

INDUSTRIAL LABOR AND POLITICS: 1900-1921

INDUSTRIAL LABOR AND POLITICS

The Dynamics of the Labor Movement in
Eastern Australia: 1900-1921

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CONTENTS

	FOREWORD . . v
	ABBREVIATIONS . . vi
I	INTRODUCTION . . 1
	A Note on Terms . . 6b
II	LABOR IN 1900 . . 7
	1. The Formation of the Working Class . . 10
	2. The Trade Unions . . 22
	3. The Labor Parties . . 38
	4. The Socialist Critics . . 55
	5. The Century Begins . . 63
III	INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL LABOR 1900-1914 . . 65
	1. Trade Unions and the State . . 66
	2. Political Labor and the Industrial Wing . . 88
	3. Socialism, Syndicalism, Closer Unionism . . 103a
IV	THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE WAR . . 121
	1. The Outbreak of War . . 122
	2. The War on the Wages Front . . 128
	3. The Prices Referendum . . 134
	4. "If You Want a 44-Hour Week, Take It!" . . 144
	5. The Industrialists Take Over . . 163b
	6. The First Conscription Campaign . . 169
	7. The Conscription Vote . . 196
	8. The Aftermath: the Labor Split . . 205
	9. The IWW Twelve . . 213

10. The General Strike . . 240
11. The Second Conscription Referendum . . 277
12. The Demand for Peace . . 284
13. The Changes in the Labor Movement . . 304

V DEFEAT IN VICTORY . . 307

1. The One Big Union . . 308
2. The Year of Strikes . . 331
3. The Formation of the Communist Party . . 347
4. Trade Unions and Politics: The Socialist Objective . . 358
5. The Working Class in 1921 . . 389

APPENDICES . . 404

1. Population, Class, Employment, Unionism, Wages, Strikes . . 404
2. The ALP Objectives . . 413
3. The Electoral Strength of the Labor Party . . 420
4. The Conscription Referenda . . 422
5. The Preambles . . 426
6. The Peace Resolutions . . 432
7. Manifesto of the Australian Communists . . 442

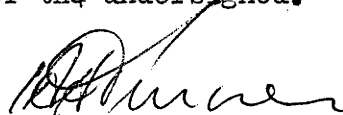
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . 450

FOREWORD

In principle, a thesis is the work of a solitary scholar, and I have no desire to escape that responsibility; but in practice, by their supervision and their discussion, many people help. Among those who have so helped in this case are Professor Sir Keith Hancock and Dr R.A. Gollan of the Department of History at the Australian National University and Mrs Miriam Roberts, a fellow scholar in that department; the late Professor L.C. Webb and Dr D.W. Rawson of the Department of Political Science; Professor G. Sawyer of the Department of Law; and Mr H.P. Brown of the Department of Economics. Mr L.F. Fitzhardinge made available his transcript of the minutes of the Waterside Workers' Federation; Mr Ian Bedford and Mr John Robertson kindly allowed me to read unpublished theses. To all of them I am very grateful.

Ian Turner
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 1959-62.

Unless otherwise specifically stated, the work contained in this thesis is entirely the original work of the undersigned.



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ABBREVIATIONS

- ACP - Australian Communist Party.
- ACSEF - Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation.
- ALF - Australian Labor Federation.
- ALP - Australian Labor Party.
- AMA - Amalgamated Miners' Association.
- AMIEU - Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union.
- ARTSA - Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants' Association.
- ASL - Australian Socialist League.
- ASP - Australasian Socialist Party.
- Aust. Comm. - Australian Communist.
- AWA - Amalgamated Workers' Association.
- AWU - Australian Workers' Union.

- BIC - Brisbane Industrial Council.

- CP - Communist Party.
- CPD - Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (also NSWPD, &c.)
- CPP - Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers (also NSWPP, &c.)

- DA - Direct Action.

- FEDFA - Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemens' Association.
- FSU - Federated Seamen's Union.

- IIW - International Industrial Workers.
- IILP - Industrial Labor Party.
- Int. Comm. - International Communist.
- Int. Soc. - International Socialist.
- ISLP - Industrial Socialist Labor Party.
- IWW - Industrial Workers of the World.

- NSWLC - New South Wales Labor Council.

- PLC - Political Labor Council (Vic.)
- PLL - Political Labor League (NSW)
- PLP - Parliamentary Labor Party.

- Rev. Soc. - Revolutionary Socialist.

- SDL - Social Democratic League.
- SDV - Social Democratic Vanguard.
- SFA - Socialist Federation of Australasia.
- SLC - Sydney Labor Council.
- SLP - Socialist Labor Party.
- SMH - Sydney Morning Herald.
- Soc. - The Socialist.

- THC - Trades Hall Council.
- TLC - Trades and Labor Council.
- TUC - Trade Union Congress (or Conference).
- VRU - Victorian Railways Union.
- VSP - Victorian Socialist Party.
- WIIU - Workers' International Industrial Union.
- WIU of A - Workers' Industrial Union of Australia.
- WLU - Wharf Laborers' Union.
- WWF - Waterside Workers' Federation.
- WPO - Workers' Political Organisation.

PART ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Labor history is a history of a new kind: it introduces the concept of masses, rather than elites, as the moving forces in the historical process. This concept may be, and often is, denied by the proposition that the leaders (industrial and political) of the labor movement are nothing but a new elite, taking their place in a Pareto-style "circulation," and providing no reason for modification of the general picture of a social continuum in which elites attain power, rule, and give way to other elites, using the masses in their drive for power and manipulating them when in power, but allowing them little or no scope as historical agents. However, one of the arguments of this thesis is that both the effectiveness and the limits of the actions of labor leaders are set by the masses of the labor movement - that is, primarily, the working class, - in a way which sets them apart from other elites. It is of course true that the actions of all ruling elites 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 this depends largely on the possibility of the ruling elite playing off sectional interests in the community one against the other, and of their manipulating mass opinion (so far as this is relevant) on matters of importance which are removed from the immediate observation and concern of the masses. The case of the labor movement is considerably different: its primary concerns are matters which affect the masses of the movement very directly and immediately, matters on which the masses feel themselves competent to pronounce and act, if necessary without the intervention of leaders. This is not to say that manipulation by the leaders of the machinery of the labor movement or the opinions of its rank and file is not important in deciding how the movement or its constituent parts will

act; it is. But an examination of the labor movement suggests that the decision-making of its leaders is under a more direct and informed scrutiny by its masses, and is more subject to their intervention and even to a direct action which cuts across or negates the intentions of the leaders, than is the case with other social institutions. The labor movement is the institutional method by which the masses transform themselves from passive to active elements in society, from weights to be pushed around or circumnavigated by ruling elites to social levers in their own right.

Labor history has a special attraction because of the high aspirations of the labor movement, which traditionally seeks not just to change governments but to change society. This can be qualified by the time-serving and place-seeking, the graft and chicanery, which are endemic to labor movements; but, because these aberrations involve a conflict of interests between the leaders and the rank and file, and 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 and conflict of values which insists that labor history is almost necessarily partisan: not only are the historian's sympathies engaged, but his work has an effect upon present circumstances, and is often written with the provision of answers to present problems in mind.

Labor history concerns modern industrial society - the creation of a class of wage-laborers who, because of the private ownership of the means of production, have no rights over the opportunity to labor or the products of their labor; the formation by this class of organisations to protect their immediate economic interests, to participate in government, to change the structure of society; the formulation of a general theory of society and an ideology which at the same time explains their condition, and guides and provides an ethical justification for their action.

It is this complex of organisations, industrial, political and social, the men and women who inhabit them, and the ideas which inform them, which constitute the labor movement. The character of the movement depends on the circumstances of its formation. If, as was the case with most of the European labor movements, the working class is formed and begins to organise in conditions of political autocracy, the tendency is for the formation, if necessary illegally, of political parties to defeat the autocracy and to create the conditions for the formation of economic organisations, 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, and from this it follows: (a) that the political party, formed for struggle against an autocracy, tends to have a revolutionary ideology, although this may become a ritual, rather than having relevance to the party's actions, as the party operates within a bourgeois democracy which it itself may have played a major part in creating; (b) that the initiative within the labor movement rests with the political wing, the trade unions having been created by it, and becoming, insofar as they take on a life of their own, 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. (A by-product of this situation is that the trade union movement tends to be divided, the ideological orientation of the unions not being approved by all workers.)

On the other hand, the natural first move of the working class is towards economic organisation, so that, if the working class first begins to organise within conditions of an already existing bourgeois democracy, trade unions are formed before political organisations, and stimulate the movement of labor 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 case 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 organised and widely dispersed socialist¹ party (the Independent Labour Party), it was this latter which inaugurated the mass labor party, enlisting the often reluctant support of the trade unions and cutting the program of the new party to fit the traditional economic organisations. 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, the program of this party too was tailored to craft union measurements and style. In the United States, craft unionists and socialists had independently attempted to inaugurate parties of labor, but cultural divisions inhibited the organisation of the mass of unskilled workers, the working class party was still-born, and the development of the labor movement remained frozen for many years at the point reached by Australian and British labor sixty or seventy years ago, the trade unions operating as pressure groups within the existing party structure and only very recently beginning to show the first signs of independent political action.² A corollary of this is that the more purely trade

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1. This use of "socialist" begs the question posed by the Leninists; however, I have throughout preferred to use the word in its broader, non-evaluative sense.
 2. Although whether, in a society in which most workers are well above the bread-line, and the balance of forces within the working class is shifting from unskilled to skilled and white collar workers, a labor party of the traditional kind will ever emerge is another question.

unionist has been the political party's origin, the more limited is its program, theory and objective: thus, in Australia, the party's program 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 from this, 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 sort of party may well fight more vigorously for its objectives than the latter.

This thesis tells the story of the Australian labor 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 and the reconstruction of the trade unions, the development of industrial arbitration and other devices for regulating the conditions of labor, and the rapid spread of ideas of fundamental social change. It seeks to explain why the Australian labor movement developed as it did, and how and why it differed from labor movements elsewhere; it seeks to analyse the dynamic 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 have provided most of the impetus for change in the movement's policy and structure, that this impetus for change (insofar as it goes beyond immediate trade union demands) originates with left-wing minorities, and that it succeeds insofar as these minorities win support within the trade unions, which in turn depends on the response of workers generally to their social and economic situation.

The emphasis of this thesis is on the movement in New South Wales, which state, having the largest population and the strongest and most diversified economy, has provided the core of the movement and its most acute internal contradictions. The weight is also with the war and post-war years, during which these contradictions came to a head, resulting in a prolonged and hard-fought struggle which produced substantial changes in the movement and set new patterns of ideas, organisation and internal conflict which determined the character of the movement until the new upheaval in the years following World War II.

The central question of the thesis is this: assuming that society is in continual change, and that in Australian society the principal initiator of change has been the labor movement,³ what changes the initiator of change? Consequently, this investigation is concerned with the internal politics of the movement, rather than with the place of labor in Australian politics generally. This limitation has meant that many important questions have necessarily gone unanswered.

With much of this thesis, including the conclusions, I am on common ground with other labor historians, particularly those of the Marxist persuasion. However, what I think is new (apart from the detailed factual material) is: the attempt to explain the unique character of the Australian labor movement; the beginnings of an examination of Australian class structure; the investigation of the internal contradictions of the Labor Party, the mass-leadership relation, and the role of radical minorities.

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3. H. Mayer suggests in an interesting article ("Some Conceptions of the Australian Party System 1910-1950," HSAZ Vol. 7, No. 27) 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 a detailed investigation. I have not been concerned to consider this problem directly, and in any case it seems to me that to a large extent it arises from a confusion about terms - that the supporters of the theory are thinking of initiative in terms of mass democracy and social welfare, while its opponents are thinking rather of industrial innovation and the emergence of a cultural elite. However, I hope it will be clear from what follows that I do not agree with Mr Mayer's thesis, and (even if obliquely) why I do not agree.

A NOTE ON TERMS

The labor movement has a technical language of its own, which it is necessary to use in any study of the movement, as it describes new phenomena and concepts which came into being with the movement. However, the language is often used imprecisely, and sometimes different people (because of differing political assumptions) use the same word to mean different things. So it is possibly useful at the outset to define the sense in which I am using the most common of these terms.

By the "labor movement," I mean the whole complex of organisations 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, the organisations are of two kinds: Industrial, that is, organisations combining workers in their character as producers, economic organisations, trade unions, whose primary concern is with the wages and conditions of labor; and political, that is, organisations combining workers in their character as citizens and as voters, whether these stand for parliamentary action, insurrection, or the denial of all political action (the rejection of politics itself being 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 "labor" 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 (NSW), the Political Labor Council (Victoria), the Workers' Political Organisations (Queensland), the United Labor Party (South Australia).

The term "industrial unionism" has a special meaning: it is used to distinguish a trade union so organised as to include all the workers, regardless of their specific skills, who are employed in the one industry and contribute with their labor to one product or a group of similar products. Thus, a building workers' industrial union would include all workers whose labor was involved in the erection of buildings - carpenters, joiners, plumbers, painters, electricians, tilers, plasterers, builders' laborers, etc.; a railway workers' industrial union would include all workers whose labor 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" - a union whose members use the same tools with roughly the same degree of skill (e.g. unions of carpenters, engineers, composers, stationary engine drivers) regardless of the industry in which they are employed; and with a "mass union" - an organisation of unskilled workers, either in one industry (e.g. builders' laborers) or in several (e.g. construction laborers employed in road-making, railway line laying, quarrying). By a "skilled worker" or "craftsman" I mean one who works in a trade of such a degree of complexity as to require a considerable period of apprenticeship or similar training to master it. In the period with which this thesis is concerned, the term "trade union" was commonly used to mean what I have defined as a "craft union;" I have preferred to use "trade union" in its contemporary sense - that is, as a general term for all working-class economic organisations, whether industrial, mass or craft.

The validity of the concept "working class" is often questioned. I have used it to describe an objective social category: the class

of men and women who work for wages, as distinct from the employers of labor and the self-employed. The use of the phrase carries the implication that this class has certain interests in common, "class interests," which often conflict with those of the employers of labor, but not the implication that all or even most of the members of the class are at all times conscious of these interests. It is not meant to imply that the class is homogeneous: its members are divided economically by the industries in which they are employed and by the kind and degree of skill which they possess, and each of these divisions has its own special interests. The former (industry) I have referred to as "sectional interests," the latter (skill) I have referred to as "craft interests." The use of the category "working class" is not meant to imply that class interests always prevail over sectional and craft interests; on the contrary, it is with the interplay and often conflict of these interests that much of this thesis is concerned. Wage-earners are also divided socially by their cultural and ideological affiliations; a consideration of this is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, defined in this objective way, it seems to me that the term "working class" is sufficiently precise to permit its use, and that there is both a sufficient community of character and interest among those so defined and a sufficient recognition of this community 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 labor? 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 problems. "Revolution" is commonly used to mean a fundamental

change in economic and political structure, and to define the means by which such a change is to be brought about. For most of the period covered by this thesis (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 they thought this would be brought about 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 the amelioration of working class conditions by a continuing process of limited change which regulates the worker-employer relationship without transforming or abolishing it. Linked with this contrast are the contrasts of conservative/moderate and radical/militant. "Radical" I have used to mean those who advocated policies involving substantial and rapid change, in contrast with the "conservatives" who sought slighter and more leisurely adjustments; this is a matter of degree and not of kind, and what is a radical position at one time may be conservative at another. "Militant" and "moderate" are used to 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 interest. 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.

PART TWO:

LABOR IN 1900

Those who, in the late nineteenth century, observed Australian society through European eyes found the antipodes bewildering, often extremely 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 labor. 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, towards the end of the 19th century, unique in respect to the situation and prospects of the working class; and there were three sets of circumstances which had given Australian workingmen and their organisations a character different from that of their fellows in other parts of the world. 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. Secondly, there was the strong bargaining

1. Earl of Onslow: "State Socialism and Labour Government in Antipodean Britain," 4.

position which the working class enjoyed because of the continuing high demand for its labor. And thirdly there was the factor of separation and distance: the separation of the Australian colonies, each with its own economic structure and policies in which grew labor 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, whose very proximity to the centres of government gave them initially a predominant influence in the labor movement which was justified neither by their organisation nor by their economic strength.

1. The Formation of the Working Class.

The privileged position of Australian workmen derived from one economic fact: the chronic scarcity of labor 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 rose from approximately £50 million to £200 million; the average annual increase of $4\frac{1}{2}\%$ was among the most rapid of its time.¹ New capital was invested in Australia at a rate which, at its peak, compared with that of the United States;² 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.³ Most new capital investment was concentrated in building, in railways and other government undertakings, and in pastoral improvements, all of which provided major employment opportunities for unskilled labor;⁴ all sectors of the economy shared in this growth, but primary industry expanded less rapidly than did other sectors of the economy - 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."⁵ 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

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1. N.G. Butlin: The Shape of the Australian Economy 1861-1900, 3.
 2. Ibid., 4. 1871-90: new capital formation approximated 20% of the net national product.
 3. N.G. Butlin: Some Aspects of Australian Capital Formation 1861-1900, 1-3.
 4. Butlin: Shape &c., 8.
 5. Ibid., 9-11. The share of manufacturing in the net national product increased from 5% in 1861 to $12\frac{1}{2}\%$ -15% in 1881.

supply of goods which must of necessity be produced on the spot."⁶ Nevertheless, secondary production was already highly mechanised, and it employed a growing body of workers in factories and workshops of increasing size.⁷ Primary industry, on the other hand, was more highly developed than anywhere else in the world,⁸ and served a rapidly growing export market. Because, on the one hand, pasturing and agriculture in Australia developed within a market rather than a natural economy, and, on the other, the natural environment was not especially favourable, and because alluvial gold was worked out fairly quickly on all the Australian goldfields, while shaft or tunnel mining was from the beginning the rule on the coalfields of New South Wales and in the silver-lead-zinc complex at Broken Hill, Australian primary industry developed early along capitalist lines, and provided a major field of employment for wage laborers. The total trade turnover (imports and exports) grew from £52.2 million in 1861 to £165.9 million in 1900;⁹ this rapid expansion was the basis for a similarly rapid growth in 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 and commercial and later as manufacturing centres;¹⁰ 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 1891-94 and the several years of drought which followed the crisis and delayed the recovery. Unemployment rose sharply during the crisis years (but had fallen off by the end of the decade);¹¹ the intense competition for jobs drove down

6. T.A. Coghlan: *The Seven Colonies of Australasia* (1893), 304.

7. See Appendix I.

8. Per capita production primary industry, 1891-92: £27.3.4 (incl. N.Z.). Cf. UK: £8.2.10; USA: £14.2.7. Coghlan: *op. cit.*, 312-13.

9. Coghlan: *Seven Colonies* (1901-02), 1049.

10. Proportion population in six capitals: 1861 - 24.2%; 1901 - 34.8%

11. See Appendix I.

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.¹² Manufacturing, which depended almost entirely on the domestic market, suffered especially. The rate of formation of new capital fell off by three-quarters,¹³ and the inability of governments to raise funds on the London money market severely restricted public works. However, by 1900, production was back to the 1889-91 highpoint; but 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, as the domestic market expanded)¹⁴ 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.

Australian population statistics confirm this general economic picture. Since a uniform system of classification of occupations and grades of employment (employer, self-employed, employee) was introduced for the first time only with the colonial censuses of 1891, and even then was followed in full detail by only two of the six colonies,¹⁵ an adequate account of the working class growth from

12. See Appendix I.

13. Butlin: *Shape &c.*, 4.

14. *Ibid.*, 9.

15. Census (1911) I, 348; Coghlan: *Seven Colonies (1894)*, 248.

1861 to 1891 cannot be given. However, the results of the censuses of 1891 and 1901 do make it possible to build up a fairly accurate picture of the Australian working class as it was in that decade.¹⁶ The census categories with which we are primarily concerned are those involved in the production and distribution of goods - that is, "Industrial," "Primary Producers" and "Transport and Communications."¹⁷ (The other three groups, "Commercial," "Professional" and "Domestic," while important for any sociological study, are not relevant to a study of the labor movement, since these sections of the population, although they included a large number of wage and salary earners, did not give rise to any significant economic organizations.)¹⁸ The two largest and roughly equal groups are those labelled "Industrial" (embracing manufacturing, processing, building and construction workers) and "Primary Producers" (embracing agricultural and pastoral pursuits and mining): in the decade 1891-1901, these accounted between them for roughly six out of ten Australian breadwinners - that is, 840,000 to one million people out of a population which grew during the decade from 3.2 to 3.8 million¹⁹ - 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.²⁰

The effect of the financial crisis is shown clearly in the very slight (2.4%) increase in the numbers of those getting their live-

16. A more intensive study could result in some valuable conclusions about the largely unexplored field of Australian class structure, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

17. Appendix I.

18. Although the special interests of shop assistants were widely canvassed during, and well served by, the successful labor agitation for early closing legislation.

19. Contrast Britain, 1901: industrial (incl. mining and transport) - 8.4 m.; agriculture and fishing - 1.2 m.; commercial - 1.9 m.; domestic - 2.0 m.; professional - 1.0 m.

20. Appendix I.

lihood from industry, compared with the 27.9% in the primary producers' group.²¹ This did not reflect any permanent trend in the working class, however, for the proportion of employers and self-employed was much higher in the latter category than in the former,²² which meant that, already by 1891, the bulk of workers was 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 initiative 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.²³ There were, however, 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 - that is, farm laborers scattered in ones or twos on small individual farms, accepting the rural values and difficult to organise; rather, they were itinerants, working in fairly large groups, with no permanent connections with their employers.²⁴ The agricultural workers, except for the

21. Appendix I.

22. Thus (1901) self-employment in primary industry - 21.3%; in secondary industry - 9.4%.

23. "Self-employment" in gold and other metalliferous mining (i.e. fossicking) is a characteristic feature of economic depression.

24. 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.

fruit-pickers, were more like the European model, while the miners, except on newly-opened fields or in times of depression, were overwhelmingly wage-laborers in large-scale enterprises. And these men were not in the main aspiring land- or mine-owners, not since the working out of alluvial gold and the failure of the various 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; and, together with similarly homogeneous groups in the transport industry, they were the largest units of the working class, and, industrially but not at the turn of the century politically, the most important forces in the labor movement.

Turning to 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 industrialised of the colonies; ten years later, New South Wales had edged Victoria out of top place in the second respect, but not in the first. Victoria's early primacy was due 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 slightly ahead of New South Wales; while in building and construction the advantage was with New South Wales. By 1901, the larger state had caught up with or passed Victoria in all the major manufacturing industries except clothing; since this last employed large numbers of female workers, there was in Victoria a higher proportion of women in the

workforce than was elsewhere the case.²⁵ Industry otherwise was not highly developed, except for large groups of metal workers in South Australia, associated with the Port Pirie smelters which serviced the growing production of Broken Hill, and of meatworkers in Queensland, employed 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 high number of such workers in New South Wales in 1901 was due to labor pressure on the Lyne government to absorb some of the unemployed in public works. Employment in transport was also distributed fairly regularly, and was growing rapidly, rail transport faster than maritime or road. This section of workers, that is, those employed in industry and in transport, was, except for watersiders, seamen, carters, construction workers and Port Pirie smelter workers and Queensland meatworkers, more fragmented by craft divisions than were the pastoral workers and the miners; however, they were concentrated in the cities, and were often (especially in the case of the more highly skilled workers in the metal, building and printing trades) well organized, and because of this they exercised an influence in the labor movement, and particularly on the political wing, beyond their numerical strength.²⁶

Reconstructing a picture of Australian wage and salary earners in 1901 from the not always adequate census data, it looked like this:

25. Women as % of breadwinners (1901): Aust. - 21.7%; Vic. - 23.3%. The Tailoresses' Union, formed in Melbourne in 1882, was the first Australian organisation of working women, and probably one of the first in the world.

26. For detailed occupational figures, see Appendix I.*

* These figures are not included, as the point is made more clearly by the tables on pp 17 and 391.

THE AUSTRALIAN WORKING CLASS, 1901^a

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	TOTAL
MANUFACTURING ^b	74	74	[26] ^e	11	12	7	204
incl. heavy ind. ^c	(16) ^f	(13)	(5)	(6)	(2)	(2)	(44)
light ind. ^d	(58)	(61)	(21)	(5)	(10)	(5)	(160)
TRANSPORT & COMMUN.	38	28	[16]	12	[10]	4	108
incl. railways	(10)	(10)	(6)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(34)
road	(8)	(8)	(4)	(2)	(2)	(1)	(25)
maritime	(15)	(6)	(4)	(5)	(3)	(2)	(35)
BUILDING TRADES	18	15	[5]	4	[3]	2	47
CONSTRUCTION	13	7	[2]	7	[4]	1	34
MINING	29	23	[14]	5	17	5	93
incl. coal	(12)	(1)	(1)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(14)
gold	(7)	(20)	(9)	(1)	(17)	(1)	(55)
other metal	(9)	(-)	(2)	(3)	(-)	(4)	(18)
PASTORAL	28	9	12	3	5 ^g	1	58
AGRICULTURAL	33	28	5	15	7	7	95
DISTRIBUTION ^h	43	40	[12]	9	[8]	4	116
PROFESSIONAL ⁱ	28	27	[7]	4	[5]	4	75
DOMESTIC	60	53	[23]	2	[10]	7	155
OTHERS ^j	21	29	[12]	10	[6]	5	83
<u>TOTAL</u>	385	333	134	82	87	47	1068

(All figures to nearest '000.)

SOURCES: Census Reports for 1901 for NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania. W.A. Statistical Register for 1901.

NOTES TO TABLE:

(a) The total given here for the "working class" does not agree with the total given for "breadwinners" in Appendix I. This is because pensioners and people of independent means are included in the latter category.* Since census reports were not made on a uniform basis in 1901, the above figures are in some cases estimated (shown by the square brackets); however, a cross-check shows that the estimates are fairly accurate, and the above can be taken as being correct,

* Should read: "This is because employers and self-employed, pensioners and people of independent means . . ."

where estimated, with an error of something like $\pm 5\%$, which would mean an error in the totals of rather less than $\pm 2\%$. More intensive analysis of the census reports and other sources could undoubtedly refine this result much further; this is a first approximation only.

(b) "Manufacturing" comprises the census category "Industrial," less building and construction workers, who appear under separate heads; and workers engaged in disposal of refuse and the dead (the link is made in the census reports) and those whose occupation is imperfectly defined, who are included among "Others."

(c) "Heavy industry" includes the categories suggested by the Commonwealth Statistician (Census of 1911, I, 356) as belonging to the "metal trades," together with workers engaged in the production of power and light. The title "heavy industry" is more an indication of its future status than an accurate description of its situation in 1901.

(d) "Light industry" includes all other manufacturing categories.

(e) The square brackets [] indicate that the figure is estimated. The report on the Queensland Census of 1901 did not break down the occupational categories into grades (i.e. employer, self-employed, employee, etc.); the estimates are based on the proportion of employees to the total number of persons occupied in the various categories in other states. The limited figures for Western Australia are from the W.A. Statistical Register for 1901 (except for those for rail, road and maritime transport, which are from the Report on the 1911 Commonwealth Census); estimates for other groups of workers are based on the relative numbers in the various categories in the other states.

(f) The round brackets () indicate sub-categories that are included within the immediately preceding general category.

(g) Pastoral workers in Western Australia include 4000 Aborigines, recorded as receiving wages for work in this category. As Aborigines, they would not appear in Commonwealth Census figures.

(h) "Distribution" includes employees in the census category "Commercial," less those engaged in dealing in property and finance, who are included among "others." That is, it includes shop and warehouse employees.

(i) "Professional" comprises the grade of employees in the census category "Professional." It is not suggested that this corresponds to a general category of white-collar workers, many of whom are hidden in the other groups, requiring a great deal of detailed digging to uncover them.

(j) "Others" are largely imperfectly defined laborers who cannot be conveniently fitted in elsewhere; also included are the troublesome "engineers" (because it is not known whether these are professional engineers or fitters and turners), workers in primary industry not included in one of the general categories in the table, and the two small groups noted in (b) and (h) above.

COMMENT ON TABLE:

The figures in this table, as well as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled industrial workers and craftsmen, include "white collar" workers (i.e. salary earners), who, in some definitions and for some purposes are thought of as "middle class." Unfortunately, the information provided in the Reports of the Commonwealth Censuses is not sufficient for the further breakdown to be made.

AD.

The working class enumerated in this table made up about two-thirds of Australian breadwinners. Apart from the wage and salary earners, some 16% of breadwinners were described as 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.²⁷ About 10% of breadwinners were employers of labor; no statistics are available to break this down into groups according to the number of workers employed, but the figures on the size of factories suggest that the great majority were small employers.²⁸

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

1. 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 unskilled workers who formed the new mass unions and came to play a major part in the organised labor movement, although this was qualified, particularly in the case of the pastoral workers and the miners, by their geographical separation from the centres of government.

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

27. For a general picture of class structure, see Appendix I.

28. Ibid.

3. On the assumption that, once they are organised, unskilled workers tend generally to be more militant, and to rely more on their industrial strength, than skilled workers, social as well as geographical factors combined to turn the mass unions towards industrial methods of realising their ends, and the craft unions towards more moderate and parliamentary means.

4. The major exception to this basic mass union/craft union division 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 organisation - the "all grades" or industrial union. The social composition of the railways unions led them towards industrial methods of 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. (The tramways unions, whose members are included in the "road transport" category, generally shared these characteristics.

5. There was a wide variation, arising from natural as well as historical factors, in the size and composition of the working class in the several colonies. This led to the development of different forms of organisation and lines of action, to a tendency towards isolationism, and - insofar 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.

2. The Trade Unions.

Although the Australian labor movement was regarded internationally as one of the most advanced in the world,¹ in fact there were in Australia in 1901 only about 100,000 trade unionists, organised in some 200 separate associations, in a work force of over 1½ million.² The reputation of Australian labor 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 organisation.

As everywhere where working-class organisation was not suppressed, the earliest trade unions were those of skilled craftsmen, the first wage-workers to be differentiated out by division of labor 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 organisations as those of engineers, stonemasons, carpenters, typographers, formed in the Australian cities from the 1850s, 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 organisations. The craft unionists were exponents of the dignity of labor, settings standards of "competency and good conduct"³ as well as high entrance fees for their unions; in return, they required of their employers recognition that the laborer was worthy of his hire, and wrote into their rules the

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1. This was not universal; a Marxist criticism was made, for example, by Georges Sorel. See his article "A Socialist State?" (1898), trans. P. Coleman, APSA News, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1-4.
 2. Appendix I.
 3. Melbourne Branch, Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Monthly Report for November 1864. R.N. Ebbels (ed.): The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907, 82.

minimum rates of wages for which their members would work.⁴ They were the progenitors of the eight-hour day, inspired more by their fervent belief in self-improvement than by the anticipation of immediate economic advancement;⁵ 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 labor 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, for, 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 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 implementation of the eight-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 ameliorative measures, they formed Parliamentary Committees of their unions to lobby existing parties and to endorse candidates who were pledged to support the reforms required by labor but were left free 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 themselves as a group whose inter-

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4. cf. Rules of Operative Plumbers' Trade Society (1862). Ebbels, op. cit., 76.
 5. W.E. Murphy: History of the Eight Hours Day,*I, 50-51, 66-67. In fact, it was common for unionists to offer to accept a lower wage in return for a reduction of hours.

* Should read: "History of the Eight Hours Movement . . ."

ests 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; and, from this starting-point, 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 activity to secure the desired reforms, a need which found its expression in the Trades and Labor Councils (in Melbourne the Trades Hall Council) which were formed in the major cities from the 1860s: these were concerned primarily to co-ordinate the action of their craft union affiliates for their economic demands, so that the resources of the unions were not strained by a simultaneous withdrawal of labor in several trades; to channel financial assistance to any union whose members had struck work; through the Parliamentary Committees, to present a united labor demand to the colonial legislatures.⁶ Across the borders, the emergent consciousness of nation which accompanied the growing inter-colonial movement of goods and labor, as well as the community of problems confronting workingmen, led the Labor Councils and their constituent unions to a series of irregular but frequent Intercolonial Trades Union Congresses, the "parliaments of labor," 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

6. 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.

should be made to obtain direct representation of Labor in Parliament. . . ."⁷ - 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 growth in the 1870s and 1880s of wage labor 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 laborers. In terms of the kind of workers they covered, these unions were comparable with the miners' unions in Great Britain, and indeed the early Australian miners' organisations 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."⁸ 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

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7. Resolution of 6th Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (1889). Ebbels, op. cit., 100.
 8. Evidence of T.D. Hay, Gen. Sec., Australasian Institute of Marine Engineers, to Royal Commission on the [1890] Strike. Ibid., 119.

relied rather on collective bargaining backed by the threat of mass strike than on the boycott of individual employers.⁹ Their members had few connections with the traditional political groups, and correspondingly 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."¹⁰ 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 organisations - that is, they brought together the unskilled workers in one or a number of industries, rather than seeking to combine within one organisation all workers, whatever their craft or degree of skill, whose work contributed to one kind of finished product. Except for seamen and watersiders and a section of construction workers (those 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 organisations of the unskilled workers connected with the various skilled trades - ironworkers' assistants, builders' laborers, 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 commonly worked closely with the latter in the Labor Councils or the trades combinations. Similarly, as increased mechanisation in light manufacturing industries such as the clothing and boot trades replaced skilled craftsmen with unskilled process workers, their unions tended to continue the traditions

9. 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 [contd.]

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 Laborers' Union (the organisation 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. embraces* all within its ranks."¹¹ This sweeping gesture recalled the unfulfilled ambitions of Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and anticipated the aspirations of the One Big Union; but at the time it was made and for years later the AWU's membership was confined to workers in the pastoral industry in the three south-eastern colonies. (Parallel organisations of shearers and shed-hands operated in Queensland.) Even so, the AWU 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 strikes which temporarily crippled Australian unionism. By 1900, the AWU's membership had fallen to 8000; this was in part the result of the strikes of 1891 and 1894, but was due more perhaps to the drastic decline in the Australian sheep population during the years of drought, and from the turn of the century membership rose rapidly.¹²

The AWU 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,"¹³ the union taught its members - in the words of W.G. Spence, its President for thirty years - that "to vote straight for Labor candidates

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9. [contd.] by the formation of tightly-knit employers' organisations, a process which was developed much more effectively by these employers than, at this time, in manufacturing industries.
10. Report of Sydney Defence Committee [1890]. Ebbels, op. cit., 151.
11. Preface to AWU Rules. W.G. Spence: Australia's Awakening, 75.
12. Sheep population: 1891 - 106 m.; 1902 - 54 m.
13. Objects of AWU. Spence, op. cit., 73.

* Should read: ". . . the A.W.U. aims at embracing . . ."

is as necessary as to act straight in regard to Union rules and conditions industrially. The workingman who supports any candidate for Parliament opposed to a Labor candidate is considered as politically blacklegging on his class."¹⁴

In these respects - non-exclusive membership, political aims, and the use of collective bargaining and the mass strike - the AWU was close to industrial unionism, but its structure inhibited development in this direction. Inevitably, since almost all its members were itinerants, the basic unit of the union was the geographical rather than the workplace 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 branches, and the union was administered by the branch secretaries and organisers 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.

In contrast to the AWU, the miners' organisations, both coal and metalliferous, were closer in structure 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 -

14. Spence, op. cit., 76.

and indeed until 1909 - the characteristic miners' action was the pit stoppage, although strikes which affected whole districts were not unknown.

The organisations of gold and other metalliferous miners were initially more highly centralised than those of their coalfields 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 organised 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.¹⁵ Unlike the coalminers' organisations, the AMA at first sought to include 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 AMA - 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 at all the mines small groups of skilled workers - shot-firers, engine-drivers, carpenters and others - whose allegiance was to the craft unions, and who remained an obstacle to industrial unionism.

Not sharing the preoccupation of the craft unions with their status and privilege, the new unions 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} as low as two or three hundred. With their headquarters usually far removed from the capital cities, and with the likelihood of being constantly outvoted by the moderate representatives of conservative unions, the mass unions stayed away from the

15. Spence, op. cit., 33.

craft combinations; nevertheless, there was among the new unionists a consciousness of their identity and mutual interests as a class: "We are all mutually dependent upon one another," said the preface to the AWU rules. "Alone, we can agitate; organised, we can compel."¹⁶ The pattern for new-unionist confederation was set by the Queensland Shearers' Union; in 1889, the QSU formed the Australian Labor Federation, the first plank in whose platform was "The Nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and distributing wealth."¹⁷ 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 organisation 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 ALF throughout the Australian colonies and New Zealand, to secure "unity of purpose and action," an essential element of which was the direct representation of labor in parliament.¹⁸ The Sydney Labor Council responded by re-forming itself in 1894 as a District Council of the ALF, and incorporating the unions of coal miners; but elsewhere the call went unheeded.

Alone among the unions at the end of the century, the organisations 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 trade union structure which, two decades later, was widely canvassed as

16. Qd. Spence, op. cit., 74-75.

17. Qd. Spence, op. cit., 614.

18. Ebbels, op. cit., 101-02.

the final solution of all labor's troubles. Because of this, and 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, the great majority being in Victoria and New South Wales. This was the largest concentration of workers in any Australian industry.¹⁹ 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 Services Association);²⁰ they aimed to enrol all railwaymen from senior executives, through enginedrivers, clerks, fitters, porters, signalmen, to laborers in the goods yards and on the permanent way. This range of occupations and status created a diversity of attitudes which it seemed almost impossible to encompass within one organisation, and from their earliest days the all grades unions were beset 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 of the workers employed therein, and their interests seemed remote from those of the thousands of unskilled laborers and even the highly trained craftsmen of the running grades and the workshops. They tended to be conservative in politics and to abjure industrial action, and their officers' associations reflected these attitudes. The running grades employees - enginedrivers and firemen, conductors and guards, shunters and signalmen - were also career railwaymen; most of them had joined the

19. Appendix I.

20. The History of Labor and Capital, *177,109.

* Should read: "The History of Capital and Labour . ."

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 the mass of 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 existed craft unions. Unlike the running grades employees, these men were not (in the railways argot) "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 this was 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 what they regarded as their legitimate field of recruitment. The wide scatter of railwaymen - particularly station crews, gate-keepers and permanent way fettlers - through the countryside 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 laborers in the workshops and the goods yards and on the permanent

way were the breeding ground for railways militancy: as with all unskilled workers, labor 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, and 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 some of these men, the permanent way employees, the question arose whether a line should 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.

These were the typical problems of industrial unionism: 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 around the boundaries. Nowhere else perhaps did these problems appear so acutely, but they were the counterweight 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 set-backs before, but they had been short-lived; now, for the best part of a decade, the labor market was over-supplied, and working class living standards and organisations 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, and there was a substantial expansion - of about 75%, bringing the total trade union membership in 1901 to nearly 100,000.²¹

The motif of the great strikes of 1890-94 was "freedom of contract" - that is, the refusal of the employers to recognise the authority of the unions to bargain collectively for the wages and conditions of work of employees; and, in conceding defeat, the unions also conceded their inability, at least for the time, to enforce their rates of pay, or indeed to have any effective voice in the determination of wages. Throughout Australia, the trade unions were confronted with the demand of the employers 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 organisations declined, sometimes collapsed. Attempts to restore the workers' bargaining position proved futile. Land was made available for selection and for the establishment of labor colonies, but few selections were taken up, and the labor 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 fogs-sicking; but, as fast as they left, out-of-work bushmen flocked in to take their places, "drifting past, drifting past, to the beat of weary feet . . grinding body, grinding soul, yielding scarce

21. These figures do not however reveal the full picture: the deep troughs of the depression were 1893-94 and 1897-98, 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 indicates a much greater fluctuation than is revealed.

enough to eat. . ."22 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 houses. Only the Western Australian gold discoveries, which added over 120,000 people to that colony 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 1896-97, and recovery, once it got under way, was "speedy and remarkably complete,"23 so that, by 1900, The Worker could editorialise:

"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 demands. 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.23a should refuse to confer. The tide at last is turning to the workman. It is not at present possible to rake up hordes of unemployed to break down the Union organizations."24

Throughout Australia, workers began to regroup their forces and to demand a restoration of their old condition. The AWU gained 5000 members in the 1900-01 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' association, although it still refused to negotiate with the union, could no longer hold back its members from unilaterally granting the union rate.25 Sydney carpenters were able to get their

22. H. Lawson: "Faces in the Street." Poetical Works [1944], 8.

23. Butlin: Shape of the Australian Economy, 3.

[contd.]

23a. Pastoralists' Union.

wages back to 9/- a day in 1899, and, after a lengthy strike against recalcitrant employers, to 10/- in 1900.²⁶ The coalminers, after 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 3/6 a ton.²⁷ Seamen met shipowners in a conference which agreed to important improvements in conditions of work and an eventual restoration of the last 10/- of the £2 (per month) which they had lost in 1893.²⁸ Plasterers, bricklayers and other building workers, railway navvies and other construction workers, began to re-form their unions and to force their wages up - generally to 7/- a day for laborers, 9/- to 11/- a day for skilled workers. In Sydney, the craft unions which had in 1894 dissolved the Labor Council to form the Australian Labor Federation finally decided that the demands for help from the miners' organisations were too heavy to be borne; they "regretfully withdrew" from the ALF²⁹ and reformed the Labor Council, immediately embarking on a vigorous program of organising among workers in the electrical trades, the boot trades, the tramways and other industries.³⁰ The Melbourne Trades Hall Council appointed an organising 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, gas stokers.³¹ Wharf laborers helped to organise coal lumpers and carters; typographers began to organise the letterpress machinists; the metal trades societies assisted the unskilled ironworkers to form a union. In Queensland, the Australian Labor Federation was working vigorously to renew its strength; in South Australia,

24. Aust. Worker, 17/2/00.

25. Worker, 10/2/00.

26. Worker, 31/3/00.

27. Worker, 24/8/00.

28. Worker, 29/12/00.

29. Sydney Labor Council, Report, 31/12/99.

30. Sydney Labor Council, Report, 30/6/00.

31. Worker, 31/3/00, 9/6/00.

fifteen unions had voted in favour of an interstate labor federation; in New South Wales, the ALF had become the central organization of the miners; in the AWU, 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:

She is the scroll on which we are to write³²
Mythologies our own and epics new. . .

32. Bernard O'Dowd: "The Bush." Collected Poems [1944], 208.

3. The Labor Parties.

For those whom experience or observation of the poverty and insecurity of wage-labor and the gulf between masters and men had led to a socialist critique of the existing order, the realisation of their proposed alternative was necessarily a political act - but what kind of politics? At first it seemed that co-operation in production and an equitable distribution were self-evidently so much more rational, so much more just, than the barbarities of capitalism that all they needed to do was to sow their ideas widespread among men of goodwill and good sense and their harvest would be assured. But the ground was infertile and the going was hard. Then, as the limited skirmishes of isolated groups of workingmen with their employers 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 the thinking of revolutionaries, 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 organisations created by workingmen to protect and advance their economic interests. Out of this understanding grew the political parties of labor.

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 organisations trailed along behind. This raises the most difficult of all questions concerning Australian labor: why, in this country alone, did the political labor movement develop in this way? In a thesis which is concerned with this problem only as background, I can do no more than outline an answer. The essence is the confluence of new organisations and new 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 organise and the right to vote. Together, these elements created a situation in Australia in 1890-91 which was without parallel anywhere else in the world.

The necessary condition for the creation of a mass working-class party (as distinct from either a socialist sect or a trade union pressure group) is the existence among a substantial number of workers of a consciousness of a community of interest among themselves and a conflict of interests with the employing class. For the reasons suggested above, such a consciousness is more likely to develop among unskilled workers than among skilled craftsmen; in Australia, from the 1880s, these workers, organised in the new mass unions, formed the largest units of the labor movement, and it was they who bore the brunt of the 1890s strikes. To the new unionists, 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 Labor;¹ 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 socialism which was part of the intellectual climate of those years. Already - a fortnight before the outbreak of the maritime strike on 16 August 1890 - the Australian Labor Federation, as yet operating only in Queensland, had, under the influence of William Lane and other disciples of the American socialist Bellamy,² adopted a program of state ownership and operation of all 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

1. cf. 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

[contd.]

every citizen,"³ and similar ideas were held by many of the leaders of new unionism in New South Wales. So that when the Union Defence Committee, which was dominated by the unions of seamen and shearers, came to write its post-mortem on the 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 himself and the fruits of his labor - he must set out about the work of reform where it seems that reform can alone be obtained - and that is in Parliament;" and that what was hoped for from this was the overthrow of the competitive system.⁴ However, when it came to translating these aspirations into practical political shape, it worked out rather differently. The experience of the Paris Commune, which was already providing the basis for the revolutionary strategy of European Marxists, had no significance for Australian labor; there seemed to be no barriers to the workers assuming control, by their votes, of the organs of legislation and administration, and no discontinuity between limited social reform and total social reconstruction. So that, when the ALF demand that the workers should receive "the full benefit of their share of the common toil"⁵ was carried into the electorates with the formation of Workers' Political Organisations, it was transmuted into "any measure that will secure a fair and equitable return to labor;"⁶ and likewise the inadequacy noted by the Union Defence Committee in the traditional trade union objective ("to get as much wealth for the workers as present conditions will admit of")⁷ was carried through into the 1891 platform of the NSW Labor Electoral League.⁸

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1. [contd.] a new phase, viz., Capital v. Labor." Qd. B. Fitzpatrick: Short History of the Australian Labor Movement, 57-58.
 2. E.H. Lane: Dawn to Dusk, 12.
 3. Report of the First Annual Session of the General Council of the Australian Labor Federation. Ebbels, op. cit., 206-07.
 4. Report of the Defence Committee. Ebbels, op. cit., 150-51.
 5. ALF Report. Ibid., 206. My emphasis.

[contd.]

The early labor platforms were in fact - as has often been pointed out - a rag-bag of immediate demands, uninformed by any coherent theory of social reconstruction, and reflecting the current pre-occupations of the various strata 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 labor.

It was not, however, merely a matter of the inadequacy of the socialist theories of the day: behind the translation of the revolutionary ambitions of the new unionists into the piecemeal reforms of the labor platforms, there were real contradictions and real conflicts of concept and purpose:

(1) Originally, parliamentary representation was seen immediately as a means of neutralising the employers' use of the machinery of state against the unions, and ultimately as a 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 safeguard the conditions achieved over the last thirty-odd years.

(2) Although the inspiration for the independent working-class party came from 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

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6. Qld. Labor Platform, 1893. Spence, op. cit., 616. My emphasis.
 7. Defence Committee Report. Ebbels, op. cit., 150.
 8. Spence, op. cit., 598.

their outlook was not that of the mass unions. They were concerned primarily 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 activity as complementary to their industrial activity, and were insistent upon strengthening the trade union organisation to prepare it for even more general strikes,⁹ the craft unions saw political action as a substitute for the strike,¹⁰ and were well to the fore in the demand for 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.¹¹ And on top of this there was the special interest of those unions whose members were engaged in one sort or another of "government work" to use the parliamentary process to force governments to accept trade union conditions.

(3) It was^a foregone conclusion - as the radical wing of the Australian Socialist League was quick to point out - that any mass party which put its hopes in electoral victory rather than a revolutionary crisis would soon lose any socialist flavour it might have started with. Any organisation which seeks a mass membership and a regular popular following tends to whittle its program down to the factors common to its potential supporters and the minimum needed to maintain

9. cf. 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., 151.

10. 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

[contd.]

its separate identity. This problem was universal for the labor movement. In England, the Independent Labor Party sought to solve it by proposing a platform for the new Labor Party which did not go beyond such policies as were acceptable to the trade unions, while maintaining its independent existence as a force for socialist propaganda; finally, the ILP was swallowed by the monster it had created. In Russia, the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Labor Party solved it by insisting, against the Menshevik desire for a mass labor party, on the revolutionary purity of a hierarchical vanguard, which established its mass influence by winning the leadership of such organisations as the trade unions; but this solution was predicated on the future development of a revolutionary situation. In Germany, the Social Democratic Party looked for an answer in a comprehensive program which expressed also the philosophy of the party and which was binding on all its members, and the affiliation to the party of a variety of mass organisations; but the program was subject to argument and re-definition, and the mass affiliates (notably the trade unions) emerged as rival leadership centres within the party. But 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 organisation was extemporised to meet a rapidly changing situation; its progenitors were the trade unions whose purposes were various; it had no world view from which its program was derived, but rather proceeded from the particular to the general - and, insofar as it reached any "general," this was a collection of ethical catch-cries, subject to an infinity of interpretations.

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10. [contd.] voices shouted, "The ballot box!" Fitzgerald replied: "The choice is the right one." T.R. Roydhouse and H.J. Taperell: The Labour Party in New South Wales, 19.
 11. Thus the AWU was prominent in the demand that the parliamentary party "sink the fiscal question," while Victoria, the largest manufacturing centre, was also the centre of labor protectionism. The NSW city unions - those engaged in manufacturing - also tended to be protectionist.

(4) Associated with this was an imprecision about the nature of the organisation: was it a "class party" or was it not? The early documents were clear enough: what was required was the representation of labor 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. . ."¹² But this straight-forward class approach was soon blurred by the ideas of community and of nation. There was a lot in this of the desire to find an effective counter to the anti-labor challenge 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."¹³ This was a common attitude in the party from its foundation; it led to such "national," supra-class 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, as against the anti-labor parties, whose concern was to protect only the interests of employers and land-owners: it was not just that labor men argued that it was doubtful whether the term "class" could be applied to the 80 or 90 per cent. of the community

12. Defence Committee Report. Ebbels, op. cit., 152.

13. R. Bedford: Naught to Thirty-three, 248. The "Imperialism" referred to is the British interest in Australia, and not the newly-acquired Australian interest in New Guinea.

whose interests labor claimed to represent,¹⁴ but that some even went so far as to reassure those to whom it had been assumed labor was certainly inimical - thus, W.G. Spence, paying a rather 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."¹⁵

(5) 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 a minority 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 nationalisation 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.

(6) The party's electoral ambitions implied the creation of an organisation which automatically produced 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 program, 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 organisation based on geographical rather than occupational divisions (except where these happened to coincide, as in electorates with high concentrations of one occupation - for example, the mining and waterfront electorates, which had already returned candidates supported by the unions concerned, and the pastoral districts); the place of individual supporters who were not trade unionists - whether these were small employers or self-employed artisans; shopkeepers, publicans or professionals (lawyers and journalists parti-

14. G.F. Pearce: "The Trades Hall." Review of Reviews, 19/11/04.

15. Spence, op. cit., 350.

cularly), some of whom were attracted by the ideals of the movement and some by the prospects of a political career, or wives of workers whose interest was to serve the cause; the relation between the trade unions which created the political organisation and the party machine which developed out of it; and the relation between members of parliament and the movement in whose interests they stood.

(7) 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,¹⁶ quickly led it into compromise. Thus, George Black, one of the 36 Labor members elected in 1891, announced early in the life of Labor's first parliament that it was his party's intention to sell itself to the highest bidder, that it offered support in return for concessions,¹⁷ while the party leader, J.S.T. McGowen, announcing Labor support four years later for the premiership of George Reid, drew the obvious conclusion: "We have sunk our principles^{*} for the sake of collective good. In party warfare we may have to vote against some of our principles in order to obtain one of them in the course of legislation."¹⁸

It was this combination of factors - the lack of a philosophy of labor, the concept of a mass party, the conflicting interests of the various strata of the movement, the belief in parliament as an appropriate 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 this thesis is concerned with the development of these themes.

16. This tactic, particularly associated with the Bolsheviks, was common currency for revolutionaries in the late 19th century. In Australia, it was urged by radicals in the ASL.

17. Roydhouse & Taperell, op. cit., 55-56.

18. Qd. Coghlan, op. cit., IV, 2194.

* Should read: "We have sunk our individuality . . ."

By 1900, the labor parties were well entrenched in the parliaments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, but in different situations and with different results.¹⁹

The NSW party, holding the balance of power between Protectionists and Free Traders, and playing the "support for concessions" game for all its worth, had given successive support to the governments of Parkes, Reid and Lyne; 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 C.C. Kingston's 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.²⁰ In Victoria, the party was not, with 10-13 members, sufficiently represented in parliament to affect the course of legislation. Its main strength was in the city; and what advances it could claim (such as the Factory Act of 1885 and the establishment of the Wages Board system of wage determination) 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 (the Workers' Political Organisations won 16 seats out of 72, and added another two at by-elections) forced a coalition of the McIlwraith and Griffith parties, inaugurated the "continuous" government which, under a variety of premiers, lasted until 1903, and relegated the labor party to semi-permanent opposition (although it did not formally become the Opposition until 1898).²¹

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

20. cf. G. Black: *The Labour Party in New South Wales*; S. O'Flaherty: *The Labor Party in South Australia, 18-19.*

21. Coghlan, *op. cit.*, 2258.

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 program 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.²² His parliamentary strategy was likewise dictated by the movement, which was generally suspicious of any sort of official or unofficial 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 labor 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."²³ But many labor politicians continued to chafe under the tight rein of party conference and executive, and to demand a greater flexibility of parliamentary manoeuvre.

22. 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.

23. Spence, op. cit., 429.

The parliamentarians were selected for candidature by, and directly responsible to, the local electorate organisations, 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 organisations 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 organisations in the party machine was still unresolved by 1900, while the parliamentary party had already established a strong position. Generally, the local organisations were content to go along with their parliamentary representatives, supporting them in their resistance to union claims on the party; however, at times of party crisis, the unions could usually mobilise enough of their members to swing the branches over to their side.²⁴ 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

24. e.g. the 1893 ballot of NSW Labor Electoral Leagues on the adoption of an earlier form of the pledge, when the Leagues voted 72/4 in support of the TLC-dominated executive and in favour of the pledge. Coghlan, op. cit., IV, 1878.

of the mining and pastoral electorates; in Victoria, the Trades Hall itself nominated the parliamentary candidates,²⁵ in Sydney and Melbourne, parliamentarians were well to the fore in the revival and reformation 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 labor 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 white civilisation 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,²⁶ and the continued importation of Pacific Islands labor into Queensland. Restriction of Chinese immigration had been generally accepted, but the Queensland government was standing firm on Kanaka labor; there was, too, labor agitation against the continuation of assisted migration from Great Britain at a time of considerable unemployment. Labor colonies had been advocated to offset unemployment, had been tried and failed; trade union pressure was now directed towards the responsibility of governments to find work for the unemployed; government labor exchanges were demanded, and - long before it became economic ortho-

25. Aust. Worker, 15/9/00, 27/10/00.

26. Chinese, although only 2% of the population, made up in 1891 20% or more of the work force in 16 trades in Victoria, and averaged less than 40% of the wages of Australian workers in the same trades. Coghlan, op. cit., IV, 2318-19.

doxy - the expansion of public works to counterbalance sinking private employment.²⁷ It was generally accepted by the labor movement that hours of labor 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 of providing a necessary measure of security for workers not covered by such benefits.

After the years of wage cuts, the restoration of wage levels was the major preoccupation of the unions; and, 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,"²⁸ but this consensus had not been reached without conflict, and indeed was still not universal.

Attempts had been made to introduce a system of industrial conciliation, based on English models, from the '80s, and various Victorian unions²⁸ 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 remove disputes from the employers and workers immediately concerned and settle them in an amicable fashion around the conference table. In these terms, conciliation meant little more than the substitution of peaceful negotiation for the strike - which seemed important enough to the unions, because of the financial cost of strikes. But even this involved the formal recognition of the

27. cf. Spence, op. cit., 313.

28. The boot trades, the watersiders, and the Amalgamated Miners' Association.

27a. W.A. Holman, NSWPD, cv, 2227.

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 to discuss.

The early experiments with conciliation were not therefore very successful, and some union men ²⁹ began to ask the further questions: should not voluntary conciliation be extended to compulsory arbitration by an independent party, and should not the arbitrator's decision be enforceable? Neither unions nor employers, however, were at first prepared 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 organisations to "mere shadows."³⁰ But when voluntary conciliation proved ineffective to avert the defeats of the 1890s, labor opinion consolidated behind compulsion, while the employers, dominating 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;³¹ this resulted from a combination of the unions and those employers who objected to "unfair competition," against the "sweating" employers whose activities

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29. e.g. Richard Richardson, member for Creswick, a mining constituency, in the Vic. Legislative Assembly, 1883-85.
30. Dr Quick MLA (Sandhurst, Vic. - a mining seat). VPD, xlvi, 1363.
31. Boards consisted of elected representatives of employers and employees with an independent chairman, and were empowered to make a binding award.

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. Labor 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 the Reid 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 wharflaborers, coal lumpers and miners, as well as typographers, engineers and other craft unionists, to force the hand of the Lyne government on arbitration. The AWU was likewise urging the early passage of the Arbitration Bill, and even expressing its "surprise and disgust" that the parliamentary party had not been more forthright in its demands.³²

Despite this preoccupation, arbitration was not discussed at the foundation conference of the Federal Labor Party, held on 24 January 1900 in the Worker office, "a longish, barnlike 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 NSW 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

32. Worker, 1/12/00. Sydney Labor Council Minutes for 1900, passim, record this general union support for arbitration. Almost the only opposition came from a small group of ASL members on the Council - cf. J.O. Moroney's comment that arbitration "was only a palliative dealing with the effects of strikes and in no way aiming at their causes." Minutes, 9/8/00.

33. Worker, 3/2/00.

and W.G. Higgs from Queensland, all soon to be members of the House of Representatives and two of them 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 this 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 NSW 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 NSW 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, for, as another of the delegates commented, "the shorter the programme the more likely they were to secure united action."³⁵

The new federal party, with its preponderance of parliamentarians and its cautious program, was a forecast of the respectability which increasingly characterised the parliamentary labor parties as they soared above their origins on the way to power.

34. Report of First Federal Conference (1900), Worker, 3/2/00.

35. Report of NSW Conference (1900), *ibid.*

4. The Socialist Critics.

Outside the labor parties, more and more critical and increasingly differentiating themselves from the official machine, were the various factions of socialists. In the early days of labor in politics, the socialists had taken an active part in the new political machine which the trade unions were creating; but the first decade of parliamentary experience soon 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 labor movement were present in strength. Was it possible to achieve a revolutionary reconstruction of society 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 provide merely a temporary amelioration of conditions which served 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 because of a lack of powerful intellects as because of the social environment.¹

Writing many years after the event, with the advantage of a recently acquired Leninist hindsight, E.H. Lane suggested that there had existed in Australia in 1890-91 a "revolutionary situation."² But

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1. Although in fact Australians made no significant original contribution to socialist theory.
 2. E.H. Lane: Dawn to Dusk, 30.

in fact the conditions listed by Lenin, the greatest practitioner of revolution, as being necessary for a revolutionary situation were not present: the government had not lost the support of all sizeable social classes - it was not "no longer able to govern," and, even if it had been, there was no revolutionary elite 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 experience of the international labor movement suggests that the sort of desperation which produces mass popular revolt is more likely to arise in the early stages of industrialisation than in a developed capitalism - and particularly so if the authoritarian government which is normal for this condition is disrupted by defeat in war. The Marxist prediction of an ordered progress from feudalism to a capitalism which would remain viable until social polarisation 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 for amelioration 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 1890-91: while the socialists inveighed against the strikes and the crisis as a 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;"³ nor even for 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, set out to convert the unionists to his vision of the future society, and convinced the Australian Labor Federation of state ownership of the means of production as 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."⁴ 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."⁵

It was not just that Lane, the revolutionary, over-estimated his prospects and his achievements. There was, in his own position, an ambivalence which was common to all the socialist groups - how to reconcile revolution and reform? His departure for New Australia side-stepped 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 on socialist propaganda and advocating a moderate immediate program, the ASL was, according to an early

3. Qld. Worker, 7/8/90. Ebbels, op. cit., 165.

4. Ibid.

5. Qd. L. Ross: William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement, 172.

member, "quarter philosophical anarchist, quarter physical force anarchist, quarter state socialist, and quarter laborite."⁶ 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; ASL members had been active in the formation of local Electoral Leagues and were even present in some numbers among the candidates,⁷ and the possibilists won a majority for co-operation with the Labor party which was later confirmed by the formal affiliation of the ASL to the party in 1894.⁸ This identification with reform politics, and the parliamentary compromises which the Labor party accepted, led to a number of secessions from the Socialist League,⁹ but not all the militants departed, and the line between reformers and revolutionaries was not clearly drawn until 1897.

In that year, a number of ASL members who had remained in the Labor party¹⁰ 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,"¹¹ and left the Political Labor League;¹² while, in the Socialist League, a number of prominent Labor politicians¹³ had become increasingly preoccupied with parliamentary affairs, and had left the way clear for the revolutionaries to win the League conference for a new constitution, manifesto and program, 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

6. "The Vag" [T. Batho]: Random Ramblings, 7.

7. P.J. O'Farrell: "The Australian Socialist League and the Labour Movement, 1887-1891." HSAZ Vol. 8 No. 30, 162.

8. H.V. Evatt: Australian Labour Leader, 36. But see 1894 Manifesto of the ASL and comment by the Australian Workman, Ebbels, op. cit., 186 ff.

9. Including the first two secretaries, W.H. McNamara and E.J. Brady. [contd.]

("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 ASL belonging to any other political organisation.¹⁴

The League's influence was more extensive than its membership of a hundred or so would suggest:¹⁵ it was in open competition with the Labor party for the support of the trade unions, and its members were active in the formation and the affairs of quite a few unions,¹⁶ and there was a small group of ASL 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 of securing improvements in their wages and conditions of labor, while advising them that any advances they might make would be of strictly limited value, and warning them that the professional politicians¹⁷ were interested in the trade unions largely as vote-catchers. Meanwhile, on the political front, the League had drafted a platform, in anticipation of the coming Federal election, which on the face of it contained little that was not common ground with the Labor party.¹⁸ Their point of departure from the official party was the belief that the Labor politicians, by betraying the independence of the working-class organisations, were compromising the socialist cause: "Labor must be absolutely free to fight for its own emancipation. . . [The worker's] great concern is

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10. Among them C.M. Barlow of the Typographical Association and in 1896 secretary of the PLL, and J.O. Moroney of the Tobacco Workers' Union and later chairman of the ASL.
 11. C.M. Barlow: letter to Sydney Daily Telegraph, 27/2/01.
 12. Formed by the amalgamation of the NSW council of the Australian Labor Federation and the Labor Electoral League in 1895.
 13. Among them W.M. Hughes, W.A. Holman, G. Black and J.D. Fitzgerald.
 14. People, 6/1/00.
 15. The ASL had had about 50 members in 1898, and by 1900 chairman Moroney was reporting "a fairly large membership." People, 24/2/00.

[contd.]

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."¹⁹ This would be accomplished, the League believed, when Australian workers realised that it was "their mission to effect [the] social revolution by means of an intelligent use of the ballot" and organised "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 advance the interests of the Australian workers - the Australian Socialist Labor Party."²⁰

This point was reached earlier in New South Wales than in the other colonies because of the unique parliamentary position of the Labor party.

In Queensland, those socialists who had survived the New Australia exodus²¹ kept the flag flying first in the Queensland Socialist League (1893-94) and then in the Social Democratic Vanguard (from 1895). 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.²²

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16. Among them the AWU (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 newly formed unions of ironworkers' assistants, tailors and hotel and club employees.
 17. The ASL had a special dislike for W.M. Hughes.
 18. The program called for a White Australia, old age pensions, a citizen defence force, a Commonwealth note issue, constitutional reform, and union conditions on government jobs.
 19. People, 14/7/00.
 20. People, 6/1/00.
 21. Notably E.H. Lane, R.S. Ross, H.E. Boote, C. Seymour (secretary [contd.]

The Vanguard, well dug in to 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, several of the leading militants having left Queensland, a majority voted to support the Morgan-Kidston coalition government - an issue similar to that which split the ASL in 1891 and again in 1897 - and the Vanguard collapsed.

In Victoria, a Social Democratic Federation had been founded in 1889 by the English socialist H.H. Champion;²³ 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 recognised that there were circumstances under which "revolutionary methods will be perfectly justifiable."²⁴ The Victorian SDF 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, following a visit by the British trade union leader Ben Tillet, a Victorian Socialist League was formed and attracted some intellectual support;²⁵ its

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21. [contd.] of the Queensland Seamen's Union) and A. Hinchcliffe (secretary of the ALF and manager of The Worker).
 22. Lane, op. cit., 54.
 23. Champion was a follower of H.M. Hyndman, leader of the Social Democratic Federation in England.
 24. T. Tunnecliffe: Socialism: Its Aims and Objects, 6.
 25. e.g. the poet "Furnley Maurice" [F.L.T. Wilmot] printed the VSL paper, The Socialist, on his hand press.

appeal was largely ethical ("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.")²⁶ 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 realisation, through parliament, of "the organised power of the working class;" its immediate aim was the formation of union-based consumer co-operatives,²⁷ and these had, by 1900, grown to considerable proportions in Melbourne.²⁸ But this - one of the very few attempts to 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 - party forsaken - principles sacrificed - connection with Unionism sustained as a mere political catch vote;"²⁹ despite this solemn warning, its foundation president and secretary themselves joined the ranks of Labor parliamentarians in the Victorian election of 1902.³⁰

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 of these by directing their propaganda towards trade unionists; the second remained a divisive issue for socialists throughout the period covered by this thesis.

26. B. Tillett: Environment and Character.

27. Rules of the Victorian Labor Federation, 2-4.

28. W.E. Murphy: History of the Eight Hours' Movement, II, 142.

29. Rules of the VLF, 5.

30. They were (respectively) F. Anstey and G.A. Elmslie.

5. 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 wharves, the ships and the shearing sheds. These men had, over a decade earlier, created their own "new unions" which were, in almost all respects, 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; and from this they had concluded that they must perfect their industrial organisation by the federation of labor, 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 in their formation by the craft unions, whose concerns were more immediate and whose vision was narrower 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 situation, 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, federation was close at hand, it was the dawn of a century and hope was in the air:

"We are now founding an Australian nation - one that in many respects is unique in the world's history. It has now 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 the division of 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 a 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 man 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. . ." ¹

1. Donald Macdonell (General Secretary, AWU): "The Labor Movement." Worker, 22/12/00.

PART THREE:

INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL LABOR, 1900-1914

1. Trade Unions and the State.

The new century opened on the upswing of the economic cycle, and Australian labor 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 labor's ambitions. Primary industry had passed through a decade of drought and was now beginning to flourish; gold mining was declining, but coal and metal mining were advancing fast; railway construction and other public works were pressed ahead; manufacturing was undergoing its most rapid growth. The demand for labor remained strong - sufficiently so to keep pace with the impressive population growth, although throughout these years 5 or 6% 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; roughly, these balanced one another, so that real wages, although they oscillated through a spread of about 5%, were almost the same in 1913 as they had been in 1901.¹ If standards of living had not advanced greatly, neither had they slipped back, and at least the pre-crisis level had been restored.

The major preoccupations of the unions were the establishment of the "living wage," the universal 8-hour day (later, the "Saturday half-holiday" - that is, the 44-hour week),² and the "right to work," and the recognition of trade unions (there was here the special problem of unions of government employees) and of the principle of preference in employment for union members. The keys were

1. Appendix I.

2. The AWU did not support this, considering that the 8-hour day was impracticable for many bushworkers. e.g. D. Macdonell to Commonwealth TUC, 1902.

stronger trade union organisation and the more effective participation of labor in politics; the preferred solution was the legal regulation of standards of living by arbitration.

The union story in these years is, then, one of the steady growth of the movement, and of the contradictory pattern of its relations with the state. From slightly under 100,000 in 1901, trade union membership grew to well over half a million in 1914;³ 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.⁴ 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 for prosecution for conspiracy as well as the possibility of an award, greatly encouraged the formation of unions; the struggle over preference aided their growth; and, with the establishment of the Commonwealth Court in 1904, state organisations were given a powerful incentive to federate, so that, by 1914, two-thirds of all unionists belonged to the 79 "interstate unions."⁵ But arbitration was not the central factor; it facilitated the growth of unionism and made it more complete, bringing in marginal groups and those with special difficulties which might otherwise have remained unorganised,⁶ 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

3. Appendix I.

4. Labour Report (1914) No. 5, 62.

5. Appendix I.

6. cf. the case of the Brisbane tramway workers, *infra* 82 ff.

a substitute for strikes. At first they fought hard to overcome the considerable employer opposition; but, this done, they were frustrated by the inadequacy and inefficiency of arbitration. Then there was a division in the labor 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 revert to reliance on industrial strength. While the employers for their part came to realise 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."⁷ Generally, this meant the Labor parties.

Arbitration was argued most fiercely in New South Wales and the Commonwealth in those years when the Labor parties, with substan-

7. Outward Correspondence Book, A.T.U. Letter to Broken Hill Typographical Society, 27/12/02. 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 election funds in 1903. Minutes of Political Organising Conference, 31/10/03.) But 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 a judicial tribunal rather than leave themselves open to the pressures of trade unions and Labor conferences. Standard hours legislation (other than that covering women and juveniles) began only in 1920.

tial 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 NSW Industrial Arbitration Act of 1901,⁸ 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.⁹ The newly formed Sydney Labor Council had led the labor demand for this legislation. Already, it had excluded from its rules any provision for strike levies or a permanent "defence fund,"¹⁰ now it wanted to make the new system work. This pacific sentiment was tested almost immediately by a strike of tailoresses, recently organised into a union by H.E. Holland of the ASL, 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 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.¹¹

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8. This Act was based on, but went beyond, the New Zealand Act of 1894.
9. J.H. Portus: The Development of Australian Trade Union Law, 105-07. The most serious deficiency, from the trade union viewpoint, was the absence of a provision empowering the Court to award preference. This had been included in the original Bill, but was removed by the Legislative Council.
10. SLC Report, 31/12/99. [contd.]

In practice, 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 no judge could be found for some months to take his place.¹² The unions were anxious and annoyed. "We are on the verge of having one of the most sensational strikes in New South Wales," the secretary of the Coal Lumpers warned the government. "It's taking us all our time to keep the men down." While another union leader commented that another 1890 was needed "to bring the Government to its senses."¹³ But there was no return to 1890: the craft unions had come to depend on the parliamentary process, and the majority of the Labor Council opposed a boycott of the Court in favour of continued pressure for amending legislation.¹⁴

What they got from the Liberal government, when the original Act expired in mid-1908,¹⁵ 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."¹⁶ From this developed a prolonged internal dispute, during which the industrial movement began to redefine its attitude to arbitration and to parliamentary action.

11. SLC Minutes, Nov. 1901 - Feb. 1902, passim.

12. Ibid., 22/12/04, 13/4/05. In 1904, only four cases were settled, and in 1905 only three, while 63 were listed. (Ibid., 31/5/05.) In 1906, the Coachmakers' Union had their claim for an award struck out, for technical reasons, after it had been pending for three years. (Ibid., 22/2/06.)

[contd.]

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.¹⁷ At the 1908 NSW 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.¹⁸ The unions were strong enough at the NSW Labor confereance, early in 1909, to reject the equivocal comment of the party executive on the Act,¹⁹ but at the following Trade Union Congress the Labor Council reported that it had been unable to enforce its ban;²⁰ and at the 1910 Congress - held six months before the state's first Labor government took office - a motion for the repeal of the Industrial Disputes Act was withdrawn in favour of one for its amendment.²¹ But by this time the Act had been challenged on the industrial field, and the challenge had failed.

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13. Ibid., 13/6/05, 27/2/06. The reply of the Premier (J. Carruthers) to a deputation which put these views was that, if the unions would cease supporting a certain political party, they might expect more consideration for their views.
 14. Ibid., 8/3/06.
 15. In its seven years of operation, the Industrial Arbitration Court made 111 awards and settled 94 industrial disputes. SLC Report, 30/6/08.
 16. Ibid. The unions opposed the Wages Board system because it meant sectional hearings and a multiplicity of awards; it was thought that this would weaken the unions and put the employers in a favourable tactical position.
 17. Ibid.
 18. Report, TUC, 12 ff. 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."
 19. Report of 1909 NSW PLL Conference, Worker, 27/1/09.
 20. Report of 1909 NSW TUC, Worker, 29/4/09.
 21. Report of 1910 NSW TUC, Worker, 14/4/10.

The NSW coal-miners had supported the arbitration legislation, but they had soon become dissatisfied, and, with the election of the International Socialist,²² Peter Bowling, as president of the northern miners' union,²³ they swung over to militant opposition to the Industrial Disputes Act. In 1909, Bowling piloted through an amalgamation of the three 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, and, next day, all but one of the miners' lodges declared it.²⁴ The union's demand was for an open conference²⁵ with the minowners 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.²⁶ On November 9, 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 the branches of the WWF whether they were prepared to strike; the watersiders replied that they would leave it to their union to call them out.²⁷ The government offered 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,

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22. Bowling is usually referred to as a member of the IWW. In fact, he belonged to Holland's Socialist Federation, which was at this time committed to industrial unionism but not to the IWW. A 1908 (n.d.) letter from W. North, a Cessnock miner and IWW member, refers to the miners "being led and bled by Peter Bowling and his gang of boodle-hunters." (Corresp., Sydney IWW Club.)
23. There are three major coal-fields in NSW - the northern (Newcastle-Maitland), western (Lithgow) and southern (Illawarra); each at this time had its own union.

[contd.]

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.²⁸ 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" . . . to enable the IWW 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 19 votes to 4.

Immediately, the Wade government gagged through parliament an amendment to the Industrial Disputes Act, providing 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 parliamentarians²⁹ washed their hands of the "extremists" and left them to their fate.³⁰ Hughes and Bowling were now in open competition for the allegiance of the unions, and, except for Bowling's own union and the Coal Lumpers, Hughes won.³¹ 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.

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24. Unless otherwise stated, this account is based on the reports in *The Worker*, 11/11/09 to 17/2/10.
 25. i.e. one whose proceedings were publicly reported.
 26. i.e. that the eight 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 daily wage to miners working on contract rates.
 27. WWF Minutes, 10/11/09, 19/11/09. The Council of the Federation did not meet after this, and the dispute was left to Hughes.
 28. Hughes claimed that the opposition was IWW-inspired; in fact, it was led by the International Socialists, but the IWW was the currently fashionable stalking-horse.
 29. Including the coal-fields members, A. Edden MIA conceding that he had agreed "to some extent" with the gaoings, because he did not want "fanatics" leading the union. Int. Soc., 25/6/10.

[contd.]

The conclusions drawn from the defeat were mixed: Bowling was beaten as president of the northern miners by a Labor party man,³² but shortly afterwards defeated the moderate secretary of the southern miners,³³ while the pro-Hughes president of the Sydney WLU was replaced by an International Socialist³⁴ 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 intact³⁵ - for by now most Labor politicians had come to agree that arbitration was unworkable unless strikes were punished, and the 1912 NSW Trade Union Congress, by 35 votes to 28, agreed with them.³⁶

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 Court's second president, Mr Justice Higgins. The unions

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30. Bowling was sentenced to 2½ years, and four others to 18 months. They were in fact released after nine months.
31. But again against strong opposition in his own union. The watersiders rejected the report of their returning officer that a ballot on a motion recommending that they work ships which had been coaled by "scab" labor was carried.
32. D. Watson, later MHR.
33. F. Dunleavy. Ironically, Dunleavy, who had urged the southern miners to accept the Wages Board and had himself taken a position on the Board, had been sacked when he was absent from work during a Board meeting.
34. E. Hillier.
35. Despite repeated trade union protests, the penalties stayed in the Act. The 1912 (Labor) amendments for the first time introduced the provision that workers' wages could be garnisheed to meet fines imposed under the Act, thus preventing strikers from "cutting it out" in gaol. Int. Soc., 16/11/12.
36. cf. J.C. Watson to 1910 NSW PLL Conference (Worker, 17/12/10); E.J. Kavanagh to Interstate Congress of TLCs, November, 1913. Report of 1912 TUC, Worker, 13/6/12. The miners and watersiders demanded repeal; the Labor Council and craft unions opposed them.

had strongly urged the legislation,³⁷ 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 labor specifications, although an unwelcome limitation had been imposed on the Court's power to award preference.³⁸ 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."³⁹

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

The AWU registered with the NSW Court in 1902, but it got caught up in the queue, and it was further bedevilled by the operations of the Machine Shearers' Union, a pastoralist-sponsored company union which lived a few inglorious years until the AWU ruined its officials with a well-timed libel action.⁴⁰ Thrust back on its own resources, the AWU took the best it could wring out of the squatters. After the amalgamation with its Queensland counterpart in 1905, the AWU 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 AWU leaders were deeply committed: arbitration would,

37. cf. Reports of Commonwealth TUC, November 1902, and Commonwealth Labor Conference, December 1902.

38. It was on this that the Watson government was defeated.

39. Qd. W.A. Baker: *The Commonwealth Basic Wage*, 5.

40. cf. Worker, Feb.-March 1904; Spence: *History of the AWU*, 124-27.

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"⁴¹ - action which would be carried out in no small measure by AWU officials who had won political preferment.

So the AWU was able, in its second giant amalgamation in 1913-14,⁴² to digest unions like the United Laborers (an organisation of South Australian fruit-pickers and farm laborers) and the Amalgamated Workers' Association (metal miners and sugar workers in North Queensland) which had until then got along without arbitration. Optimistically, the AWA militants had thought that they would "outweigh and submerge in a short time the moderate, even reactionary/policy of the AWU," but it was the AWU's devotion to arbitration which submerged them.⁴³

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 [NSW] 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."⁴⁴ 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 of shipowners;⁴⁵ however, the coastal men had been left with a lower rate of pay, and, late in 1911, they went on strike.

41. Spence: Australia's Awakening, 489. Contrast Sen. 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, 19/11/04. [contd.]

Hughes, by now Attorney-General in the Fisher Government as well as the strong man of the WWF, lined up the Federation, the Melbourne and Sydney branches and the Seamen's Union⁴⁶ against the Sydney branch; the NSW Labor government threatened to reopen the port with "free" labor⁴⁷ and ordered the formation of a Wages Board. Faced with inevitable isolation, the Sydney union capitulated.⁴⁸

In 1914, Mr Justice Higgins gave the WWF its first federal award; it provided for substantial wage increases and the eight-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."⁴⁹ From North Queensland, the Mackay branch asked plaintively: "Are the Council selling us?"⁵⁰ Thirty months later, after the first conscription referendum, the members answered yes.

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42. As well as the unions mentioned, the Rural Workers, Rabbit Trappers and Carriers' Unions were amalgamated; after this, the AWU had over 60,000 members - nearly one in eight of all Australian unionists. Worker, 9/1/13, 22/1/13, 5/2/14.
 43. Lane: Dawn to Dusk, 119-21.
 44. Qd. T. Nelson: The Hungry Mile, 38-39. Hughes was persuading the Sydney men that, despite the NSW Act, they still needed the Federation.
 45. SLC Report, 30/6/08. It was these agreements (with the deep sea, interstate and coastal owners) which Hughes was protecting on the miners' Strike Congress in 1909.
 46. Senator R.S. Guthrie was at this time president of the FSU.
 47. The strike was the work of the International Socialists, and a blow at the Labor party and arbitration, Premier McGowen said.
 48. Int. Soc., 11/11/11.
 49. WWF Minutes, 27/4/14, 4/5/14.
 50. Ibid., 26/6/14.

What these cases revealed was the domestication of the trade unions to the arbitration process, the miners being tamed by the forces of the state, the watersiders and the AWU being bridled by the politicians who led them; this, however, tended to be a one-way process, as had been shown during the four-months lock-out of the Barrier miners early in 1909.

The Barrier Amalgamated Miners' Association had gone down with the other mass unions in the '90s, and the miners had laboriously rebuilt their organisation, 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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² Anticipating trouble, the combined unions' committee⁵³ invited Tom Mann, the well-known British socialist who had been in Australia since 1902, to help. Two months' vigorous organising enrolled 1600 new members in the Barrier unions and built out of nothing a powerful branch of the AMA among the smelter workers at Port Pirie.⁵⁴ 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 9/- a day for surface men, and a guaranteed minimum for contract miners. The smaller companies were prepared to renew the existing agreement, but the Broken Hill Pty. demanded a 12½% 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.

51. This account is based on G. Dale: The Industrial History of Broken Hill, 109 ff.

52. Report of the 1909 Lockout, 12.

53. Representing craft unions like the Engine Drivers and the various metal trades unions as well as the AMA.

54. T. Mann: Memoirs, 229-33.

It was a bitter dispute. Even before these abortive negotiations, the Broken Hill police had been heavily reinforced, and, during the dispute, Mann and four other unionists, and H.E. Holland, who had come to the Barrier to preach revolutionary socialism to the strikers, were charged with rioting.⁵⁵

The unions appealed to the Arbitration Court, seeking an award and an injunction restraining the Broken Hill Pty. 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 1907-08 wage, a guaranteed minimum for contract miners, and the six-day week at Port Pirie.⁵⁶ 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 NSW 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/worse ^{a great deal} can they get better."⁵⁷ While the Lib-Lab coalition in South Australia had sent police into Port

55. Mann was released on bail, on condition that he took no further part in the strike, and spoke at no public meetings in NSW. There was some feeling that Mann "should have 'gone in' rather than have his tongue tied by authority." * (Dale, op. cit., 125.) However, Mann said that the strike committee had decided that he could do better work raising funds in other states. (Mann, op. cit., 237.)

56. The Pirie smelter workers had been working a seven-day week with no holidays. [contd.]

* Should read: ". . . rather than permit his tongue to be tied by authority . . ."

Pirie to protect the "free" labor with which the smelters were being reopened. And, at the NSW Trade Union Congress, an impassioned appeal by Peter Bowling for a general strike in support of the imprisoned unionists was defeated by 46 votes to 17, the craft unionist majority urging that only the return of a Labor government could secure the release of the prisoners.⁵⁸

The companies would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender, and, first at Port Pirie (on the advice of Mann, who feared that the union would be completely destroyed) and then at the Barrier (against the advice of the AMA leaders, who wanted a guarantee of no victimisation), 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 to take the law into their own hands, to seize the mines, to march on Sydney, pillaging as they went. But the men were demoralised, and the agitation faded out in a whimper. The NSW government provided funds for some public works; the Broken Hill Pty. gradually resumed operations; the unemployed drifted away; "in time the position became sufficiently relieved to keep the slaves a bit quiet."⁵⁹ 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 the labor movement had created to

57. Qd. R.G.S. Williams: *Australian White Slaves*, 43-44. The nearest IWW 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 AMA. cf. Sydney IWW Club Minutes, 27/1/09, for a denial of IWW influence or responsibility.

58. Report, 1909 NSW TUC. The militants were especially bitter because the venue of the trials had been changed from Broken Hill to Albury, evidently with the intention of securing an anti-unionist jury.

59. Dale, *op. cit.*, 141.

ameliorate its conditions 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 provided by government instrumentalities, and this created some special problems. There was the reluctance of governments to recognise the unions of state employees, or their right to have their claims go to arbitration - these were regarded as an abrogation of sovereignty. There was the unwillingness to allow state servants to associate with workers outside the service⁶⁰ - 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.

In 1903, the Irvine government in Victoria - having already ordered retrenchments in the railways service, and introduced legislation to provide for special electorates for state servants⁶¹ - ordered

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60. Whether by affiliation of state service unions with the Labor Councils, or by membership of state servants in comprehensive unions.
61. Railway employees were to be represented by two members of parliament, and other civil servants by one member. The special electorates were considerably larger than the average, and the special members were to have restricted voting rights. Tocsin, 27/11/02.

the unions of railwaymen to sever their connection with the Trades Hall Council. The men refused, and struck work; "imported paid agitators . . . talking sedition" were to blame,⁶² and Irvine set out to "teach [the railwaymen] a lesson."⁶³ The government hurried through a "Coercion Act" which provided heavy penalties for strike activities, deprived the strikers of their seniority, and gave preference to loyalists. The strike collapsed, but the "lesson" was not that which the government intended: persistent labor agitation caused the repeal of the separate representation bill in the following parliament, and, a few years later, the union swung decisively to the left with the appointment of Frank Hyett, a well-known socialist, as secretary and the amalgamation of the sectional unions into the Victorian Railways Union.⁶⁴

The question of recognition also precipitated the most extensive strike that Australia had until that time known - the Brisbane general strike of 1912. Over 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 other men.

The Queensland ALF called the railwaymen, watersiders, seamen and other unions into conference, and, on 28 January 1912, declared that, unless the tramways union was recognised, there would be "a general cessation of work." Three days later, the first issue of

G.
62. Graham MLA, VPD civ 32. The reference was to Tom Mann.

63. W. Irvine MLA (Premier), *ibid.*, 8.

64. The Railways Union Gazette: Frank Hyett In Memoriam Edition, 7/6/19. (Hyett died during the influenza epidemic.)

the Official Strike Bulletin sounded triumphant: "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."⁶⁵

Curiously, this was near to the truth. Over 20,000 Brisbane unionists came out on strike, and business in the city was almost at a standstill. Railwaymen⁶⁶ and miners at Ipswich, and 14,000 unionists in the far north,⁶⁷ 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."⁶⁸ Both diagnosis and prognosis were somewhat exaggerated,⁶⁹ but this was how the government saw the struggle. They suspended Wages Board determinations, recruited

65. Official Strike Bulletin No. 1, 31/1/12.

66. The Railways Commissioner formed a special committee of "loyalists" - the skilled men - to help him keep the service running. The officials of the mass Queensland Railways Union wanted to join the committee, but their members voted them out of office and stopped work. After the strike, the Commissioner expressed the hope that, in the future, the officials of unions covering the railways would themselves be railway servants, and that these unions would have no further connections with outside bodies (i.e. the ALF). But this was scarcely a real possibility.

67. The AWA 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 AWA militants "managed to skulldrag them to vote for the strike resolution." Lane, op. cit., 102. [contd.]

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 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" labor 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 enough. After an unsuccessful attempt to get guarantees against victimisation, the committee, on March 6, declared an unconditional return to work, and the strikers returned to such jobs as were still available. Wise after the event, the Queensland Worker wrote: "Now the truth can be told. The Brisbane strike lasted five weeks too long; it should never have occurred."⁷⁰

In terms of the then current theories of militant trade unionists and socialists - in brief, "if a strike is big enough, it's bound to win" - it was hard to see why the Brisbane general strike should

68. Letter of a Brisbane special constable, in *The Tyranny of Trade Unions*, by One Who Resents It, 173-78.
69. That the diagnosis was not altogether exaggerated is suggested by the comment of the *Strike Bulletin* (10/2/12) that the strike was the "latest phase" of the struggle for socialism.
70. *Qld. Worker*, 14/3/12, qd. A.A. Morrison: "The Brisbane General Strike of 1912," *HSANZ* 14 (May 1950), 125 ff.
(Unless otherwise stated, this account is based on the daily *Official Strike Bulletin*.)

have failed so badly. The solidarity was splendid, the organisation 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 organised labor to ensure the effective isolation of the anti-labor 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 organised but unorganised labor 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.⁷¹

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 there was a residue of bitterness from the strike. One of the new government's first measures was an Industrial Peace Act which followed closely the 1912 Act of the NSW Labor government, but prescribed special penalties for strikes in public utilities.

71. 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 recognised. The government was possibly worried by the growing power of trade unionism, as evidenced by the successful strike organised in the sugar industry by the AWA the previous year (the interests of sugar companies and growers having always been a sensitive area for Queensland governments), and by the growing support for the Labor party, and saw this as a good opportunity for stemming both.

The strike committee and the Labor party⁷² had claimed (although they opposed this measure because of the penal clauses) that, had Queensland had an arbitration system, there would have been no serious trouble.⁷³ But the experience of trade unions elsewhere, and especially in New South Wales, did not support their confidence. Labor administrations, too, were prone, when confronted with major industrial upheavals, to pronounce solemnly that "the government must govern."

During a protracted strike of coal-miners and ironworkers, employees of C. & G. Hoskins, Australia's original iron manufacturers, at Lithgow in 1911-12, the McGowen Labor government supported the wholesale prosecutions instigated by the company against the strikers, while its supporters first persuaded the men to return to work alongside "free" laborers and, when the strike broke out again, influenced the Labor Council to withdraw the black ban it had previously imposed on Lithgow iron.⁷⁴ The following year, the government threatened to introduce "amateur blacklegs" during a strike of gas-workers who were demanding, before they returned to work, a guarantee that the Wages Board (on which the government was insisting) would award them an increase.⁷⁵ Pleading the "interest of the Labor Movement as a whole," the Labor Council settled this and other strikes in New South Wales in 1913 - in all cases by persuading the men to go back to work.⁷⁶

Much of the experience of trade unions in the years before World War I had centred on the relation of the unions to the law and the

72. The president of the strike committee was J.A. Coyne, a Labor MLA.

73. cf. Strike Bulletin, 20/2/12, 9/3/12, 18/3/12.

74. The original point at issue was the demand of the miners in the Hoskins pit for the union rate. It was an additional union grievance against Labor governments that Hoskins were receiving a bonus from the Commonwealth under the Iron Bounty Act, which provided that bonuses should only be paid to firms which accepted the union rate; however, W.M. Hughes said that this

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state. Arbitration had secured the recognition and growth of industrial organisations, the 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, found 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.

Two questions confronted trade unions at this time: whether to organise their movement for strikes or for arbitration, and what demands to make of political labor.

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74. [contd.] applied only to the foundry employees and not to the miners, and that the bonus could not be withdrawn. Int. Soc., 25/3/11.
75. Worker, 6/3/13, Int. Soc., 29/3/13.
76. NSWLC Report, 30/6/13.

2. Political Labor and the Industrial Wing.

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

The Labor party had decided that it was not purely a working-class party;¹ on the contrary, as one of the members of the Fisher Ministry said of this, the 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."² Along with 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."³ The party had come a long way from its trade 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."⁴ But the problem, as unionists saw it, was not that parliamentarians should have a sense of responsibility, but where it should be directed.

Political labor's vulnerability was the size of the working-class vote. Despite the bold claim to the support of the 80 to 90%

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1. cf. Report of 1904 NSW PLL Conference, Worker, 6/2/04. A motion declaring that the party represented the working class only was ruled out of order, and the ruling was not challenged.
 2. E.L. Batchelor MHR, Worker, 28/1/09. cf. W.G. Spence's description of the Fisher government as having "the most truly national policy ever presented." Report, 1910 AWU Conference, Worker, 19/1/10.

[contd.]

of the community for whose interests the party purported to stand,⁵ the Labor vote was largely (although it went well beyond the trade unions) largely a working-class vote; and, of a potential electorate in 1901 of roughly two millions, the wage and salary earners made up slightly more than half. So that, even if the Labor party had been able to count on the whole of this vote, which it could not, it would have been able to win only a bare majority; and the pressure on the party to seek votes from other social strata was irresistible.⁶ 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 AWU;⁷ the union's political organising was often effective,⁸ but it acquired a greater weight in the political machine, and committed itself more and more to parliamentary means. However, the votes of bushworkers were clearly not enough to ensure Labor a parliamentary majority; 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 wagelabor 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 AWU, and they were 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.

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3. P. Heagney (Sec., Melbourne THC), Preface to Report, Third Commonwealth Political Labor Conference, 1905.
 4. SMH, 17/8/08.
 5. [Senator] G.F. Pearce: "The Trades Hall." Review of Reviews, 19/11/04.
 6. This problem was accentuated by the distribution of population. The working class tends to be concentrated either in "industrial" suburbs or in particular isolated (e.g. mining) communities, with the result that there is a relatively high number of "blue ribbon"

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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,"⁹ which was interpreted to mean the universal establishment of individual small holdings, on leasehold rather than freehold tenure. Accordingly, apart from the detailed program of improvements in agricultural techniques and marketing arrangements,¹⁰ the major Labor preoccupations were with the suspension of the sale of crown lands and the nationalisation of land already alienated; and with the introduction of a progressive tax on unimproved land values, the aim of this being 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 nationalisation promoted to the fighting platform were equally defeated,¹¹ and the policy was never seriously pressed. However, the progressive land tax was vigorously pursued: it could be expected to appeal to small land-owners who wanted more land for themselves, or land for their sons;¹² it was supported by the unions, who saw closer settlement as a means of relieving unemployment;¹³ and it was enacted by the Fisher government in 1910. The argument was not over the tax itself, but over the extent of the exemption. Originally, no exemption had been

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6. [contd.] Labor seats, and a correspondingly greater pressure to find policies acceptable to non-working-class electors in other seats.
 7. e.g. the NSW PLL request to the AWU in 1900 (Worker, 10/2/00), and the decision of the 1908 AWU Conference to appoint political organisers (Worker, 21/1/09).
 8. e.g. the work of J.H. Scullin, which was held largely responsible for the Labor success in the countryside in the 1908 Victorian elections. Worker, 7/1/09. (Scullin was later a Labor Prime Minister.)
 9. NSW Labor Platform, 1891. Spence: Australia's Awakening, 598.
 10. cf. NSW Labor Platform, 1909 (Land Reform). Spence, op. cit., 600-01. Decisions of 1914 NSW PLL Conference. Worker, 12/2/14.

[contd.]

proposed; but, under pressure from the country branches, the party decided that holdings worth less than £5000 should be free of tax - it was, said Holman, who represented the small-farming electorate of Cootamundra, 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.¹⁴ This policy won support in the countryside, and local organisations were formed in which the farming interest formed a centre of conservatism within the party.¹⁵ But land nationalisation and the land tax affected only the ideological preconceptions of the industrial wing; more immediate interests were at stake when economic issues were involved. The AWU, for example, took it badly when the NSW Labor government accepted a country back-bencher'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 AWU conference, and a motion to cut off financial support was only withdrawn when the party conference changed its rules to increase the power of unions in the party machine.¹⁶

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11. e.g. at 1911 NSW PLL Conference. Worker, 3/2/11, 8/2/11.
 12. Relations between the Labor party and the Farmers' and Settlers' Association were good early in the century. (Worker, 14/7/00.) But, by 1909, the Association had fallen into the hands of the wealthier farmers, and had swung against the land tax. (Worker, 29/7/09.)
 13. cf. Report, 1902 Commonwealth TUC.
 14. NSW PLL Conference, 1909. Worker, 11/2/09. The Federal party supported a similar exemption. Ibid., 1/4/09.
 15. e.g. the reluctance of country Labor organisations to co-operate in the political organising work of the AWU in 1908-09; the S.A. secretary of the AWU said that this was because the AWU's work would mean "a militant spirit in the House." (Worker, 26/1/10.)
 16. Worker, 9/1/13, 16/1/13, 6/2/13, 12/2/13.

The Labor parties were 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 usually be contained within the movement) it was the working-class interest which suffered.¹⁷

This attempted reconciliation of conflicting interests, rationalised 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 was the fight of the trade unions to establish their hegemony over the parliamentary party, and, for this, control of the party machine at three points was necessary - first the conference, which decided the platform; secondly the pre-selection ballots, which chose the men to carry it out; and thirdly 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 organisations - 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 affiliated, and were not divided among themselves. Once the situation had been established (on the insistence

17. 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 coalminers and maritime workers was due in no small measure to this sensitivity to the farming interest. Int. Soc., 10/9/10, 22/10/10.

of the unions) that members of parliament should not sit ex officio on the party executives,¹⁸ 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 organisations, in which individual 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. And, while the executives could disallow a local selection, this was rarely done, even when the chosen candidate was not to their liking, because it usually meant local disintegration.¹⁹ In the electorates, the middle-class adherents of the party were generally able, because of their verbal and financial facility, to exercise an undue influence, so that the parliamentary party, because of its social composition as well as its electoral ambitions, was usually 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 different. Federal parliamentarians were responsible to the state parties, although the Commonwealth conferences determined policy which, from 1905, was binding on all party organisations if carried by a two-thirds majority²⁰ - a provision which W.A. Holman strongly but unsuccessfully

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18. On the other hand, moves to prohibit Ms.P. from sitting on the executives or as conference delegates were not successful - nor were similar moves to limit the powers of Ms.P. in the AWU.
19. In the early '20s, the AWU officials in NSW for a time solved this difficulty by introducing false-bottomed ballot boxes into the pre-selections.
20. Report, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905.

resisted.²¹ Six delegates from each state constituted the Commonwealth conference, and among these federal parliamentarians were invariably well represented.²² However, most matters of immediate concern to trade unionists were still within the province of the state parliaments; because of its strong national links, the AWU 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.)²³

Given this special place in the party machine, the trade unions generally affiliated to the party, and contributed generously in money, propoganda and organisation 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 the 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~~^{them} the quid pro quo of electoral immunity for their non-Labor partners. The

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21. Report, 1906 NSW PLL Conference, Worker, 1/2/06.
22. Of 36 delegates to the 1905 conference, 16 were federal members or senators; 1908 - 18; 1912 - 5; 1915 - 8. In addition, there were between 9 and 11 state members at each of these conferences.
23. This became a major source of conflict in the NSW party in regard to 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, influence by Holman, took a "state-rights" position; each time, the party conference, on AWU initiative, condemned the parliamentarians, but, although disciplinary action was threatened, it was never taken. The unions generally supported increased Commonwealth powers because the Commonwealth Parliament was not burdened by
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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 organisations, which carried much more weight in the Labor parties than in any other party, were unwilling to forego their right to stand candidates.²⁴ 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 (1903-06),²⁵ the extra-parliamentary Labor parties 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 program advanced by the Labor party.²⁶ At the 1905 Commonwealth conference, and again at the 1906 NSW 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.²⁷ 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 organisations 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 leader of the parliamentary party, refused, and led twelve of the 34 Labor members out of the party, relegating Labor to the opposition benches for another decade.²⁸ By 1909, with the break-up

23. [contd.] an undemocratic upper house, and because effective intervention in the economy could only be undertaken on a federal basis.

24. e.g. the decisions of the 1900 NSW PLL conference and the 1904 (foundation) conference of the Victorian PLC against Labor participation in non-Labor governments. Worker, 3/2/00, 2/4/04.

[contd.]

of the Lib-Lab coalition in South Australia,²⁹ it was firmly established that the Labor parties would settle for nothing less than undivided power.

It is beyond the range of this thesis to attempt an evaluation of the legislative record of the Labor parties. Current commentaries tend to emphasise the continuity of Labor with radical-liberal legislative programs, 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 organisations, which precipitated the wave of social legislation which, for a time, made Australia a model for the world. Acts of Parliament and administrative decisions establishing the rights of workers to organise 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 of these, the better and the worse, owed their existence substantially to the Labor parties. However, it is not relevant to the

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25. First Deakin (Radical Protectionist with Labor support), Watson (Labor), Reid-McLean (Free Trade-Protectionist coalition) and Second Deakin.
26. The platform adopted by the 1902 Commonwealth conference consisted of: White Australia, old age pensions, nationalisation of monopolies, citizen defence, restriction of public borrow-

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present purpose to argue this point; rather, the concern of this thesis is with the ways in which trade union pressure conditioned the platforms of the Labor parties, and with how particular political acts were received by the industrial movement.

With the Commonwealth party, the picture is fairly simple. The original Commonwealth platform, drafted largely by state politicians, was referred to the unions for their endorsement.³⁰ The 1902 platform followed closely the decisions of the Interstate Trade Union Congress. The decision of the Watson government to resign rather than to accept qualifications to the Arbitration Court's power to award preference to unionists, and the record of the Fisher government in carrying through legislation of special interest to trade unionists were alike commended.³¹ Once the High Court's decision in the Harvester case had called the scope of the Commonwealth's industrial powers into question,³² there was overwhelming trade union support for the attempt of the federal Labor party, by referenda in 1911 and 1913, to secure power for the Commonwealth to legislate over a wide range of industrial and economic questions, despite the opposition of the NSW parliamentary party.³³

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26. [contd.] -ing, and a navigation law. Of these, only the nationalisation plank was possibly not acceptable to the radicals, and that in any case was beyond the powers of the Commonwealth.
27. Report, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905; Report, 1906 NSW PLL Conference, Worker, 8/2/06.
28. Report, Fourth Triennial Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1905; T. O'Sullivan: Reminiscences of the Queensland Parliament.
29. A situation similar to that in Queensland had caused similar pressures in the S.A. party in 1905-09, but on this occasion the parliamentary party gave way - partly, no doubt, because of the dispute in 1909, following the death of the Labor Premier T. Price between John Verran, the new Labor leader, and R.H. Peake, the Liberal, over who was to become Premier of the coalition. Worker, 6/1/09, 10/6/09.
30. Worker, 8/9/00. [contd.]

Only with the federal party's defence policy was there any substantial opposition, and that was very much a minority. 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 an independent navy;³⁴ in the minds of the parliamentary leaders, Australia was to become "the guardian of civilisation in the southern seas."³⁵ 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.³⁶

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 coalfields and at the Barrier, but Peter Bowling, at the 1909 NSW Trade Union Congress, could not even find a seconder for his motion that, as there was "never a weaker or more spineless party" than the Labor party, the congress should not recommend to unions that they affiliate.³⁷ Then, with the return of the McGowen

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31. SLC Minutes, 18/8/04; Worker, 16/1/13. 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 labor on trade union conditions), and the decision of the government to give preference to unionists on government works.
32. In R. v. Barger (the "Harvester case"), the High Court, by a 3-2 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.
33. Worker, Jan.-Feb. 1911, passim.
34. Report, Fourth Commonwealth Conference, 1908. The unexpected success of the Japanese against the Russians was very much in the minds of delegates; the motion was carried 21/5.
35. A. Fisher, Worker, 4/2/09.

[contd.]

government in 1910 (although with a minumte majority of two) it seemed to the Labor Council that "the 'new Unionism' has come to stay,"³⁸ but, within the life of this one parliament, the miners' unions had disaffiliated,³⁹ and there was talk of an independent trade union party.⁴⁰ The government's role in industrial disputes, the failure to deal with the Legislative Council, the argument over state rights and the constitutional referenda, the encouragement of the BHP steel-works at Newcastle despite the party's policy of a state-owned iron industry, had embittered a large section of industrial opinion, by now convinced that the McGowen-Holman government⁴¹ was betraying the trade unions, and that, as an AWU 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."⁴²

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,⁴³ drew from Holman the short-tempered retort that, while he would not hold up any legislation which might be popular, he would not undertake to follow the priorities demanded by the unions.⁴⁴ 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 brought the industrial-political dispute to the climactic upheaval of 1916.

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36. The coal-miners' organisations and the AMA were the only unions to oppose the Defence Act on internationalist grounds. The 1909 NSW TUC endorsed Fisher's policy (Worker, 29/4/09), and the 1912 NSW TUC and the Interstate Congress of TLCs called only for the amendment of the Act to prohibit the use of troops in strikes. (Worker, 13/6/12; Report of Interstate Congress of TLCs, 1913.)
37. Report, 1909 NSW TUC, Worker, 6/5/09.
38. NSWLC Report, 31/12/10.
39. Int. Soc., 21/10/11.
40. NSWLC Report, 31/12/11.
41. Holman became Premier when McGowen resigned in June 1913.
42. Hector Lamond, Worker, 13/2/13. [contd.]

"We are all socialists now," said the Federal leader, Andrew Fisher, to the 1908 Commonwealth conference,⁴⁵ 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 - what immediate policies the party was to follow, and who was to administer them; but, weaving these 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 Labor Federation in 1890 was nourished on William Lane's vision of the workingman's paradise as well as on the realities of the class war; but the entry of labor 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."⁴⁶

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 on what was already becoming a machine (and a very effective one) to serve sectional special interests their conception of what a working-class party ought to be.

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NSWLC Report, 31/12/13. The party had increased its representation from 46 to 50 in a house of 90.

44. SMH, 16/5/14.

45. Report, Fourth Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1908.

46. "Whither?" by "Touchstone" [H.E. Boote], Qld. Worker, 18/4/03; reprinted as leaflet by the Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard.

At the Queensland conference, where the local organisations, under militant trade union influence,⁴⁷ were already hotly critical of parliamentary compromise, the objective became one way of getting at the politicians; two delegates who were also members of the Social Democratic Vanguard⁴⁸ won a two-to-one majority for the "collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange."⁴⁹ In Victoria, in the same year, the influence of socialists organised in the Social Questions Committee, who had already infiltrated the parliamentary party, was able to secure the adoption of a similar objective.⁵⁰ In South Australia, with its radical rather than socialist tradition, the party conference decided that there was no need of an objective - that the platform was enough.⁵¹ Again, it was in New South Wales that the division was most clearly expressed. The debate opened on a motion from the Barrier AMA 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 AWU, 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;"⁵² there were left-wing grumbles about the chauvinism of the first clause and the timidity of the second, but the conference accepted this declaration.⁵³ At the Commonwealth Conference which followed this round of state gatherings, Watson moved for the NSW

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47. The unions were not represented at this conference as such; the conference changed the rules to provide for this in the future.
 48. M. Reid and J.S. Collings.
 49. Report, Fourth Triennial Labour in Politics Convention, 1905.
 50. cf. Report, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905.
 51. Tocsin, 21/9/05.
 52. For text, see Appendix
 53. Report, 1905 NSW PLL Conference, Worker, 4/2/05, 11/2/05.

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 go any further would frighten the electors,⁵⁴ that what the party wanted was a practical program and not "the ideas of Continental Socialists,"⁵⁵ that what was already on the platform was quite enough to keep the party busy for "two or three lifetimes."⁵⁶ For the Queensland-Victoria 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 program. The moderate objective won the conference, by 23 votes to 11.⁵⁷ And there, until 1921, the matter rested. Subsequent attempts by the radicals at the NSW and Commonwealth conferences failed monotonously.

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" attack⁵⁸ 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."⁵⁹

54. cf. W.A. Holman's objection to the "all-out" objective at the NSW Conference: "In his electorate it would make a great difference what form the Labour movement would take." Qd. A. St. Ledger: Australian Socialism, 225.

55. Donald Macdonell.

56. J.C. Watson.

57. Report, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905. For the NSW objective were all the NSW, WA and SA delegates and five of the Tasmanians (one abstained, favouring the Qld-Vic. motion, but being mandated against it); against were the Qld. and Vic.

[contd.]

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."⁶⁰ 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."⁶¹

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.

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57. [contd.] delegates (Prendergast, Vic., did not vote as chairman).
 58. After the fall of the Reid-McLean government in June 1905, George Reid began a major public campaign against Labor party socialism.
 59. Socialism as defined in the Australian Labor Party's Platform and Objectives.* [Report of the Reid-Holman debate, April 1906.]
 60. Spence: Australia's Awakening, 594, 446.
 61. W.M. Hughes: The Case for Labor, 85, 89.

* Should read: "Socialism as defined in the Australian Labor Party's Objective and Platform, 42."

3. 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 industrial organisations, the problem became real. The socialists of 1909 were rediscovering the principle on which the Labor parties had been based - the linking of socialism to the mass movement - but this time with the experience of nearly twenty years of mass labor in politics behind them, and with a greater commitment to the class war.

The sources of this new ideology were two: the revolutionary theorising imported from Europe and America,¹ and the practical experience of Australian socialists in the mass labor 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 organisation 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 their 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 economic organisations in the revolutionary process and the best kinds of organisations to serve this process.

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

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 "discredited and confused set of political hangers-on and time-servers" whose program was "a lamentable display of ignorance," offering no salvation for the working class from the indignity and injustice of wage slavery.² The solution was the creation of a Socialist Labor party, modelled on Daniel De Leon's party in the United States, which would fight for a program of immediate demands without forgetting its working-class origins or its socialist ends. One important way of winning working-class support was by the activity of ASL 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 Socialist Labor party.³ Starting from these premises, the ASL was not without influence in the Sydney unions,⁴ and, for the first Senate elections in May 1901, it stood six candidates who polled an average of over 4500 votes.⁵

But, from the formation of the International Socialist Club in 1900 by H.E. Holland and a group of German Social Democrats (many of them cigar-makers), divergent tendencies began to appear in the ASL. The majority of the League, dissatisfied with the result of their attempt to outbid the Labor party, resolved to abandon "palliatives" and to stand as the Socialist Labor party on a one-point program: the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth. Holland and his followers, however, continued to adhere to the immediate program, and at the 1901 NSW elections, J.O. Moroney of the SLP and Holland stood on different platforms. From 1902, Holland abandoned the ASL for his

2. People, 10/2/00, 17/2/00.

3. cf. D. De Leon: What Means This Strike? [first published 1898]

4. Supra, 59.

5. The lowest successful candidate polled 70, 468.

activities in the Club; later, he established a minute Social Democratic Party, and began the publication of the weekly International Socialist Review.⁶

Besides the argument over the desirability of an immediate program, there were other substantial points at issue. From the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World in America in 1905, De Leon had completely re-formulated his tactics. The place of the political party in the social revolution was now confined to that of the "shield" of the revolution - that is, its function was, through the ballot box, to capture and neutralise the capitalist state; while the "sword" of the revolution, the socialist labor 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 reorganised; 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 organised on industrial rather than craft lines, the Industrial Workers of the World.⁷ 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 nationalisation of the means of production, of state socialism.⁸

In Victoria, socialism had taken on a different orientation. Tom Mann had, since 1902, been engaged in organising work for the Trades Hall and the Labor party, and, in May 1905, he and other socialists had formed the Social Questions Committee, with the aim of investigating unemployment in Melbourne, and, five months later, had arranged a merger

6. Annals of the A.C.P., 10-11, 14-15.

7. cf. De Leon: The Burning Question of Trade Unionism, and The Preamble of the I.W.W.

8. The "Internationals" however also supported a reconstruction of trade unionism on industrial lines; the difference was over the role of industrial unionism in the revolution.

of this and other socialist groups to form the Socialist Party of Victoria.⁹ In 1904, Mann had described the Australian Labor parties as "Independent Labour . . . but not necessarily Socialist;"¹⁰ now he declared of himself and his associates that "we are Labour men, but not Labour men minus Socialism."¹¹ 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 parties, "Australia is perfectly safe for Socialism."¹² The duty of socialists was to work through the mass party, to improve its program, 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 mischievous."¹³ 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.¹⁴

In June 1907, these disparate groups came together to discuss the formation of a "United Class-conscious Socialist Party."¹⁵ The conference was unanimous in condemning the arbitration system as having

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9. Mann: *Memoirs*, 204 ff; *Tocsin*, 8/3/06. In 1906, the VSP had 750 members, in 1907, 1500; by 1909, it had fallen to 430.
 10. "The Political and Industrial Situation in Australia." *The Nineteenth Century*, Sep. 1904.
 11. *Qd. Annals of the A.C.F.*, 13.
 12. Mann: *Socialism* [July 1905], 26.
 13. Mann: *Memoirs*, 197 ff; *Socialist*, 11/8/06.
 14. Outstanding was H. Scott Bennett, MLA for Ballarat, who proclaimed himself a Marxian and later abandoned parliament for socialist propaganda work.
 15. As well as the SLP, the VSP 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 2000.

"weakened trades unionism in spirit and achievement," and in urging the re-organisation of the working class on the lines of the Industrial Workers of the World, but there was disagreement on the kind of political action socialists should undertake. R.S. Ross (representing the Barrier socialists, but later to become secretary of the VSP) 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 VSP 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.¹⁶

The SLP refused to join the Federation, and, still asserting its priority, formed in Sydney in October 1907, an IWW Club as "a propaganda and educative force" to disseminate the principles of industrial unionism and eventually to launch the IWW union in Australia.¹⁷ Soon other clubs were established in Melbourne and on the northern coalfields, and members of the VSP and the International Socialists freely joined.¹⁸ But, although the constitution of the IWW Club proclaimed that it did not endorse any political party, it maintained a close connection with the SLP, and this proved irksome. The Internationals broke with the Club in 1908,¹⁹ and that year's conference of the SFA withdrew its endorsement of the IWW, 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

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16. Report of Socialist Unity Conference, The Flame, July 1907. The inaugural members of the SFA were the VSP, the International Socialist Club and the Barrier Socialist Group. The Brisbane and Kalgoorlie groups refused to break their links with the Labor parties. The SA Socialist Party joined in 1908.
 17. Constitution of the I.W.W. Club, March 1909., 10.
 18. Membership of the six clubs which had been formed by early 1908 was perhaps 2-300.
 19. IWW Club, Minutes, 9/9/08, 23/9/08.

that, contrary to the SLP-IWW policy of discouraging its 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 SFA pronouncement on political action, and an intense debate raged in the party until finally a ballot of members supported²⁰ the decision of the 1908 SFA 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."²¹ The VSP resolved to stand two candidates in the Victorian elections of December 1908. The Labor party, not knowing what to expect, did not welcome these rivals for the working-class vote, and invited the socialists to confer on a possible "amalgamation of the forces of the two parties;"²² the discussions were inconclusive, the candidates stood, and polled between them 167 votes.²³ 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.²⁴

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 Hughes in the election, the Labor party said),²⁵ ran a vigorous anti-Hughes campaign, 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

20. By 50 votes to 37.

21. Minutes, VSP, 1908 passim; esp. 7/7/08, 17/7/08, 2/9/08, 28/10/08.

22. Ibid., 7/12/08, 10/12/08.

23. The Labor party alleged Liberal financial support for the two socialists; this rang rather hollowly when the VSP had to find £100 to repay the money it had borrowed for its candidates' deposits.

24. Minutes, VSP, 30/12/08, 4/1/09.

25. Worker, 28/10/09.

that Labor had been returned, because they would certainly soon fail "on their demerits."²⁶ For its part, the VSP flatly refused to stand any more candidates, and withdrew the ban on its members supporting the candidates of the Labor party.²⁷ The issue was debated at the 1910 conference of the SFA, and the views of the Sydney socialists prevailed; no member of the Federation was to stand as, nor give any support to, other than a socialist candidate.²⁸ The two points of view were clear. To most of the Victorians, it seemed that this ban "imposes upon the membership a 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."²⁹

Hard on the heels of this fight came the dispute about defence. The "Internationals" adopted an uncompromisingly anti-militarist stand, urging defiance of the call-up; the VSP was divided between anti-militarists and advocates of a citizen army, and took no official stand.³⁰ A pro-Sydney faction began to organise to take over the VSP;

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26. Int. Soc., 30/4/10. 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.
27. Minutes, VSP, 21/3/10, 11/4/10, 20/4/10. A general meeting refused to censure John Curtin (later Prime Minister, then an official of the VSP) for so doing.
28. Report, Third Annual Conference, SFA. Int. Soc., 9/7/10. The motion was moved by Holland, the SFA secretary, and seconded by H.L. Denford, at one time or another secretary of the ASP, the IWW [Chicago] and the CP.
29. Int. Soc., 23/7/10. The spokesmen were R.S. Ross, now editing the VSP weekly, The Socialist, and Holland.
30. Minutes, VSP, 10/10/11, 24/11/11. cf. H.E. Holland and W.R. Winspear, "An Open Letter to the Conscript Boys of Australia," Int. Soc., 11/2/11; Holland: The Crime of Conscription [1912]. 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 organised, in April 1912, the Australian Freedom League. Between Jan. 1912 and the outbreak of war, there were nearly 28,000 prosecutions of defaulting youths (mainly instituted by the Labor government), involving 5700 gaolings. Jancey: The Story of Conscription in Australia, 50, 65-67. [contd.]

the moderates appointed a special board to take over the party's affairs, and the leader of the faction was expelled.³¹ The break was consummated in 1912: a branch of the SFA was formed in Melbourne; the Federation finally converted itself into the unified Australasian Socialist Party, and the VSP formally resigned.³²

Apart from the protracted argument over attitudes to the mass labor 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 organisation. The 1902 Commonwealth Trade Union Congress had urged a national federation of labor, incorporating both the Labor Councils and the "big unions,"³³ but this had foundered on the craft union fear of domination by the AWU and the miners.³⁴ The Sydney Labor Council was growing rapidly in size,³⁵ and enforcing its principle of one trade, one union, although its craft union affiliates were irreconcilably opposed to industrial unionism as represented by the ARTSA.³⁶ Both the Sydney Labor Council and the Melbourne Trades Hall Council were trying to establish closer executive control over industrial disputes - in the end successfully. Federations of kindred and allied unions were proceeding apace.³⁷ And into this ferment of reorganisation was thrown the entirely new principle of the IWW.

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30. [contd.] The principle concern of the socialists - drawing the lesson from the recent French railway strike - was that troops might be used against the workers in industrial disputes. Int. Soc., 22/10/10, 26/11/10.
31. John Curtin and Frank Hyett (of the VRU) headed the moderate move. Minutes, VSP, 28/2/12.
32. Int. Soc., 30/3/12, 4/5/12; Minutes, VSP, 29/5/12, 17/6/12.
33. Report, 1902 Commonwealth TUC. The Congress claimed to represent 150,000 unionists; however, the Commonwealth Statistician reported only about 100,000 trade union members for that year.
34. cf. SLC Minutes, 19/2/03.
35. The Labor Council, which had represented at most 5000 unionists in 1900, claimed to represent 70,000 in 1905, 130,000 in 1911.
36. Ibid., 22/6/05. A delegate of the Amalgamated Carpenters

[contd.]

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,³⁸ came to many unionists as a revelation. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council went close to being captured for the IWW in 1908,³⁹ but finally resolved, the following year, to consolidate the industrial movement by grouping together the kindred unions.⁴⁰ At the 1908 NSW Trade Union Congress, the Newcastle Labor Council moved for reorganisation on IWW lines; the Congress preferred⁴¹ the Barrier AMA's proposal for the federation of existing unions, but subsequent Congresses could report no progress.⁴² 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;⁴³ the suspicion among moderate unionists and Labor politicians that the IWW organisation 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.⁴⁴

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36. [contd.] said that he had "never yet heard of a society that assumed the same pretensions" as the ARTSA. When the Council refused to endorse its protest against craft union objections to its registration, the ARTSA withdrew.
37. e.g. the Transport Workers' Federation, which W.M. Hughes formed in 1908 of seamen, watersiders and carters.
38. cf. for a detailed description of the scheme, Wm. E. Trautmann: One Great Union.
39. Letter of M. O'Dowd (Melb. IWW Club) to sec., Sydney IWW Club, 15/3/08.
40. Worker, 11/11/09.
41. By 55 votes to 23.
42. Report, 1908 NSW TUC; Report, 1910 NSW TUC, Worker, 14/4/10.
43. cf. the AMA delegate's comment at the 1909 NSW TUC that "skilled trades rule the Labor movement instead of Miners and General Laborers." Worker, 22/4/09.
44. J.H. Catts MHR, then sec. of the ARTSA, Sydney Evening News, 14/9/08.

In its own way, each of the three main socialist tendencies rejected this reliance on political labor. The SLP-IWW relied on its propaganda, directed particularly towards the miners, to convince the workers that they should abandon their old unions and form the IWW; but the tiny IWW Clubs had little influence on the movement generally.⁴⁵ The Victorian socialists were well entrenched in the building and metal trades and among railway-workers and wharf-laborers; 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 provide the workers with 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."⁴⁶ With strong support among coal and metal miners and on the waterfront, the "Internationals" were in a good position to point 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.⁴⁷ 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 the Labor party. While H.E. Holland's mission to the Barrier miners during the lock-out found little support,⁴⁸ and the support of the Barrier social-

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45. e.g. the suspension of two IWW Club members from the Northern miners' delegate board because of their refusal to pay a political levy for the Labor party; the levy was later cancelled when the union voted against continued affiliation. IWW Club Minutes, 2/10/12.
46. Dora B. Montefiore, Int. Soc., 8/4/11.
47. Thus, the IWW Club condemned the "insanity of the absolute general strike" as propagated by the SFA, urging that this would be fatal until the workers were organised into the IWW - when it would be unnecessary. IWW Club Minutes, 29/12/09, 1/12/09.
48. Holland was, e.g., refused access to the official strike platform.

ists for Tom Mann's part in the settlement isolated them from the unionists.⁴⁹ 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. "Throughout the industrial turmoil," wrote a member of the IWW Club from Broken Hill, "[the group which professed to believe in IWW principles] rather stood aloof from the unionists, and on every possible occasion attacked the Labor Party. The effect was that workers who regarded 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 AMA round to that form of organisation. . ." ⁵⁰

But while rank and file unionists, discouraged by defeat and antagonised 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. For had not the organised railwaymen transported police and strike-breakers and supplies for use against the Barrier miners? And this without effective opposition from - even, in the case of the South Australian party, 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."⁵¹ This was not the one great union, as proposed by the IWW, but rather giant amalgamations of the existing unions according to the industries

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49. Dale: Industrial History of Broken Hill, 148; Int. Soc., 19/11/10.
 50. Letter of W. Rosser to sec., Sydney IWW Club, 3/12/08.
 51. Mann: Memoirs, 239 ff. cf. Mann: The Way to Win.

they served,⁵² and it embodied a significant move away from the IWW's present position on political action towards a quasi-anarchist denial of politics; but, as Mann said, the doctrine he was advocating had become the common currency of labor movements in many lands.⁵³

Anarchism has many points of origin, but one source: an impatience with the slowness of political action, and a moral revulsion against the corruption and compromise of political life. Its social ideal rejects centralised in favour of atomised 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 organised, 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 elite, an owning class, or an impersonal market: this they can only do when they join together as producers and themselves freely determine the organisation 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.

52. cf. "An Open Letter from the Industrial Workers of the World Club to the Australian Working Class" [Sep. 1909] which warned of the dangers of another federation of craft unions, and urged the workers to join the IWW Club and help to educate the working class in the benefits of true industrial unionism.

53. Mann: Memoirs, 241.

But mechanisation and the development of the large-scale enterprise made obsolescent the simple anarchism of the First International, the instinctive revulsion of peasants and petty craftsmen to the cancer of industrialisation. Syndicalism was the reaction of anarchism to large-scale industry, to the formation of an industrial proletariat and the growth of economic organisations 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 atomised 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 labor movements, were its rejection of political action as an effective or adequate means of securing the social objectives of the labor movement in favour of industrial ("direct") action; its assertion that, since capitalist class rule and the exploitation of wage-labor 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 Sorel, even regarded it as having the quality of myth - and immediate ways of prosecuting the class struggle must 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 legal restraints while serving the interest of the parliamentarians in power and wealth, and the wages contract was concluded under duress. Revolutionary syndicalism was a complete and well-knit philosophy and ethic and program for action.

Within this general framework, the specific forms of syndicalism were determined by the particular structures of the working classes and labor movements from which they grew. In France and Italy, where small-scale industry prevailed, the characteristic form was the local syndicate of the workers employed in a small enterprise, and these were loosely linked in federations of kindred syndicates and a national federation embracing all the syndicates, 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 form was the movement towards industrial unionism by the amalgamation or institutionalised common action of existing unions,⁵⁴ and the revolt of the shop stewards' movement against a well-entrenched and conservative trade union bureaucracy with close links with the parliamentary labor 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 migrants) employed in mining, construction, timber, meat-packing, textiles, the characteristic form was the creation of a new union of the unskilled (the IWW) which challenged the dominance of the traditional unions over organised labor. 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, bushworkers, miners, construction laborers - 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.

54. e.g. the Triple Alliance.

Syndicalism had first reached Australia, in dilute form, with the formation of the IWW Clubs in 1907, and the adoption of the IWW by the Socialist Federation of Australia. 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 IWW 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."⁵⁵

From late in 1908, there was unrest in the Australian IWW Clubs, as more and more of the members advocated the adoption of the new Preamble and the industrial tactics which went with it.⁵⁶ The De Leonites denounced this "anarchistic" tendency in the movement, but it could not be quelled: as the socialists of the SFA 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.⁵⁷ Finally, on 6 May 1911, a meeting convened in

55. Preamble of the [Chicago] IWW. For text, see Appendix V.

56. IWW Club, Minutes, 9/12/08, 14/7/09; Int. Soc., 10/9/10.

57. e.g. the article supporting sabotage, Int. Soc., 31/12/10.

Adelaide by a De Leonite, but attended largely by members of the SFA, to consider the formation of an IWW Club resolved instead to form a "mixed local" of the Chicago IWW, and to begin recruiting members to the union of the Industrial Workers of the World.⁵⁸ The decision, wrote the secretary of the Sydney IWW Club, "strikes us here as insane;"⁵⁹ but from the fourteen "muddle-headed, prejudiced and ignorant pseudo-socialists"⁶⁰ who constituted the Adelaide local grew the most significant revolutionary movement the Australian working class had yet known.

Five months later, a group of dissidents in the Sydney IWW Club, together with some SFA 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 IWW.⁶¹ In both Sydney and Adelaide, the inspiration was not so much anarchistic as dissatisfaction with the identification of the IWW Club with the SLP; the Socialist Federation welcomed the formation of the new IWW, which, the secretary of the Australian Administration declared, was "neither pro-political nor anti-political but purely economic."⁶² The IWW 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;⁶³ and renewed unity discussions between the SLP and the newly-constituted Australasian Socialist Party⁶⁴ broke down on the SLP insistence that the united party endorse its version of the IWW.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶

58. Letter of P. Christensen to H.J. Hawkins (Sec., Sydney IWW Club), 18/5/11.

59. Hawkins to Christensen, 29/4/11.

60. Christensen to Hawkins, 18/5/11, 7/6/11. (E.A. Moyle, at first President and then secretary of the Adelaide local, put the first meeting at 24 May and the inaugural membership at 16. Letter to G.G. Reeve, 23/6/11.)

61. IWW [Chicago] Minutes, Sydney, 26/10/11; Int. Soc., 2/12/11.

[contd.]

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 IWW should be non-political - it must be anti-political, as well as anti-capitalist, anti-respectable and anti-patriotic. This was what Haywood and St. John⁶⁷ 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 IWW invaded the No. 2 Australian local and succeeded in capturing it.⁶⁸ The founders of the local departed indignantly;⁶⁹ the ASP returned to the fold of the De Leonite IWW;⁷⁰ the "physical force element"⁷¹ was left to propagate direct action, sabotage, and a plague on King, Country, Capitalism and the Law.

The vigour of their lower-depths agitation for industrial unionism gave a new impetus to the top-level movement for closer unionism: the great AWU amalgamation was carried through;⁷² the craft unions, through their Labor Councils,⁷³ joined in a pretentious Federal Grand Council of Labor, with a strictly limited power "to advise in respect to, and if deemed necessary by State Council, control or endeavour to prevent any dispute with employers extending, or likely to extend, beyond the limits of any one State;"⁷⁴ the NSW mass unions, not to be outdone,

62. Letter of D. Mallon to G.G. Reeve, 23/7/11; cf. H.L. Denford (then sec. of the Sydney local), Int. Soc., 13/1/12.

63. Minutes, IWW Club, 15/5/12, 26/6/12.

64. Formerly the SFA, see supra 109.

65. Int. Soc., 1/6/12.

66. The total income of the Australian Administration of the IWW in its first fourteen months was £10-0-6. (Letter, E.A. Moyle to G.G. Reeve, 10/8/12.) The combined membership was perhaps 30.

67. The leaders of the Chicago IWW.

68. Int. Soc., 19/7/13. The "captors" included T. Glynn, J. Fagin and J.B. King of the IWW Twelve - infra 217 ff.

69. Letter of G.G. Reeve to Mitchell Library, Sydney, 9/2/16.

70. Int. Soc., 27/9/13. However, the unity negotiations with the SLP again broke down - this time on the SLP's insistence that it be allowed to absorb the ASP. [contd.]

formed a Federation of Labor which was denounced by the craft unions as a "No. 2 Labor Council,"⁷⁵ and later an Australian Union Federation which was denounced by the IWW as an attempt to shackle the legs of trade unionists whose hands were already tied by arbitration.⁷⁶ On the revolutionary political front, the IWW Club had fallen away by mid-1913 to under a hundred members;⁷⁷ the SLP was complaining of "apathy and indifference," and its membership was less than 300;⁷⁸ the membership of the VSP was down to 200-odd, and the circulation of its paper to 1500; and the desperate efforts of the political socialists to meet the IWW challenge by uniting their declining strengths all foundered on sectarian bitterness.⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the IWW 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.

71. Letter of G.G. Reeve, loc. cit.

72. Supra, 75-76.

73. In Brisbane, the Industrial Council, which was formed after the ALF had voted itself out of existence on the advice of the AWU and following the AWU-AWA amalgamation early in 1913. There were, in 1914, 26 central organisations of this kind throughout Australia, to which were affiliated 668 trade unions and union branches. Labour Report No. 8, 16.

74. Report, Interstate Congress of TLCs, 1913.

75. Worker, 23/10/13; NSWLC Report, 31/12/13. The ARTSA, the RWGLU and the coal-miners' unions took part; the organisation folded up with the formation of the miners' federation in 1915. ARTSA Minutes, 13/4/15.

76. D.A., 1/6/14. As well as the above unions, the AUF proposed to include the AWU and the Seamen's Union; it failed when the AWU refused its endorsement. Sutcliffe: History of Trade Unionism in Australia, 171-73. [contd.]

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 parliament⁸⁰
 The next election day.

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.

77. IWW Club Minutes, 23/7/13.

78. People, 8/1/14, 15/1/14.

79. cf. Int. Soc., 7/6/13, 30/8/13, 29/11/13; People, 29/1/14.

In Victoria, the ASP and the VSP differed substantially in their attitudes to political action and to defence; in NSW, the ASP and the SLP differed only on whether the united party should be called the USP of A or the USLP of A.

80. "Bump Me Into Parliament," the most notable Australian contribution to the IWW'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, Dec., 1937. After IWW stump men had been convicted for blasphemy over this song, the words were modified, at least in the official publications.

PART FOUR:

THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE WAR

1. The Outbreak of 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 in the war; but this was - contemporary observers suggested - not so much a matter of conviction as of their desire not to antagonise the electorate, and a small group of parliamentarians and a fairly large group of unionists (most importantly the leaders of the AWU) were outspoken in their condemnation of Australian involvement.

By August 1914 there had been a further slide: Labor had transformed itself into a national party, in office in three¹ of the six states, 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 touches 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 ready advocacy of what has since remained a fundamental dogma of foreign policy - that Australia, an outpost of white European civilisation in an alien and hostile environment, can only be secured against the coloured hordes 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,

1. New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania.

the closest links with the Imperial strategists.² 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, and 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.³ 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.⁴ 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, in an election characterised by the highest participation of voters yet recorded,⁵ with the biggest popular vote it had yet won, capturing five seats from the Liberals in the House and winning 31 of the 36 places in the Senate.⁶ 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 anticipated.

There was little qualification to the patriotic enthusiasm of the labor leaders. A few Labor candidates - Arthur Rae, for the Senate in New South Wales, and Frank Anstey and Frank Brennan, for the House

2. cf. G.F. Pearce: Carpenter to Cabinet, 71 ff.

3. E. Scott: Australia during the War, 11.

4. 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 of their position.

5. Voting was not yet compulsory.

[contd.]

in Victoria - sounded a warning;⁷ and there was no great round of cheering from the unions - indeed the war was little mentioned, except in terms of its possible economic effects, in union gatherings.⁸ 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% were unionists - well above the proportion of unionists among adult males;⁹ and later there were some chauvinistic outbursts in which watersiders in several ports, a few NSW miners' lodges, and - most importantly, since it led to a substantial strike in 1916 - West Australian goldminers refused to work alongside men they deemed to be enemy aliens.¹⁰ But the prevailing note in the labor 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 will seize the opportunity to raise the necessaries of life to famine prices. . .

"We must protect our country. We must keep sacred from the mailed fists 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

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6. Appendix III. All Senate seats were contested because this election followed a double dissolution.
 7. Rae, with 11,000 votes than the leading candidate (Gardiner, ALP) was not returned. The others won.
 8. e.g. the immediate response of the ARTSA was to "ask the government to see that all railway and tramway employees are kept at work in the present crisis." The next day, the union's Council

[contd.]

copper.

"God help Australia! God help England! God help Germany! God help us!"¹¹

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,¹² but in Sydney, where the ASP and the SLP were pretty much insulated by their dogmas from the mass labor organisations, little had been done to win trade union support. However, it was just this connection with the mass labor movement that lay behind the VSP's early ambivalence. It was not only that the party "found itself confused and amazed by developments amongst the Socialists of other countries"¹³ - 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 - Jaures, already dead, and Liebknecht and Luxemburg, believed (wrongly) to have been executed - stood out. But the VSP had deliberately chosen to "bore from within" the Labor Party,¹⁴ 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 "apostacy" of the Victorian Labor leaders, and a repudiation of the "fakers, twicers and

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8. [contd.] resolved to launch a "patriotic fund" - to help any employees who lost their jobs because of the war. Almost as an afterthought, the Council carried a motion expressing its "sympathy and loyalty to the Empire at this critical time." ARTSA Minutes, 10/8/14, 11/8/14.
 9. Labour Bulletin No. 8, 294-95.
 10. Scott, op. cit., 667. This could, however, be interpreted as unionists using the anti-German hysteria to settle old scores; e.g. most of the goldminers to whom objection was taken were

[contd.]

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.¹⁵ Untroubled by any feeling for the Labor party other than a profound contempt, the Sydney sects were immediate and direct in their denunciation of the war. "Mammon and Militarism are now triumphant in Europe," wrote the International Socialist. "'A Madman's Holiday' will probably be the future historian's description of 1914. . ."¹⁶ 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 27,272.¹⁷ 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 the European majority 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.

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10. [contd.] 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.
 11. Worker, 6/8/14.
 12. Socialist, 13/11/14.
 13. ibid., 5/3/15.
 14. ibid., 4/9/14.
 15. ibid., 28/8/14, 4/9/14. Prominent in the minority were the poet R.H. Long, later to be gaoled during the Melbourne "Red Flag" fracas, and W.P. Earsman, a foundation Communist.
 16. Int. Soc., qd. Socialist, 4/9/14.
 17. The candidate was Mrs Emily Paul; the winner was J.H. Catts MHR.

Only the IWW 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!"¹⁸

As yet, not many more workers were listening to the IWW 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.

18. Tom Barker, Direct Action, 22/8/14. Barker was later gaoled for publishing a "recruiting poster" which repeated these sentiments - infra,

2. The War on the Wages Front.

Unless they accepted the revolutionary opposition offered by the IWW, or something like it, there was little that the labor organisations 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.¹ 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 labor organisations, neither realistic nor desirable. The forecast by The Worker 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 declaration, 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.² This was just what the unions feared - that the burdens of the war, economic as well as military, would be loaded onto the workers; and, as unemployment spread, prices soared and wages were frozen, it seemed that this was happening.

Despite the 140,000 workers who had been added to the labor force in secondary industry, the essential elements of the Australian economy remained the export of primary production and the import of manufactured goods, the metal industry in particular still not having

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1. Scott: Australia during the War, 287.
 2. SMH, 5/8/14. Actually, the Herald said: "It is well to accustom ourselves . ." but there seemed little doubt to whom they were talking.

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 trades.³

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, responded to the war with an immediate awareness 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; the metal industry, which depended on imports; coal-mining, which depended on exports; and 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% of all union members.⁴ By December, NSW unionists estimated that eleven or twelve thousand workers had lost their jobs;⁵ 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 matters into their own hands;"⁶ in September, the Queensland Combined Unions Committee reported 5000 unemployed, most of them members of the AWU;⁷ 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

3. 1913: gross output of metal trades - £33.24 m.; imports of machinery and other fully or partly finished metal products - £16.62 m. C'wlth Year Book 1914; O/seas Trade Bulletin 1914-15.

4. Labour Report, No. 6, 17.

the adventurous or the patriotic, unemployment 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 cynical disbelief in the politicians' promises of equality of sacrifice, and a spur to their agitation for a reduction in working hours and the right to work.

The cynicism of some unionists was not lacking in justification: 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 New South Wales, Mr Justice Heydon of the Industrial Court, who had, earlier in 1914, declared 8/- a day as a minimum wage, ruled that no application for an increase should be considered by the Wages Boards under his supervision; in Victoria, the Premier, Sir Alexander Peacock, issued a similar order; in Queensland, Mr Justice McNaughton ruled that applications for variations in the awards could be heard, but only if both parties agreed to the hearing, and the Queensland Liberal government directed that the automatic adjustment of civil service wages to price movements should be suspended for the duration; in March 1915, Mr Justice Powers of the Commonwealth Court commended all parties on 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

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5. Scott, op. cit., 516.
 6. Socialist, 22/1/15.
 7. Combined Unions Committee, Minutes, 6/9/14.
 8. Labour Bulletin No. 9, 62-64.

The restraint 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.⁹

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; the result of Mr Justice Heydon's decision was that, by the end of 1914, for 59 of the 217 Boards there were no determinations in operation. Unionists were thus deprived of a legal shield on which they had come to rely.¹⁰

The Labor Council protested against the suspension of Wages Board hearings, and claimed the credit for the relaxation in January 1915, when all Boards except those covering government employees were instructed to re-open 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.¹¹ The January dispensation provided some measure of relief, but the qualification was extremely irksome to the unions of government workers.

The ARTSA had, in October 1914, registered its "indignant and vehement" protest against short-time and retrenchments in the service, for which it blamed the Labor government's financial policy; its secretary, Claud Thompson, had organised an Industrial Unions Committee (including the Railway Workers' and General Laborers' Union - the union of construction workers - and the AWU) to consider this question, as well as some proposed amendments to the Arbitration Act

9. 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, 34.) After this the index flattens out, even falling slightly, until the post-war inflation.

10. Labour Bulletin No. 9, 75.

11. NSWLC Report, 30/6/15.

which, it was claimed, discriminated in favour of the craft unions.¹² This group was not hesitant in criticising the Holman government - the RWGLU said that the unions had to fight just as hard for wages as they had done under the Liberals¹³ - and, at the 1915 Conference of the NSW Labor party, they launched a frontal attack. It was Holman himself who had given Mr Justice Heydon the tip to impose the wage freeze, charged Hector Lamond, a powerful figure in the AWU, as he moved for the "severest censure [of the government] for allowing the workers to suffer in this crisis."¹⁴ The Premier denied that the government could have influenced, or would seek to influence, the Court; however this may have been, within a few weeks of the inconclusive conference debate (Lamond's 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;¹⁵ the proposals of the Trades Hall to the Victorian government for state cultivation of unused land and an extensive program of public works, and to the Federal government for an unemployment pension, were alike unsuccessful.¹⁶ From Adelaide, it was reported that there was 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,¹⁷ but it made little difference

12. ARTSA Minutes, 7/10/14, 30/10/14.

13. SMH, 20/3/15.

14. Report, 1915 NSW PLL Conference, Daily Telegraph, 9/4/15.

15. 18 in a House of 58, following the Dec. 1914 elections.

16. Socialist, 19/2/15, 19/3/15. The moves were sponsored by John Curtin and E.F. Russell, both supporters of the VSP.

17. 20 in a House of 46, following the elections of 28 March 1915.

to the conditions of the working class.

d.
 Labor's most spectacular victory was in Queensland, where a Liberal government had been in power since the party split in 1905. Led by T.J. Ryan,¹⁸ Labor launched a devastating campaign against the unpopular Denham government for the 1915 elections. Queensland's 4000-odd sugar-growers were up in arms against the dictation by the *near-*monopoly Colonial Sugar Refinery of the prices it would pay for 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, and 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 labor legislation; Labor promised them a new deal. Unemployment was widespread,¹⁹ 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: 22 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,

18. T.J. Ryan, after standing as a Deakinite in 1903, 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 are 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, *op. cit.*, 281.) [contd.]

* Should read: "The friends were too warm . . ."

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."²⁰

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 difficulties²¹ . . . the most sweeping list of legislative reforms yet achieved in the history of the State during a similar period of time. . . ."²²

In many respects, the theory behind Ryan's program 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 nationalising existing enterprises, but rather "to protect the public by competing with [private traders] on fair and efficient lines."²³ State enterprises were established in saw-milling and in food production and distribution,²⁴ and were forecast in coal-mining and the exploitation of oil and iron ore resources; government works were carried out by day labor, 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 described as the "most advanced arbitration system in Australia" was instituted, and an eight-hour working day was established by law.²⁵ The government worked

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19. Unemployment in Queensland (% of trade unionists): 1914/3 - 14.3%; 1914/4 - 17.7%; 1915/1 - 17.9%.
 20. 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.
 21. i.e. the war and the steady opposition of the Legislative Council.
 22. Socialism at Work, 118.
 23. Ibid., 5.
 24. The competition of the state butchers' shops was claimed to have resulted in a reduction of meat prices of some 40% - a saving worth 4/- a week to the average family.
 25. Socialism at Work, passim.

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.²⁶

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.

26. QPD cxxi 1492; Qld. Worker, 23/9/15.

3. The Prices Referendum.¹

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; but even this was subject to interference by the desire of the states (stimulated by trade union demands) for funds for public works. While 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 Cook government, in its last days, appointed Alfred Deakin to head a Royal Commission on prices, but the Commission was given no executive powers, and it 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.² Meanwhile, prices continued to rise. It may have been, as Scott, the historian of the home front, suggests,³ that the major causes were the drought-created scarcity of foodstuffs and the inflation caused by the rapid expansion of the note issue;⁴ but the labor movement clung stubbornly to its belief that the sources of the trouble 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."⁵ To support their case, the labor propagandists pointed to the undoubted desire of food producers and especially processors

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1. The powers claimed by the Federal government want far beyond the power to control prices, but, by popular consent of the labor movement, this was the main issue of the referendum.
 2. Brisbane Combined Unions Committee, Minutes, 19/9/14, 3/10/14.
 3. Scott: Australia during the War, 635.
 4. Note issue: June 1914 - £9.57 m.; June 1920 - £56.95 m. Ibid., 503.
 5. W. Wallis, Labor Call, 15/7/15.

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 labor organisations returned to the proposals for constitutional reform which had already been rejected twice by popular vote - overwhelmingly in 1911, but narrowly in 1913.⁶ 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 product, to protect themselves against the extortions of the Trusts, and to maintain Industrial Peace;"⁷ and Fisher had, in his 1914 policy speech, specifically pledged that they would be presented again.

At the 1915 NSW Labor conference, Holman 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, as 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 NSW 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.⁸

A similar demand had been raised within the Victorian party, and when the Commonwealth conference met in Adelaide on 31 May 1915, it

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6. In 1911, 53% of electors voted, about three to two against the proposals, only W.A. voting "Yes" on any of the six questions. In 1913, 74% of electors voted, about 51/49 against; this time, Queensland, S.A. and W.A. voted in favour of all six questions.
 7. Amendment of the Constitution: Federal Referendums: The Case For and Against [1913], 44.
 8. SMH, 8/4/15. Hughes was probably thinking of the tendency of High Court decisions to limit the Commonwealth arbitration
[contd.]

was two Victorian delegates⁹ 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 onto 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 to the Commonwealth Constitution which would protect their interests."¹⁰ Most delegates had been mandated by their organisations 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."¹¹ 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 West 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 trade unionists like Don Cameron (W.A.)¹² and Hector Lamond and Arthur Rae, both

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8. [contd.] power, and of the recent decision in N.S.W. v. Commonwealth, which upheld the right of a state government to acquire any property within its domain, regardless of S. 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution.
 9. L. Cohen, President of the Political Labor Council, and J.F. Hannan MHR.
 10. Report, Sixth Commonwealth Labor Conference, 10. Fisher, Holman and other politicians were present as delegates from the state organisations, not from the parliamentary parties. Indeed, non-parliamentary delegates tended to resent any claim by politicians [contd.]

prominent members of the AWU in New South Wales. Despite the objections of the state politicians, the conference report records that Hughes's motion was carried unanimously.¹³ The gap between trade unionists and politicians was clear, but on this issue the unionists were in alliance with the Federal ministry, who had a special interest in the matter.

Two days later, conference passed a motion urging the Federal government to introduce compulsory voting, for both elections and referenda, before the coming poll. This time, the unionists found themselves allied with the state parliamentarians against the Federal members.¹⁴ Not long previously, the Queensland Liberal government had introduced compulsory voting for that state; in the elections just concluded, Labor had been returned with a substantial majority. The delegates were encouraged to feel that a compulsory vote would mean "a true vote of the people."¹⁵

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."¹⁶ Its first act when it met on 10 June 1915 was to ask the government to push ahead with the referendum.

10. [contd.] 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., 14.
11. Ibid., 17.
12. Later a Federal Senator.
13. Report, 18. 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.
14. Hughes felt that "compulsory voting was a very poor alternative to political education." Fisher warned that "circumstances might arise which might prevent compulsory voting coming in before the constitutional amendments were put to the people."
15. J.D. Fitzgerald MLC (NSW). Report, 39.
16. Ibid., 42.

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.¹⁷ 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,¹⁸ while he reassured his own supporters that "nothing short of an earthquake would prevent the . . . proposals being submitted to the people."¹⁹

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 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."²⁰ 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 itself. 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

17. CPD lxxvii 4188 FF.

18. Labor Call, 15/7/15.

19. Qd. ibid., 10/2/16.

20. Ibid., 22/7/15.

over certain amendments which the unions and the left-wing of the parliamentary party were demanding to the Arbitration Act,²¹ went to London, and Hughes became Prime Minister. Hughes had already begun to have doubts about the referendum, and had had discussions with leading members of the Opposition;²² now he convened a conference of State Premiers, five of whom were Labor men.

Meanwhile, pressure from a section of the Queensland AWU,²³ which was deeply entrenched in the new Queensland government, had convinced T.J. Ryan that the referendum should be dropped, and, at the Premiers' Conference, Ryan moved that this be done, in consideration of 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.²⁴ Without reference to Caucus or to the newly-constituted Federal Executive, Hughes accepted this offer; later he claimed²⁵ 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, and the majority of members agreed to the abandonment of the referendum,²⁶ a measure which had aroused more enthusiasm than any other act of the war-time Labor government.

The opponents of the referendum were jubilant, but the labor 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

21. Pearce: Carpenter to Cabinet, 126-29.

22. G. Sawyer: Australian Federal Politics and Law, 144.

23. cf. J.F. Hannan to Victorian Conference, ALP, Labor Call, 4/5/16.

24. Under S. 51 xxxvii of the Constitution.

25. At the special Federal Executive meeting, Jan. 1916. Labor Call, 10/2/16.

26. Hannan, loc. cit.

prospect whatever of the upper houses in the state legislatures agreeing to the proposed transfer of powers.²⁷

The Worker was not sure of its position - perhaps reflecting the division which already existed between Hector Lamond, its manager, and H.E. Boote, its strongly radical editor. "The most vicious tools of Vested Interests lurk in the shadows of those charnel-houses," thundered 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 (and this was probably Lamond's influence speaking) 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."²⁸ But the optimism of The Worker was not generally shared. Hostility to Hughes was most outspoken in the Victorian party, from where 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."²⁹

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

27. In fact, only the NSW 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. cf. QPD cxxi 2067-68.

28. Worker, 11/11/15, qd. Labor Call, 18/11/15.

29. Labor Call, 2/12/15, 13/1/16.

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 by the time the meeting was resumed, Hughes was again on top. A well-timed threat of resignation³⁰ had, as it so often does, frightened the executive, with its majority of parliamentarians, into surrender. The moves had been well worked out. Senator Givens,³¹ 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 MLC³² and Senator O'Keefe³³ moved the recommittal. Senator O'Keefe and Fitzgerald moved 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 West Australians standing firmly by the original motion.

The South Australians, who had 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 him-

30. M. Blackburn: The Conscription Referendum of 1916.

31. Queensland.

32. New South Wales.

33. Tasmania.

self 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.³⁴

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 new militant Federal members, was added the heavy artillery of the AWU. The Worker, which had in November still shown some belief in the good faith of the government, was asking in February: "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?"³⁵

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, under the chairmanship of J.H. Catts MHR, and was

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34. This account of the 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, 10/2/16.
35. Worker, 27/1/16. The choice of the words "parliamentary delegates" is significant.

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 AWU to pose the question of the movement's control over the men it 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.

4. "If You Want a 44-Hour Week, Take It!"¹

The first eighteen months of the war were relatively quiet on the industrial front; widespread unemployment made any general use of 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, it seems to be the case that major industrial disputes do not 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 lockouts rather than strikes, occur on the down-turn 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 of this is that the widespread unemployment which is characteristic of the trough of the trade cycle creates fears among unionists, first that a reserve of unemployed is also a reserve of strike-breakers, and secondly that if an industry is closed down by a strike it may not re-open - at least not with the same workers as caused it to close. Political action tends to replace industrial action at the low-point 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-

1. The legend on a button worn by the marchers in the Broken Hill Eight-Hour Day procession, 7 October 1916. It is clearly of IWW origin. Dale: *Industrial History of Broken Hill*, 185.

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 realise their demands by the peaceful means of legal determination or collective bargaining. This is a very sweeping generalisation, subject to many quite legitimate qualifications; nevertheless, so far as any generalisation 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 Engineers and the Moulders.²

The only substantial exception was a prolonged strike on the souther coalfields, where 2700 men had walked off the job on 27 May 1914 in support of a demand for the abolition of the afternoon shift. The strike lasted for over nine months, the Illawarra Miners' Association being twice fined £1000 for abetting the strike, and was only finally settled when the unions and the mine-owners reached agreement on increased rates of pay for the disputed shift and its staggered discontinuance.³ The mines, however, were a special case.

2. Labour Bulletin No. 7, 186.

3. Labour Bulletin No. 8, 248; No. 9, 53.

The strike had started more than two months before August 4, 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 labor 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. The political agitation broke the wage-freeze towards the end of 1915, and especially in 1916, when nearly half a million workers benefited by wage increases averaging 5/10 a week, and increasing the total annual wages bill by nearly £7½ million.⁴ Most of these increases were due to a new series of industrial awards, rather than to direct action;⁵ nevertheless, by 1916, the depression-imposed straight-jacket was beginning to wear thin.

The strikes of 1916 illustrated a recurrent theme in Australian labor history - the direct action of workers, driven by frustration or exasperation to down tools regardless of the expressed wishes of the leaders of their unions, 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 labor movement for years to come.

4. Labour Report No. 8, 106. Cf. estimated total wage increases: 1913 - £2.0 m.; 1914 - £1.6 m.; 1915 - £2.7 m.

5. Ibid., 93. Awards and determinations: 1914 - 208; 1915 - 274; 1916 - 426.

Appropriately - because the watersiders' union, more than any other, epitomised the contradiction between politicians and trade unionists - the year opened with the waterfront in the beginnings of an unusual kind of upheaval that was to last for the best part of 1916. From its foundation in 1902, the Waterside Workers' Federation had been dominated by Federal parliamentarians⁶ whose concern was as much for their own electoral interests as for the economic interests of the watersiders.⁷ Nevertheless, the WWF had made some important advances through arbitration: following the April 1914 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 WWF 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 a small-scale dispute on the Melbourne waterfront over the rates of pay for overtime and week-end work; the strike only lasted a week, the men accepting the Court's interpretation of the award. Then the Melbourne coal-lumpers refused to work after 5 p.m., demanding hourly instead of contract rates of pay; the shipowners appealed to the union to get the men back to work, but the union could do nothing. No sooner was this argument 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

6. As at July 1915, the Federal Council of the WWF consisted of W.M. Hughes (President), Andrew Fisher, four other MSHR and three senators, and seven others.

7. cf. the resolution of the Federal Council to communicate with all branches "explaining the necessity for our members to work in the interests of the Labor Party at the forthcoming election." Minutes, 24/7/14.

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 IWW.⁸ Again the union officials were unable to enforce their will. Hughes was sure that the IWW 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."⁹ And he called on the Federal Council of the union to deal with the strikers - "at such a time as this [stoppages] cast a reflection on the whole of the WWF."¹⁰ But it was to no avail; the Melbourne watersiders only called off their ban when the Victorian government ordered a reduction in the price of bread. It is tempting - because of the similarity in tactics between this and later disputes - to believe that Hughes was right in this case; but in reality there was little IWW strength in Melbourne at this or any other time, and it seems more likely that whatever external influence there was had come from the socialists on the Melbourne Trades Hall Council.¹¹

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.¹² Three months later, watersiders at Mackay (Q.) tied the port up on a wages issue - the rate to be paid for handling sugar. Sydney wharf laborers refused to handle sugar in sympathy with the Mackay men; the secretary of the Sydney branch denied that there was any strike - the men were bargaining individually with the companies, and refusing individually to work.¹³

8. DA, 19/2/16.

9. *West Australian*, 18/1/16.

10. WWF Minutes, 11/1/16.

11. There is, however, no evidence for this in the records of the VSP.

12. WWF Minutes, 19/4/16.

13. Higgins J. referred this question to the High Court, which held that a refusal to accept employment was not a breach of the award. SMH, 9/9/16.

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 strike, or to alter its rules so as to compel branches to abide by the award.¹⁴

After his return, Hughes made one further attempt to restore his authority in the union: he persuaded the Federal Council to direct the attention of the Sydney branch to those rules which required it to refer matters in dispute to the Council.¹⁵ But by now the movement was quite out of hand, and there was a general demand from watersiders for an increase in the hourly rate to 2/6, which the shipowners conceded rather than have an Australia-wide strike on their hands.¹⁶ 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,"¹⁷ and two months later - the Sydney branch having already voted for his expulsion¹⁸ - Hughes was deposed from his presidency.

At the same time as Victorian watersiders were refusing to be bound by the close adherence to arbitration which their leaders urged, a similar situation was created by the miners on the southern coalfields of New South Wales.

Coalminers had first won the eight-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."¹⁹ Besides, the limitation

14. WWF Minutes, 30/8/16.

15. Ibid., 13/9/16.

16. SMH, 30/9/16.

17. WWF Minutes, 15/11/16.

18. By 160 votes to 42. Sydney Branch WWF, Minutes, 27/9/16.

19. Supra, 72-73. It was calculated that this could mean a reduction of hours at the coal-face of anything up to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours a day.

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, which derived from the skilful use of divisive tactics by the mine-owners, the leaders of the northern and southern miners - J.M. Baddely and A.C. Willis, both products of the British miners' union and the guild socialism associated with the London Labor College²⁰ - had, during 1915, persuaded their organisations to re-form the Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation (the "Miners' Federation"), which had maintained only a shadow existence since the 1909 defeat, so that it could 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 NSW Legislative Council, and the union was highly critical of the "spineless attitude" of the Holman government.²¹ On 3 January 1916, all 2000 miners of the Illawarra district struck work. This was a rank and file movement; the militants in the lodges, influenced by IWW propaganda, wanted direct action,²² while their officials wanted the question to go to arbitration under the November agreement. But, for the moment, the south coast militants were isolated - their action was in advance of the feeling on other fields. On January 7,

20. cf. Willis's advocacy of guild socialism to the NSW Labor Council in September 1917. Worker, 11/10/17. Willis had replaced Peter Bowling as secretary of the Illawarra miners.

21. Worker, 13/1/16.

22. A south coast member of the IWW Club reported to Sydney headquarters on 21 March 1916 that "Direct Actionists are mobilising on the coast." (Letter of A. Rees, Correspondence, Sydney IWW Club.) The Illawarra Miners' Association officials "asserted that the strike was brought about and maintained as the result of the actions of a noisy minority, who made it their business

the northern union decided against making common cause. The Central Council of the revived Federation, although its leaders Willis and Baddely were themselves militants, 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, with the rider that, if no settlement were reached by March, the matter should be reconsidered. The south coast delegates' board (the central organisation of the miners' lodges) was readily persuaded of the wisdom of this; a ballot was held, and the miners voted two to one for resumption.²³ On January 16, after a fortnight on strike, mass meetings of the men accepted the decision of the ballot, and, for the time, the pits reopened.

The Legislative Council finally passed a Bill which provided that the eight-hours bank to bank should be incorporated in future miners' awards; however, the mine-owners maintained that this was to be applied to each miner individually, while the union demanded that it be measured from first man down to last man up; and in any case NSW legislation could not bind the Federal Court, to which the miners' claim had been submitted. On July 20, mass meetings were held on all the NSW fields to demand an early hearing of the claim; the Illawarra men wanted an immediate strike, but were again restrained by the leaders of the Federation.²⁴ 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 was in favour of accepting the agreement, but the southern district again rejected it. The rash of local stoppages, a permanent condition of the coal industry, continued; Mr Justice Higgins at first postponed the hearing of the hours claim, and then - commenting that the miners

22. [contd.] to prevent arguments of reason and moderation from being heard at general meetings of the men." SMH,

23. Worker, 20/1/16.

24. SMH, 21/7/16.

were apparently loyal neither to the public nor to their union - struck it out altogether.²⁵ Officials of the Federation said that they were not surprised that the Court had done this - but the men had been waiting for years for this reform, and had now lost hope of redress either from Parliament or from the Court. On November 1, all NSW miners stopped work on the order of their Federation; they were quickly followed by miners in Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, only Western Australia holding out.²⁶ The participation of the Victorian miners was particularly resented: they already enjoyed the conditions sought by their NSW comrades, and the Victorian State Coal Mine had been opened by the government in 1909 with the specific intention of securing Victoria's coal supplies in the event of a hold-up in New South Wales.²⁷ In all, 11,500 men were involved, and to the IWW 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."²⁸

Coal stocks were low, and the Commonwealth commandeered all the available supplies; but within a fortnight the situation looked almost desperate. "Nearly thirty thousand men and boys are idle," reported one Sydney newspaper. "Over one hundred steamers are laid up. Trams and trains will stop if all coal is declared 'black.' In eight days Sydney will be in darkness.. . ."²⁹

In the NSW 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;³⁰ " . . until the spirit of syndicalism is overthrown

25. SMH, 14/9/16, 14/10/16.
 26. Ibid., 2/11/16, 3/11/16, 4/11/16.
 27. VPD cxliv 2359.
 28. DA, 11/11/16.
 29. Sydney Sun, 14/11/16, qd. NSWPD lxvi 2693.
 30. Infra, 186.

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. . ."³¹

Following a conference with the NSW government, the Commonwealth gazetted regulations under the War Precautions Act empowering the Prime Minister to call a compulsory conference; after a day and a half of hard talking, Hughes 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 organised a ballot, but it was boycotted by the men.³²

Coal stocks were by now disastrously low. Only essential industries were working, and shipping was completely disrupted. On November 27, without waiting for a resumption, Hughes appointed Mr Justice Edmunds of the NSW 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.³³

As the IWW weekly Direct Action said, it was a complete victory for industrial strength over arbitration,³⁴ 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. It may have been that 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."³⁵

31. NSWPD lxviii 2694.

32. Labour Report No. 7, 510.

33. Ibid.

34. DA, 23/12/16.

35. Qd. Scott, op. cit., 675-76.

The most bitter of all the 1916 disputes also concerned hours of work - the demand of the Broken Hill miners for the "Saturday half-holiday," which led, within a few days of the coal-miners' strike, to a general cessation of work on the Barrier.

This was a long-standing argument; in 1911, on the expiry of the two years' award which had wound up the 1909 lockout, the AMA had claimed a 44-hour week as well as a wage increase from 8/7½ to 9/- per shift for the lowest paid men. The companies had offered a 9/6 minimum wage, provided that the union dropped the hours claim and signed an agreement for a 4½ year term; the militant officials of the AMA had advised strongly against this - 4½ years was far too long to commit themselves, and they did not want to abandon the hours claim - but a ballot of their members had overwhelmingly favoured acceptance, and they had had to sign.³⁶

Almost the whole output of Australian metals had gone, before the war, to Germany, but, with the outbreak of war, this market was largely lost;³⁷ 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 IWW writer claimed that "the organisation was asked to assist by ^{their} militant tactics,"³⁸ and a favourite song of the demonstrators was the IWW'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.

36. Dale: Industrial History of Broken Hill, 143 . Dale gives a full factual account of this dispute; the present comments are concerned with the tactics and implications of the strike.

37. Scott, op. cit., 553 ff. Some metals still got through to Germany via neutral countries.

38. DA, 1/10/14.

The "long agreement" was due to expire on 30 June 1915, and, during March, the AMA 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."³⁹ 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 AMA members, against the strong opposition of the militants, led by the "revolutionary socialist"⁴⁰ 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 and to demand a conference 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 stock-piled 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 AMA into negotiating independently,⁴¹ but the union was determined to maintain the common front, and presented its ultimatum - either a settlement, or an immediate hearing in the Arbitration Court, or work would cease in both Port Pirie and Broken Hill from 21 August 1915. The companies fell back on their second line of

39. Qd. Dale, op. cit., 174.

40. Ibid., 149. In contemporary terms, this meant a member or supporter of the Australian Socialist Party.

41. This tactic was the work of G.D. Delprat, the general manager of the Broken Hill Pty., who had learnt a great deal about handling labor disputes from a study of such American models as the Pinkerton agency. cf. P. Mawson: *Vision of Steel*, 151 ff.

defence - an offer of an extra 1/- per shift, with overtime for all hours over 48, but no discussion of 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 AMA. In the event, it enabled the companies to stave off trouble for six weeks, while they stock-piled concentrates; and, when it did come, the underground workers were for a time left on their own.

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 make the 44-hour week a fait accompli was endorsed only by "a very small majority,"⁴² and even this disappeared when the endorsement was rescinded following the companies' threat 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,⁴³ thus taking it out of the hands of the officials of the AMA. This was a revolt of rank and file militancy against the most militant union leadership then existing in Australia.⁴⁴

Saturday continued to be a half-holiday, but the companies did not act, and the AMA 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?

43. Officers were J.J. O'Reilly (sec.) and G. Kerr (Pres.), both well known militant socialists.

44. The President of the AMA 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.

42. Dale, op. cit., 180.

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 AMA 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, from 20 December 1915, the 48-hour week would be strictly enforced. They had achieved a part of their objective - the Pirie men were definitely out of the dispute. The Barrier AMA made one final attempt to persuade the miners to resume work pending the Court's decision, but again the miners refused. The companies had again delayed action, pending the outcome of this ballot, but now the die was cast. On the second Monday in January, 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", claimed the IWW⁴⁵ - was on.

Once work had stopped, the Broken Hill front was solid, but elsewhere the position of the AMA 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 to make common cause was met by "God Save the King" and three cheers for work; the AMA 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 their Federation⁴⁶

45. DA, 15/1/16.

46. The Federated Engine-Drivers' and Firemen's Association.

stumped Australia denouncing the miners for holding up munitions production⁴⁷ - 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."^{47a} Otherwise, most trade unions supported the stand of the miners, but their response was formal rather than enthusiastic (it was indeed described as "miserable"),⁴⁸ 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 into dissatisfaction with the war itself, and the appeal to patriotic sentiment was still a useful counter to the claims of class solidarity. The AMA delegates, when they went looking for financial support, were conscious of this isolation; instead of going first to the official organisations - so the NSW Labor Council complained - they went to those "who make a lot of noise, but give no financial or substantial support,"^{48a} that is, to the IWW and the socialists. Considine, the AMA President,⁴⁹ 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 is with us. It is up to you as individuals to do something to make your organisations help us."⁵⁰

The radicals made good political capital out of the strike, but the financial results were disappointing, and, had external circum-

47. 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 FEDFA, but which never produced any munitions, either before or after the strike. In fact, for tactical reasons, the AMA offered to permit the supply of power to the munitions plant, but the offer was refused.

47a. Worker, 27/1/16.

48. Dale, op. cit., 201.

48a. NSW LC Report, 30/6/16.

[contd.]

stances not favoured the miners, they would probably have been beaten. But, even by the time the strike started, 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 Barrier unionists⁵¹ when he called on them to disregard "the advice of those German sympathisers who are insidiously active in fomenting disturbances;"⁵² however, his undertaking to seek an immediate hearing, provided work was resumed, foreshadowed the eventual settlement. On 4 February 1916, the Acting Prime Minister (G.F. Pearce) suggested that the companies and the AMA should agree to work resuming on four days a week (thus neatly dodging the Saturday afternoon issue), whereupon the government would ask the Court to put the AMA's case on the top of its list for the new year. There was some disagreement about the source of this proposal: Frank Anstey, writing in the Labor Call, pointed out that Pearce's initiative followed immediately a meeting of the mining companies, and suggested that there had been a "telepathic communion of kindred souls;"⁵³ however, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council informed the AMA that it had initiated the move, and urged acceptance.⁵⁴ The miners were reluctant to accept anything less than unconditional surrender, but advice came from all sides⁵⁵ that their demand was certain to be conceded, and they finally accepted Pearce's offer, with the proviso that there be no victimisation. 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

49. Considine was himself soon to win Labor pre-selection for the Barrier.

50. International Socialist, 12/2/16. The Labor Council in fact refused twice to endorse the strike; this resulted in IWW-supported demonstrations in the public gallery which was then closed. DA, 12/2/16, 19/2/16.

at all, were awarded the wage rise, but not the reduced hours.⁵⁶ 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,"^{56a} but, by general consensus, the miners' victory was a remarkable achievement for militant unionism. Certainly, it was the most considerable impact made by the IWW on Australian industrial life.

The IWW 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 AWU presidency, an IWW nominee (A.J. McNaught) had polled surprisingly well against the veteran Spence⁵⁷ - 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."⁵⁸ At the 1916 AWU Convention, the militants, who were centred in the Queensland and Western⁵⁹ branches, moved that the union abandon arbitration for direct negotiation (as the Meat Industry Employees' Union had already done, under syndicalist influence), or, as a compromise, that a ballot of members be held on direct action or arbitration; both motions were strongly opposed by the AWU officials, who succeeded in having carried a resolution that the union apply to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court for a new award.⁶⁰

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51. Or indeed to many other unionists - cf. the Worker's (2/2/16) denunciation of his "cheap way" of attacking the miners.
52. Qd. Dale, op. cit., 199.
53. Labor Call, 10/2/16.
54. Dale, op. cit., 205.
55. Including the leaders of the AMA and the underground strike committee.
56. i.e. the Pirie men remained on a 7-day week.
- 56a. Dale, op. cit., 206.
57. Spence - 13102; McNaught - 9484.
58. Falkiner MHR (Hume, NSW), a member of the Council of the P.U., CPD lxxxii 337.
59. i.e. western NSW.
60. Worker, 9/2/16.

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.⁶¹ 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 minority of the New South Wales pastoralists had to concede the increased rates.⁶² The AWU officials were furious at this challenge to their authority, and set out to destroy the IWW influence in their union; whether it was their campaign, or that of the government against the IWW as a whole, which was successful 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 IWW this action in opposition to the wishes of union leaderships demonstrated the good work of the militant minorities - "Within 3½ years we have been able to prove that we are the power of the future."⁶³ The IWW, with its slogan of "let the boss pay the strike pay,"⁶⁴ continued to stress its preference for "job action" rather than the traditional methods;

61. cf. CPD lxxxiii 338.

62. Labour Bulletin, No. 13, 41; No. 14, 148.

63. DA, 22/4/16.

64. DA, 5/2/16.

nevertheless, they wholeheartedly supported the strikers once they had come out. The leaders of the Miners' Federation and the AMA were militants and socialists, but they tried to restrain their rank and file - from tactical considerations, because of the divisions in their organisations. The leaders of the Waterside Workers and the AWU were moderates, with a strong orientation towards labor politics; they 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)⁶⁵ 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 IWW agitators who were said to have fomented the dispute; while the AMA was distrustful of, and bypassed, both the Labor governments and the NSW Labor Council. The NSW government, which had developed close connections with the Broken Hill Pty. 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 NSW party, and precipitated demands from Broken Hill (which later took concrete form) for the candidature of industrial labor men for parliament.

65. Appendix I.

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 organised 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' organisations, for a reform of Labor pre-selections so that the unions might be better represented in the parliamentary party.

In both these strikes, Hughes, who was concerned above all to keep working industries which he regarded as essential to the war effort, 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 tried to pressure Mr Justice Higgins into making the appropriate awards. The pressure was successful in the Broken Hill case (when Hughes was overseas, which is perhaps significant), but in the coalminers' case Higgins J. 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 IWW men were present in strength at many of the sites of industrial unrest, but the IWW 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 slogan on which working-class militancy settled. The strikers were far from accepting (or, probably, understanding) the whole of the IWW doctrine, for, with the exception of the watersiders' boycott tactics, the methods chosen by unionists to prosecute their claims were not those of the IWW; they chose rather the customary methods of trade unionism. What had happened was that economic circumstances 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 stem the tide; accordingly, they turned to the most readily available ideology which seemed to express their immediate needs, and from it they took one phrase - direct action.

But revolutionaries are always optimists, and understandably the IWW read more into the 1916 strikes than was justified: "Let all take note, that the IWW 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."⁶⁶ Unhappily for the Wobblies, "freedom" was not so immediately attractive to the mass of their fellow workers as were the Saturday half-holiday and the eight hours bank to bank.

66. N. Rancie, Direct Action, 2/12/16.

5. The "Industrialists" Take Over.

The working-class revolt against the arbitration system and their political and industrial leaders gave a fresh impetus to the running fight inside the NSW Labor Party between parliamentarians and unionists. From 1902 to 1910, while the Labor 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. However, except for the AWU, the mass unions had tended to stand aside from the political party, while the craft-union oriented Labor Council had supplied a flow of parliamentary candidates and political advice. But the grievances of the larger unions continued to mount, 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 organisation, thereby ensuring that the smaller unions and local organisations were permanently over-represented. There was, too, a continuing hostility about the sort of parliamentary candidates who were selected by the party machine; more and more these tended to be 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.¹ From time to time, suggestions had come up within the mass unions for the formation of a trade union party, one which would work for a more radical working-class program, but nothing had eventuated.

1. cf. the comment of the International Socialist (6/5/16) that membership of the local Labor Leagues "comprises many odd elements - shopkeepers, estate agents, small employers, landlords, and other small businessmen - 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."

Legislation for the eight-hours day, fair rents, amendments to the Arbitration Act, and state-owned coalmines; the administration of the railways and tramways and of government works projects; the government's actions in subsidising the formation of a privately-owned steelworks and in letting a £4 million contract to the Norton-Griffiths company for railway construction - all these were fruitful sources of contention; and, overshadowing them all, was the issue of the Legislative Council, which had delayed, rejected or emasculated many measures of interest to unionists since 1910, and the demand of the Labor platform for its abolition. Unemployment, the wage-freeze and inflation brought these dissatisfactions to a head.

The 1915 bid by the AWU to down the parliamentarians with a censure motion on wages and prices² was frustrated by the skilful manoeuvring of Holman and his colleagues. Knowing that his position would be challenged, Holman "took the precaution to pack the conference."³ His method was simple and effective: he set out to convince the local organisations and as many of the unions as he could that it was the AWU that 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, the position was reversed. The keynote vote of 99/60 in favour of Holman in 1915 had been converted into a vote of 105/68 against him.⁴ The AWU had the support of the new delegates, who came mainly from unions like the ARTSA which had paid up their affiliation fees in order to be represented, and had won over some

2. Supra, 135.

3. V. Molesworth: A History of the Industrial Section of the P.L.L. . . August, 1918.

4. In 1915, the motion was a censure over the Norton-Griffith contract; in 1916, a censure over the failure to act against the Legislative Council. Daily Telegraph, 7/4/15; Lang, op. cit., 60-61.

unions and local leagues which had, in 1915, supported Holman.⁵ The stage was set by the growing popular criticism of the Holman 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 AWU, in December 1915.⁶ 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 ensured the solidity of the block 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.⁷ With this organization behind it, the AWU censure won;⁸ and, when it came to the election of officers, the Industrialist ticket swept the board, except for one of the two vice-presidents and one (Holman himself, in last place) of the thirty members of the executive. 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;⁹ 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

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5. One such was the Railway Workers' and General Laborers' Union, which had supported the Norton-Griffiths contract because it meant jobs for the union's members.
 6. As well as the AWU, unions identified with the Industrial Section included the Miners' Federation, the RWGLU and the ARTSA. Growing craft union unrest was exemplified by the choice of P. Adler (sec., Blacksmith's Union) as president of the Section.
 7. Molesworth, op. cit. A. Rae, qd. CPD lxxxii 37.
 8. The vote (105/68) did not reflect the full extent of the hostility to Holman. Many delegates, although critical, were not prepared to go as far as censure.
 9. Lang, op. cit., 60/61.

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.¹⁰ To the new executive, what had been accomplished was "the rescue of the movement from the Parliamentarians;"¹¹ but, to the critics of labor, it appeared that "the Political Labor League had adopted enough of the IWW policy and platform, implicitly in part and explicitly as regards the one great union, to become its creature."¹²

The charge that the Labor party had become the creature of the IWW was ludicrous - the IWW was nowhere near strong enough, despite the contrary assertions of anti-labor publicists,¹³ to take over the Labor 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 IWW were both on the left, and they 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 NSW Labor party; it was not a triumph for IWW "boring from within," but the assertion of class interests, policies and control over the

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10. Official History of the Reconstruction of the Labor Party, 1916.
 11. P.C. Evans (the new sec. of the PLL), SMH, 4/7/16.
 12. SMH, 28/7/16.
 13. e.g. the series by "Demos" in SMH, 28-29-31/7/16.

supra-class, "community" posture which had been increasingly adopted by the parliamentary Labor party.¹⁴

The Industrial Section, despite its closely-kniw organisation, was not a homogeneous group. The AWU, which had initiated the move, was a highly bureaucratised organisation, whose leaders were concerned with political objectives (including their personal parliamentary aspirations) rather than with the industrial objectives which animated such unions as the Miners' Federation. Already the AWU 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 AWU had swallowed half-a-dozen Queensland bush unions; in 1915, the Victorian United Laborers' Union had joined the ranks;¹⁵ now, negotiations were under way for the admission of the 12,000 members of the Railway Workers' and General Laborers' Union in New South Wales. Addressing the 1916 conference of that union, W. McCormack, the former secretary of the Queensland AWA and now an official of the AWU, pointed to the political possibilities inherent in the growth-by-absorption of the AWU. In Queensland, he said, the union was so strong that half the Labor parliamentarians were the "direct nominees" of the AWU; this was "the way to gain industrial control of the political machine."¹⁶ The leaders of the AWU conceived the future of political labor 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, had a different view. They agreed with the AWU on the need for trade union reorganisation, but their idea of this was closer to the syndicalist con-

14. To consolidate the position of the unions, affiliation fees were reduced, and any union or union branch all of whose members lived in one electorate was given the right to form itself into a branch of the party.

15. Labor Call, 2/9/15.

16. Report, 1916 Conference RWGLU.

cept of the "one big union," based on industrial rather than local units,¹⁷ and they were not so much interested in moving in 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 re-assert 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.

17. See discussion infra, 308 ff.