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A HISTORY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN NORTH QUEENSLAND:
trade unionism, politics and industrial
conflict, 1900-1920.

Thesis submitted by
Douglas William HUNT, B.A. (Hons.)
in November 1979

as partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Department of History at the James
Cook University of North Queensland.



Loading bagged sugar at Townsville, c.1910. [Oxley Library]

ABSTRACT

This study of the labour movement in North Queensland describes the evolution, organisation and nature of trade unionism and working-class politics from 1900 to 1920.

In 1905, following a period of recession and disorganisation, Queensland trade unions began to recover and expand. In the North, unionism was embraced by sugar workers, miners, meatworkers, wharf labourers, railway workers and general labourers. The Amalgamated Workers' Association [AWA] was of particular significance, stimulating the general spread of unionism and inspiring active union involvement in Labor Party politics. Despite a militant reputation epitomised by the 1911 sugar strike, the AWA, like other northern unions, adopted a consistently pragmatic approach to both industrial and political issues. This approach was rewarded by the election of a state Labor government in 1915 and subsequent legislation benefiting unions and unionists.

The unity of the labour movement, however, was increasingly strained by the economic, political and social impact of the first world war. A significant section of unionists became both increasingly militant and more inclined to socialist beliefs. After 1916 industrial conflict occurred frequently on the wharves and in the mines, sugar fields, railways and, especially, the meatworks of the North. Strikes such as the 1917 northern rail strike, the 1918 Townsville sanitary workers' strike and the 1919 Townsville meatworkers' strike confirmed the region's public notoriety for industrial disorder and turbulent, radical unionism. Historians have also argued that the labour movement in North Queensland evinced a peculiar tendency towards industrial militancy and political radicalism. In exploring the historical basis for this reputation, the thesis concludes that although the magnitude and frequency of strikes indicates the militancy - the propensity to take direct industrial action - of many northern workers, the evidence for any special support for socialism in the North is much less substantial.

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ERRATA

In two instances, the page numbering sequence is at fault:

- (a) Page 156 is followed by page 158
- (b) Page 388 is followed by page 398

This mis-numbering does not affect the text of the work, and has resulted from typing errors detected too late to permit amendments.

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D E C L A R A T I O N

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

D.W. Hunt,
12 November 1979.

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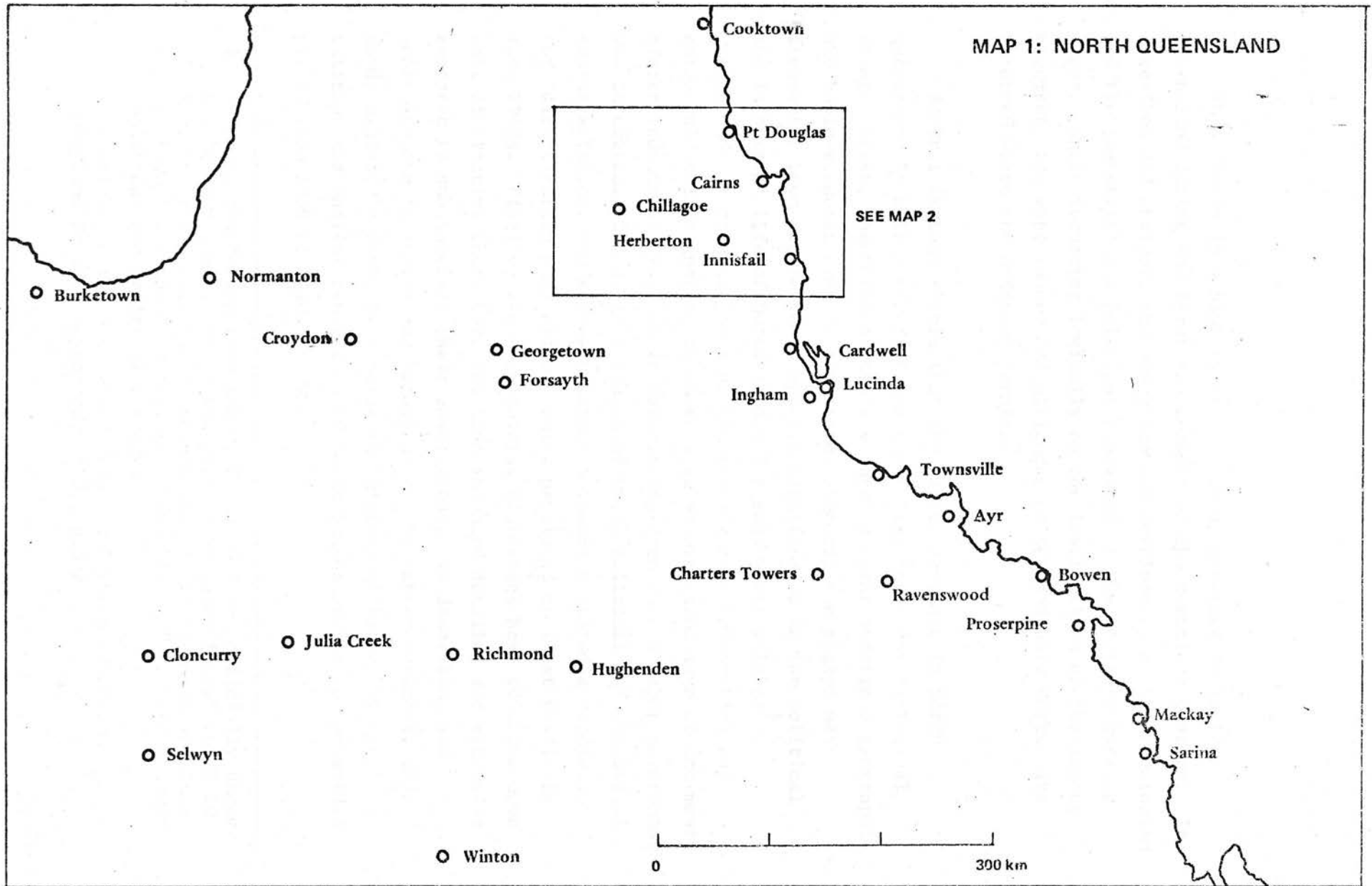
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA(B)	Australian Archives, Brisbane
AA(C)	Australian Archives, Canberra
AEHR	<i>Australian Economic History Review</i>
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AFBEU	Australian Federated Butchers Employees' Union
AFULE	Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen
AJPH	<i>Australian Journal of Politics and History</i>
ALF	Australian Labour Federation'
AMIEU	Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union
ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASPA	Australian Sugar Producers' Association
ASWU	Australian Sugar Workers' Union
AFTEA	Australian Federated Tramway Employees' Association
X AWU A	Amalgamated Workers' Association
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BIC	Brisbane Industrial Council
CPD	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</i>
CPE	Central Political Executive
CPP	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers</i>
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining Company
CYB	<i>Commonwealth Year Book</i>
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australia
HSL	Herberton Socialist League
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JRAHS	<i>Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society</i>
LEFCA	Locomotive Enginedrivers, Firemen and Cleaners' Association
MHR	Member of the House of Representatives
MIJQ	<i>Meat Industry Journal of Queensland</i>
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
OBU	One Big Union
PLP	Parliamentary Labor Party
QCE	Queensland Central Executive

QGG *Queensland Government Gazette*
QGMJ *Queensland Government Mining Journal*
QIG *Queensland Industrial Gazette*
QPD *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*
QPP *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*
QKEA Queensland Railway Employees' Association
QRU Queensland Railway Union
QSA Queensland State Archives
QUREA Queensland United Railway Employees' Association
QVP *Queensland Votes and Proceedings*
RSSS-ANUA Research School of Social Sciences - Australian National
University, Archives
SWU Sugar Workers' Union
TIC Townsville Industrial Council
TLC Trades and Labour Council
UCGA United Cane Growers' Association
WIIU Workers' International Industrial Union
WIUA Workers' Industrial Union of Australia
WPO Workers' Political Organisation
WWA Western Workers' Association
WWF Waterside Workers' Federation
WWU Waterside Workers' Union

I N T R O D U C T I O N

MAP 1: NORTH QUEENSLAND



This thesis is a history of the labour movement in North Queensland during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It describes and analyses the emergence and development of trade unionism and the industrial and political behaviour of the northern working class. While focussing logically on the institutions of the labour movement, the experiences and attitudes of the ordinary worker are recorded where the evidence permits.

Several factors ensure that the labour movement in North Queensland is both a coherent and compelling topic for historical study. First, the North distinctly forms a clearly-defined geographic and socio-economic area of the state. Second, the region has frequently been attributed a special significance in the political and industrial life of Queensland. For many years a Labor¹ stronghold, it produced some of the state's most influential and colourful politicians; at the same time it witnessed some of the most bitter industrial disputes in Queensland, even when a Labor government was in office. Third, as a result of these political and industrial characteristics, the northern labour movement acquired a reputation for "direct-action radicalism"² which persisted at least until the late 1940s. Finally, although several historians have remarked upon this distinctive character, few have advanced detailed and extensive research to substantiate their conclusions. In describing and analysing the evolution and behaviour of the labour movement, this study claims, in part, to examine the historical basis for the militant and radical reputation of North Queensland in the formative period from 1900 to 1920.

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- 1 Although the "Queensland Labour Party" did not officially become the "Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party" until 20 November 1918, this thesis adopts the more convenient spelling of "Labor" for the political party and "labour" for the broader industrial and political movement.
 - 2 G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: a history of North Queensland to 1920* (Canberra, 1963), p.336.

North Queensland begins at Sarina, 600 miles north of Brisbane, and extends west to the Northern Territory border and a further 1000 miles north to the tip of Cape York. Brisbane, the state capital, is closer to Sydney than it is to Mackay or Townsville, and closer to Melbourne than it is to Cairns. For several decades the remoteness of the region was underlined by the lack of communications. The railway line north from Brisbane did not reach Mackay until June 1921 and Townsville until December 1923. Transport between the North and the capital was therefore mainly by coastal steamer; the smaller northern ports were frequently subjected to an irregular service. Distance and isolation, key themes in Australian history, thus had a special significance in North Queensland, fostering strong local loyalties, creating a residual resentment of southern government and aiding in the development of a *regional* labour movement.

Regionalism in Queensland, as elsewhere, clearly related to economic as well as geographic and political factors. Historically, the South of the state was the only region to develop an economy based on diversified agriculture, pastoralism and manufacturing. Central Queensland relied primarily on the pastoral industry and to a lesser extent on mining activity; while the North's economy, resting fundamentally on primary industry - mining, beef production and sugar cultivation - was at least more balanced than that of Central Queensland.

Employment in North Queensland was seasonal in nature. The workforce in the sugar industry reached its peak during the harvest period from about June to November; the killing season in the meatworks usually ran from April to October-November. Mining was also subject to seasonal fluctuation depending on such varied factors as international demand and local water supplies; many mines ceased operations for several weeks at the end of each year. In some areas, railway and road construction was forced to halt during the wet months from December to February. Employment in the transport industry also depended on the seasonal pattern of the overall economy; on the waterfront, bustling activity during the latter half of the year was

followed by a period of "slack", when work was scarce and irregular. Seasonal employment thus had its natural corollary in seasonal unemployment.

The North Queensland workforce was predominantly unskilled and itinerant, characteristics which had important implications for the development of the labour movement. Though seasonal workers such as sugar-cane cutters were initially difficult to organise into resilient trade unions, once organised they proved to be cohesive and aggressive unionists. One former northern itinerant recalled

...a whole host of nomadic workers, blokes like me, who were single men, knocking about, going to look for a job where you could pick up a bit of overtime and build up a thirst to enjoy yourself in the city. And so the atmosphere of North Queensland at that time was very, very influenced by these nomadic workers. You know, that they were moving from place to place, and we didn't give a damn for the boss anyway, you always got a job somewhere.³

Studies of strikes in other parts of Australia warn against "assuming that itinerant workers always bring a spirit of militancy and solidarity into union organisation and industrial disputes."⁴ Yet in his study of the meatworkers' union, Terrence Cutler approvingly cites Jack Crampton's view that the rambler, the industrial nomad, working intermittently in a wide variety of low-paid jobs and living without home comforts, became a devil-may-care union militant.⁵ Certainly in North Queensland union militancy was historically

3 *E relatione* Albert Robinson, 22 January 1976.

4 J. Iremonger, J. Merritt and G. Osborne (eds), *Strikes: studies in twentieth century Australian social history* (Sydney, 1973), p.xvii.

5 T. Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday,: the Townsville Meatworkers' Strike of 1918-19', *ibid.*, pp.83-84, and T.A. Cutler, *The History of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union: a study of the internal dynamics of a labour organisation*, Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1976, p.169.

characteristic not only of meatworkers but of most unskilled semi-nomadic unionists in seasonal or irregular occupations: miners, carters, railwaymen, sugar workers and wharf labourers.

Geographic and social isolation and the attendant difficulties in communication meant that the labour movement in North Queensland was to a large extent oriented primarily towards the region rather than, as in other states, to the capital. Although individual trade union headquarters were increasingly located in Brisbane (in the case of the waterside workers, in Melbourne) northern unionists jealously guarded their local autonomy. When official union policy appeared to conflict with local interests, "southern" instructions were resented and frequently ignored. Notwithstanding their appreciation of the benefits of national federation, waterside workers often went on strike against the wishes of their federal council. A conflict of interests on North-South lines was also evident in the railway and meatworkers' unions: in 1914 and 1917 northern railway workers took industrial action independently of their southern confrères; during the latter years of the first world war the northern meatworkers often demonstrated their rebelliousness, though Cutler's suggestion that "the Brisbane officials were terrified of being seen in the streets of Townsville"⁶ is perhaps an over-dramatisation.

This assertion of regional interests was facilitated partly by the relatively decentralised structures of the railway, waterside and meatworks unions and partly because their northern officials remained conscious of a need to periodically demonstrate autonomy. Yet the highly-centralised Australian Workers' Union also experienced sectional conflict, which took the form of a struggle between the union officials and rank-and-file sugar workers, miners and labourers. To the paid officers of the AWU, rank-and-file agitation was caused by fractious and radical individuals; to many northern workers, however, it reflected the failure of southern union bureaucracy and its northern-based officers to recognise and adequately protect local

6 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.87.

interests. Parochialism was therefore an integral component of North Queensland's militant reputation.

However, to characterise labour in North Queensland as exclusively regional in outlook would be misleading. Northern unionists clearly formed part of the mainstream labour movement. It could not have been otherwise, given the demographic, industrial and political structure of the state.⁷ Not only was government authority centred in Brisbane, but also, with the establishment in 1916 of a central wage-fixing body - the arbitration court - an important function of industrial relations was also located in the capital.

Nevertheless, developments in the North were often decisive to the overall direction of the labour movement in Queensland. For example, the organisation of the Amalgamated Workers' Association in the far north from 1907 to 1911 produced two very influential union leaders and politicians in Theodore and McCormack; stimulated the unionisation of workers throughout the state; encouraged the active participation of unions in Labor politics; and laid the foundation for the subsequent industrial and political dominance of the AWU.⁸ When Labor gained political office in 1915, it was more than given to chance that it carried thirteen of the fifteen northern electorates. And when signs of working-class disillusionment with the Labor government appeared in the latter years of the first world war, such signs were most manifest among northern unionists.⁹

Northern meatworkers and railwaymen in particular revelled in their position as acknowledged pace-setters within their respective unions; it was a matter of some pride that the labour movement in the North was seen as more advanced in its views on unionism. Northern unionists tended to look down on the "backward" South, which was disparaged as being dominated by sectional craft unionism, politicians

7 See Appendix I: "Regional Population, 1901-1921" and Appendix II: "The Workforce".

8 See Chapters III and V.

9 See Chapters VIII and IX.

and bureaucratic conservatism. Accordingly, by 1920 internal disagreement in the Queensland labour movement was frequently expressed in regional, as well as ideological and pragmatic terms.

* * * * *

1900 is a fitting starting point for a study of the labour movement in North Queensland. Trade unions had been formed in the region in the 1880s, but these were shattered and demoralised by the industrial defeats and depression of the 1890s. In so far as there was a labour "movement" in the North at the beginning of the new century, it comprised mainly small local groups devoted to Labor Party electoral organisation. Indeed, the success of Labor in state and federal elections contrasted markedly with the evanescence of industrial organisation. In other Australian states trade unions were re-forming and reviving, but in Queensland drought and economic recession which lasted to 1904 delayed any signs of a revival of unionism.

Improved economic conditions, however, coincided with political developments conducive to the growth of unionism. In the period 1905-1907 labour leaders in Queensland became increasingly dissatisfied with the moderate policies of their parliamentary representatives who had formed a coalition government with Liberal politicians in 1904. When most of the caucus sheared their connections with the party in 1907, those who remained joined with trade union officials of the Australian Labour Federation [ALF] in actively fostering the revival of unionism in Queensland, from which a rejuvenated Labor Party could be launched.¹⁰

When labour leaders set out to rebuild the political party with a greater industrial complexion, they turned for support to trade unions already active throughout the state. In North Queensland the replacement in the sugar industry of Pacific Island labour by Europeans influenced the formation of the earliest sugar workers'

unions in Cairns and Mackay in late 1904. Despite an appeal based on an explicitly racial argument - that conditions suitable for "kanakas" were not good enough for white men - the incipient unions had considerable difficulty in establishing a solid and permanent organisation. After strikes in 1909 and 1910 failed to significantly improve working conditions, sugar workers responded favourably to the Amalgamated Workers' Association's proposal for amalgamation.¹¹

Unlike the unstable and penurious sugar workers' unions, the AWA was well organised, astutely led, and highly successful. Formed by Ted Theodore and William McCormack in the metal-mining districts west of Cairns in 1907, it soon acquired a reputation for protecting the interests of its members: a series of largely successful strikes saw the organisation grow rapidly in numbers and industrial muscle. Despite its militant reputation, which has been perpetuated by some historians, the union followed a consistently pragmatic, even defensive policy. The AWA's readiness to use direct action was in fact a logical reaction to the belligerent attitude of many mining companies whose management refused to negotiate with the union. As the AWA's bargaining strength was recognised, so the union used the strike weapon less frequently. Nevertheless, in the context of unionism in Queensland in this period, the AWA was clearly the most assertive and successful union in the state. Not only did it score a number of impressive strike victories, but it also fostered an amalgamation movement which propelled it to the forefront of the state's political and industrial life.¹²

The rise of the AWA was accompanied by an expansion of union activity among other northern workers. Aided by an improvement in economic circumstances, new trade unions were formed and older ones were rejuvenated. Miners, meatworkers, waterside workers, railway

11 Chapter II.

12 Chapter III.

employees, skilled craftsmen and general labourers all responded to the new impetus. After 1907 labour in North Queensland generally grew more confident; the incidence of industrial conflict rose accordingly. Contrary to the fears of some observers, the increased frequency of strikes did not signify the influence of doctrinaire socialism. Most strikes represented a drive to remove immediate grievances on the job; they frequently arose in response to the employers' indifference. Radical socialism and syndicalism had only a small following and a scant influence on unionism in North Queensland. Socialism in its many forms certainly provided an inspiration and a rationale for unionists, but labour's basic objectives remained practical and meliorative. Politically, the vast majority of trade unionists placed their faith in the moderate reformism of the parliamentary Labor Party.¹³

Indeed, the trend before 1915 was towards the integral involvement of the burgeoning trade unions in Labor politics. Industrial re-organisation thus heralded electoral success for the Labor Party. Symbolic of this success was the election of Theodore as member for Woothakata in 1909 and McCormack's win in Cairns in the 1912 state election; both later became state premiers. Their election reflected not only their personal drive and ability, but also a more general revival of Labor Party fortunes in the region, marking the beginning of a long period in which North Queensland was a safe Labor stronghold.¹⁴

By December 1910 the movement towards "closer unity" among Queensland trade unions had achieved practical effect through the merger of unions of sugar workers, railway navvies, general workers and western copper miners under the umbrella of the AWA. This development subsequently encouraged the AWA to seek amalgamation with other trade unions. In 1913 the AWA joined forces with, and assumed the name of, the Australian Workers' Union, which had been confined hitherto to pastoral workers. From this point the AWU became a mass

13 Chapter IV.

14 Chapter V.

trade union, by far the largest in Australia, organising unskilled and semi-skilled workers in a variety of industries. For a time it seemed that the AWU might come close to its goal of a single union for all Australian workers. It failed, however, when other unions showed little interest in amalgamation, championing instead loose affiliation with trades and labour councils. Prominent among those unions which indicated its willingness to amalgamate at various times but which did not merge with the AWU was the meatworkers' union. It ultimately decided that its destiny lay in development as an industrial union embracing all workers in the meat industry.

In the meantime, North Queensland unionists were involved in two important industrial disputes which significantly altered the direction of the labour movement in Queensland. In 1911 a lengthy strike by sugar workers, now organised by the AWA, won improved conditions and shorter hours. The strike involved a high degree of orchestration and co-ordination; yet it should be noted that its successful conclusion was neither wholly anticipated nor complete. Contrary to the findings of historians who have viewed the strike as a calculated step by the AWA leaders in pursuit of their industrial and political ambitions, the evidence shows that its organiser, McCormack, held serious doubts about the efficacy of strike action. Moreover, the jubilation which greeted the settlement of the strike masked the fact that one group of workers, field hands, received nothing but vague assurances. In fact, from an industrial relations' perspective, the real victory was simply that the recalcitrant employers were forced to recognise, and negotiate with, the union.¹⁵

Less than six months after the 1911 sugar strike, northern workers were again embroiled in a bitter industrial dispute, the general strike of February-March 1912. North Queensland unionists readily accepted the call to down tools in support of their Brisbane comrades. After only a week, however, they complied with the strike committee's recommendation to return to work. In Brisbane the strike

went on to humiliating defeat. Subsequently, unionists contrasted the AWA's performance in the 1911 sugar strike with the directionless conduct of the general strike by the ALF. This not only hastened the demise of the ALF but also gave impetus to the AWA and to unionism generally in North Queensland.¹⁶

In the wake of the 1912 strike the Denham Liberal government called an election which resulted in an immediate setback for the Labor Party. The government then pressed the advantage with legislation (the *Industrial Peace Act* of 1912) designed to prevent strikes and restrict the political activities of trade unions. The immediate outlook for Queensland labour was gloomy, but the events of that year actually provided further incentive for the movement to resist politically-created obstacles. The failure of the general strike, and the subsequent anti-union legislation, contributed to a firm belief among unionists that the political success of the Labor Party was now more important than ever.

In May 1915 labour's political aspirations were fulfilled by the election of the Ryan Labor government. Subsequent industrial, economic and social reforms were welcomed not only by trade unionists but by many electors outside the working class, including small farmers. Of most interest to the labour movement were the establishment of various state enterprises; improvements to workers' accommodation and labour exchange legislation; workers' compensation; measures securing the legal status of trade unions; and, pre-eminently, the establishment of a Court of Industrial Arbitration with wide-ranging judicial powers. Most trade unions eagerly sought the jurisdiction of state arbitration; unionism grew rapidly and the Queensland industrial court soon earned a reputation as the most liberal in the country.¹⁷

16 *Ibid.*

17 Chapter VII.

However, the Queensland government could not avert the political and social upheaval generated throughout Australia by the first world war. Inflation and industrial dislocation aggravated economic discontent; the bitter debate about military conscription and the war, and financial and constitutional impediments to the implementation of Labor policies facilitated increasing tensions within the labour movement. Like Labor governments elsewhere, Ryan's administration could neither match the grandiose expectations of some of its supporters nor assuage the radical minority's impatience with the piecemeal parliamentary programme.¹⁸

Working-class unrest was especially apparent in North Queensland, where economic grievances over wages were compounded by seasonal unemployment, geographical isolation and parochial complexes. From 1916 to 1919 strikes occurred with increasing frequency in the northern railways, on the waterfront, and in the mining, meat export, and sugar industries. In this context union militancy was promoted and support for socialism was enhanced. Industrial disputes such as the northern rail strike of August 1917 were symptomatic of growing disillusionment with the arbitration system and hence with a Labor Party which insisted that unionists should adhere strictly to arbitration court decisions.¹⁹ Though still accepting the features of arbitration while it benefited them, many unionists, especially in the North, refused to acknowledge any fetter on their right to take practical industrial action. This sentiment was not confined to the North, as throughout Australia the latter years of the war saw a more militant assertion of working-class interests and a keener interest in radical ideologies. Indeed, industrial turmoil and growing support for socialism in Australia reflected world-wide trends.

Not that radical or even revolutionary rhetoric indicated a commitment to theoretical doctrine among any more than a small minority

18 Chapter VIII.

19 Chapter IX.

of northern workers. Neither the syndicalist IWW in the period 1915 to 1917 nor the incipient Communist Party in the immediate post-war years attracted much formal membership in North Queensland. Rather, ideological propaganda served both to rationalise the experiences and justify the demands of the northern working class. Within the ranks of the labour movement itself, ideological debate was very often an expression of internal power struggles in which the real issue of contention was over practical industrial methods of promoting workers' immediate economic interests. To a large extent, internal conflict revolved around differing attitudes towards a more basic dispute: industrial conflict between employers and employees.

In late 1918 and 1919 a high level of unemployment and post-war readjustment produced a situation of acute social upheaval in North Queensland. Union assertiveness provoked a reaction from groups of employers and returned soldiers; violent clashes, such as those over the Hughenden hotel boycott in October 1918 were not uncommon.²⁰ Industrial conflict and community disorder were intensified by Australia-wide maritime strikes which exacerbated the isolation of the North, causing food shortages.

In the eyes of both contemporary observers and historians, the peculiar northern militancy was confirmed by the Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1919, which culminated in an exchange of gunfire between police and unionists in the city centre. The turbulence, violence and acrimony of the dispute, however, should not obscure the fact that the strike was an inopportune move which ended in abject defeat for the union militants.²¹ It also reflected and fuelled the rivalries and disagreements within the labour movement at the end of the first world war. The rankling antagonisms were not simply between the Labor government and the trade unions, but also within the union movement itself. On one side were the militant industrial unions of meatworkers, waterside workers and railway workers; on the other side the moderate craft unions rallied to the mass AWU, which had refused

20 *Ibid.*

21 Chapter X.

to support the meatworkers' strike and, at least according to the militants, had actually conspired to defeat it.

This militant-moderate division, however, was far from rigid, being complicated by internal conflict within individual unions. Sugar workers, for example, were among the most strike-prone in North Queensland, continually defying the cautious industrial policy of the pro-arbitration hierarchy of the AWU. Nevertheless, the broad groupings apparent at the end of 1919 set the pattern for internal labour movement relations in Queensland during the 1920s and 1930s.

In his authoritative history of the labour movement in eastern Australia, Ian Turner considers that 1921 represents "a high point in the history of the movement":²² a judgment which in North Queensland is clearly open to question. Turner's criteria centre on the evidence of class consciousness and a new wave of socialism; against this, however, must be weighed the practicalities of a high level of unemployment, damaging factional fights in the movement, and a Labor government which showed increasingly less inclination towards radical reform.²³

The story of North Queensland labour before 1915 is basically one of evolving organisations and political and industrial pragmatism. Thereafter, though these considerations still prevailed, the dominant theme is one of conflict - between militants and moderates; unionists and politicians; radicals and reformers; rank-and-file workers and union officials. These conflicts, endemic to labour movements generally, were lent an extra element of contention in North Queensland by the strength of regional feelings.

* * * * *

22 I.A.H. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: the dynamics of the labour movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921* (Canberra, 1965), p.234.

23 Chapter XI.

Many historians have speculated about the nature of the northern labour movement, though few have advanced detailed evidence to substantiate their conclusions. Although G.C. Bolton's history of North Queensland dealt with trade unionism virtually as an aside, it remains influential in attempts to explain the alleged political peculiarities of the region. A central theme of *A Thousand Miles Away* is suggested by its title: distance and isolation, which inspired "fierce local loyalties", "a strong spirit of communal identification" and, in the labour movement, "direct-action radicalism".²⁴ Briefly touching on the intense industrial conflict at the end of the first world war, Bolton asserted that "there had always been a tough, practical edge to Northern radicalism which owed nothing to imported ideologies".²⁵ This "old, irreverent Northern radicalism" was also reflected in the electoral victory of the Communist, Fred Paterson, in Bowen in 1944.²⁶

In her study of ideological conflict in the Queensland labour movement in the 1920s, M.B. Cribb noted that "left-wing militancy" seemed most pronounced among northern miners, sugar workers, wharf labourers and railway navvies. She found a plausible explanation for this in the arduous working conditions, climate and isolation of the region; the latter was, corroborating Bolton, perhaps most significant:

It must be remembered also, that North Queensland represented one of the last "frontier societies" with a sizable population, in Australia. As such, it tended to produce a special kind of outlook or philosophy. Separated by 1000 miles from the centre of authority and power, certain that those in the Government at Brisbane cared little for them, and understood less about their conditions, North Queenslanders developed a continual dissatisfaction

24 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.163, 331, 336.

25 *Ibid.*, p.313.

26 *Ibid.*, p.337.

and a contempt for those in authority, a belief in their ability to take things into their own hands, and in the necessity for looking out for themselves.²⁷

Likewise, Andrew Jones canvassed these parochial idiosyncrasies in his study of electoral support for the Communist Party in North Queensland in the late 1930s and 1940s. Although he placed some importance on ideological and organisational factors in Paterson's 1944 election, Jones still assigned most weight to regional conditions which had produced a militant labour tradition and a political climate in which personality was at least as important as party.²⁸

Unlike Bolton, Cribb and Jones, Cutler focussed attention on the industrial militancy of northern workers rather than on their more debatable political radicalism. Yet he too emphasised the North's isolation and frontier quality, which "bred parochialism and self-reliance" and "gave to the north Queenslander an independent, rebellious character". The other ingredients shaping the attitudes of the northern meatworker were oppressive working conditions ("these professional slaughterers were brutalised by their job") and "the conditioned recklessness of the seasonal worker".²⁹ Cutler's discussion of these traits in connection with the Townsville meatworkers' strike in 1919 is convincing, but it should be noted, as D.W. Rawson pointed out, that at this time

although the curious circumstances of Townsville made it particularly prone to violent outbreaks, there was a general social malaise almost throughout the country.³⁰

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- 27 M.B. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict within the Labour Movement in Queensland (1924 to 1929)*, B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1964, pp.19-20.
- 28 A.E. Jones, *Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland: a study of F.W. Paterson's victory in Bowen, 1944*, B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1972, introduction, pp.119, 130.
- 29 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', pp.81-85.
- 30 D.W. Rawson, review of Iremonger, *et.al.*, *Strikes*, in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, XX, 2 (August 1974), p.264.

Cutler's argument is reiterated and refined by the most recent of historians' attempts to define an independent political *milieu* for North Queensland, Ian Moles' biography of Tom Aikens. Moles draws also on the works of Bolton, Cribb, and Jones to suggest that "isolation and localism" on the one hand, and the seasonal nature of employment, on the other, formed equal elements in a "tradition of rebelliousness" that was at once militant, regional and radical.³¹

Although the period after 1920 lies beyond the scope of this study, previous developments in the labour movement vindicate many of the deductions offered by historians. For example, the significance of regionalism in the northern labour movement, and the militancy of most seasonal workers, were amply demonstrated between 1900 and 1920. Certainly during the war North Queensland acquired considerable notoriety for industrial conflict. However, it is evident that some qualifications and clarifications of the militant legend of the North are necessary.

First, one may question the plausibility of listing a series of spectacular industrial disputes - the 1911 sugar strike, the 1919

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31. I.N. Moles, *A Majority of One: Tom Aikens and Independent Politics in Townsville* (St. Lucia, 1979), pp.19-21. Cf. I.N. Moles, "'Hostility, Warning, Suspicion": Tom Aikens and the Origins of the North Queensland Labour Party, 1939-1949', *North Australia Research Bulletin*, I, 1 (September 1977), pp.60-61.

In an interview on 14 December 1974 Aikens himself eloquently presented the classic view of the peculiar character of the northern worker: "Now with regard to militancy in northern Queensland, I think we should get right down to the basis that most of the unusual things in that line that happened in North Queensland had their basis in the fact that North Queensland was isolated from the rest of Australia.

...that was the general atmosphere of North Queensland - that we were all just one step in front of the law, that if people did things in the South, well, they did that because they were a sort of a pansified section of the Australian community and we were quite different to them....The whole attitude was of course that we were isolated, we were on our own, we considered ourselves a separate race from the people who lived in the South, and consequently we were prepared to do anything."

meatworkers' strike, and the South Johnstone strike of 1927 - and linking them with the support enjoyed by the Communist Party in its "popular front" phases of the 1930s and 1940s, in order to adumbrate a "tradition" of militancy or radicalism peculiar to North Queensland.³² As the present study suggests that there was only a tenuous connection between the labour movement of the 1890s and that of the early twentieth century,³³ so it submits - without denying the strength of historical continuity or tradition - that the links between 1919, the acclaimed pinnacle of northern militancy, and 1944, when Paterson and Aikens and other mavericks were elected, should be more adequately established.

Second, the pervasiveness of the militant reputation of the North³⁴ tends to obscure the parallel existence of the consistently moderate, if not conservative, outlook of most northern workers. This trend, often treated as merely the antithesis to militancy and radicalism, was represented by an abiding faith in parliamentary reformism and a firm belief in industrial arbitration. It was evident in the pragmatic approach to industrial problems evinced by the AWA in the mining and sugar districts of the North; it was the trend apparently vindicated by the collapse of the 1917 railway strike and the 1919 meatworkers' strike.

32 Bolton, *loc.cit.*; Cribb, Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict, p.19; Jones, Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland, pp.76-80; Moles, *A Majority of One*, pp.15-21.

33 See Chapter I; Cf. R.J. Sullivan, *The A.L.F. in Queensland, 1889-1914*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1973, pp.207-237.

34 As well as those historians cited above, see A.A. Morrison, 'Militant Labour in Queensland, 1912-1927', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* [JRAHS], XXXVIII, 5 (November 1952), pp.209-234; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.158; D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: a political biography* (St. Lucia, 1975), p.435; J.B. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement, 1900-1922*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1975, p.243.

One of the few historians to question what he calls "the myth of the militant North" is K.H. Kennedy, in 'The Rise of the Amalgamated Workers' Association', in *Lectures on North Queensland History*, second series (Townsville, 1975), pp.204-205. However, Kennedy did not persist with this challenge.

Finally, this study of the labour movement in North Queensland suggests that historians should clearly define the terms which they use to describe working-class behaviour. With the exception of Cutler, those writers discussed above do not seem to distinguish between *radicalism* and *militancy*.³⁵ There *is* a connection between these terms, but they are decidedly not interchangeable. Indeed, some Australian trade unions which could be fairly described as industrially militant, have a membership and leadership which are commonly non-radical, even conservative, in political outlook.³⁶ This study cites the case of the AWA, which in the quiescent context of the first decade of the twentieth century was decidedly "militant" but whose leaders were "radical" only in their commitment to the Labor Party and the parliamentary process. Conversely, while many northern unionists in the latter years of the first world war proudly wore the label "socialist", it is clear that socialism or radicalism did not cause any strikes in North Queensland. It would therefore seem more

35 In a later work, however, Cribb devoted several pages to explicitly discussing the concept of militancy, which she defined in an industrial relations sense as "a preparedness to step outside the accepted norms of negotiation and action, for one's calling, in order to achieve one's objectives, whether these be ideological or industrial or both." M.B. Cribb, *Trade Union Militancy: case studies in transport*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1972, p.24 and Chapter 1, *passim*.

36 D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia* (Hornsby, 1978), p.11. Cf. Cribb, *Trade Union Militancy*, p.3: "the proposition that militancy must of necessity, be equated with radical political views, falls to the ground immediately one begins to scrutinize closely the trade union movement in Australia."

appropriate to use the term "radicalism" to refer to political attitudes and behaviour; and to confine "militancy" as far as possible to the arena of industrial action.³⁷

37 This thesis consequently adapts the definitions offered by Turner, in *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.xv: "'Radical' is used to describe those who advocate policies involving substantial and rapid change, in contrast to those who sought slighter and more leisurely adjustments. This is a matter of degree and not of kind: what is a radical position at one time may be conservative at another." "'Militant' and 'moderate' describe the methods by which particular aims are to be accomplished: the former signifies industrial action rather than reliance on arbitration or legislation..." Cf. V.L. Allen, *Militant Trade Unionism* (London, 1966), pp.18-20.

CHAPTER I

THE REVIVAL OF LABOUR IN NORTH QUEENSLAND, 1900-1907

At the end of the nineteenth century the labour movement in North Queensland was disorganised and disunited - a predicament shared with labour all over Australia. Trade unions, formed in a flush of optimism in the 1880s, had grown weak to the point of disintegration both because of depression and the active hostility of employers and governments.¹ The Labor Party remained the second largest political group in the Queensland parliament (even forming a very short-lived minority government in 1899) but, plagued by defections and damaging policy conflicts, seemed a long way from achieving power in its own right.² In the 1880s trade unionism and political organisation among workers had spread remarkably throughout most of the English-speaking world. As the ideas and influence of "new unionism"³ reached gold miners, waterside workers and general labourers North Queensland participated in this growth. In the 1890s, however, an economic slump, aggravated by drought, affected all Australian colonies except Western Australia and led to the demise of several unions and the prostration of many others. Several of the newer unions were insufficiently developed. Born in a period of high optimism, they lacked the

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- 1 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.14; J.T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia* (Melbourne, 1921 reprinted 1967), p.151; J. Hagan, *Printers and Politics: a history of the Australian Printing Unions 1850-1950* (Canberra, 1966), p.100; K.D. Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia 1852-1920* (Canberra, 1970), pp.118,139.
 - 2 D.J. Murphy, 'The Dawson Government in Queensland, the first Labour Government in the World', *Labour History*, 20 (May 1971), pp.1-8 and 'Queensland', in D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Labor in Politics: the State Labor Parties in Australia 1880-1920* (St. Lucia, 1975), p.164.
 - 3 The term "new unionism" describes the extension of trade unionism to unskilled and semi-skilled labourers in the late nineteenth century, in contrast to the older, established "friendly society" unions of skilled craftsmen. It is also associated with increased class consciousness and the permeation of socialist ideas amongst such "new" unions. Cf. H. Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism* (Harmondsworth, 1963), ch. 6; E.J. Hobsbawm, 'General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889-1914' in *Labouring Men: studies in the history of labour* (London, 1964), pp.179-203; Turner, *op.cit.*, pp.8-12; R.A. Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: a study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910* (Melbourne, 1960), pp.99-109.

experienced officials, financial reserves and sense of identity that might have carried them through the hard times of depression. Early in the decade some of them made the mistake of undertaking strike action in a situation of growing unemployment. Throughout Australia, only the strongest unions survived the 1890s; even these entered the new century greatly weakened. In North Queensland, trade unionism in 1900 was practically extinct.⁴

The Queensland economy did not recover completely from the effect of the depression until well into the first decade of the twentieth century. There were some signs of recovery after 1895, but another drought which lasted from 1898 until 1904 further delayed economic recovery and curtailed any real labour revival. The three major industries on which North Queensland economic life was based - beef cattle, mining, and sugar - each reflected these conditions.

The pastoral industry faced enormous difficulties. Drought in 1889-90 preceded a slump in 1893, which seriously affected the financial structure of the industry and restricted investment. Hopes of recovery rose with the development of a frozen meat export trade in the late 1890s, but these were soon dashed by the outbreak of a disastrous epidemic of tick fever.⁵ Renewed drought after 1898 very nearly dealt the final blow to the industry. Freezing and canning operations

4 In 1900 the only northern trade union registered under the *Trade Union Act* of 1886 was that of the Townsville shipwrights with 18 members. *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* [QVP] 1901, II, p.1542. This is perhaps an incomplete indication of the state of unionism, as unions were not compelled to register. However, the number of North Queensland unions (9) listed as having had their registrations cancelled as defunct between 1887 and 1900 confirms the decline in the level of union organisation. *Ibid.*, 1900, V, pp.1135-1186. For accounts of trade unions in North Queensland in the nineteenth century see Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.186-198; J. Stoodley, 'The Development of Gold-Mining Unionism in Queensland in the late Nineteenth Century', *Labour History*, 11 (November, 1966), pp.14-27; Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, pp.154-162, 177-210.

5 Bolton, *op.cit.*, pp.216-218; Angliss and Coy., *An early history of meatworks in Queensland*, typescript ms. (n.d. Oxley Library); R.Duncan, 'The Australian Export Trade with the U.K. in Refrigerated Beef 1880-1940', *Business Archives and History*, II, 2 (August 1962), pp.106-121.

contracted, with serious effects on trade and commerce.⁶ The dry years continued in most of the state until 1904; only then did good seasons again presage a gradual revival in the beef industry.

Gold-mining was still the economic mainstay of the North; it had to a certain extent cushioned the economy from the effects of stagnation in other industries. After an initial slump in the late 1880s, the industry revived in 1896 on the basis of increasing output at Charters Towers supplemented by new development at the Croydon, Ravenswood, Coen and Etheridge fields. Wealth won from the deep reefs at Charters Towers brought prosperity to that city amidst the uncertainty of business elsewhere. In 1903 the Under-Secretary for Mines presented his report with some pride:

The past year, so disastrous to most producing industries, has been one of more than ordinary activity in mining centres. Our leading goldfields especially have experienced a period of good fortune that has naturally created feelings of elation and confidence.⁷

Such outward signs of prosperity and confidence, however, obscured the first symptoms of decay. 1903 - "an eminently successful year [in which] the promise of larger yields and greater dividends has been amply fulfilled"⁸ - in fact heralded the steady decline of gold-mining in the North. By 1906, despite intermittent bursts of optimism, mineowners, investors and the government had accepted the fact that the dwindling output of gold was irreversible.⁹

6 'Report of the Registrar-General on Agricultural and Pastoral Statistics for 1899', *QVP* 1900, II, p.787; "Drought of almost unprecedented severity has held sway in the Western portions of the colony for many months, causing death and destruction to all classes of stock, and corresponding losses to owners." Cf. F.H. Bauer, *Historical Geographical Survey of Part of Northern Australia*, pt. 1, The Eastern Gulf Region, (Canberra, 1959), pp.41-48.

7 *Queensland Parliamentary Papers* [QPP] 1903, II, p.887.

8 'Report of the Under-Secretary for Mines for 1903', *ibid.*, 1904, I, p.1150.

9 *Ibid.*, 1907, II, pp.1006-1007.

To some extent developments in the mining of base metals offset the severe effects of the decline in gold. After a long slump prices for tin, lead and copper rose in 1897; southern and overseas capital revived the pioneer mining settlements of the Walsh and Tinaroo district west of Herberton, as well as the small copper mines of the Cloncurry area.¹⁰ But Cloncurry was hampered by its isolation and desolation; and the silver-lead, copper and tin deposits of the Walsh and Tinaroo field, though extensive, consisted mainly of low-grade ore. While prices and capital investment remained high, efficient mining on a sufficiently large scale could be profitable, but the vicissitudes of widely-fluctuating markets, difficulties of transport and communications, mismanagement and misleading prospectuses, all hindered progress. After an optimistic start, production and confidence slumped briefly with copper prices in 1901-02; thereafter, price rises, however substantial, followed a characteristically haphazard course.¹¹

Sugar was more land and labour intensive than either mining or grazing, and, being a bulkier product, stimulated a wide range of associated economic activities. By 1900 the cultivation of sugar was a virtual monoculture in the fertile coastal plains and river valleys of the Mackay, Proserpine, Lower Burdekin, Ingham, Johnstone, Cairns and Mossman districts. The industry had recovered fully from recession by

10 QVP 1900, II, p.216; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.278-279; G. Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended: a history of Australian Mining* (Melbourne, 1969), pp.248-256, and *Mines in the Spinifex: the story of Mount Isa Mines* (Sydney, 1970), p.34.

11 'Report of the Under-Secretary for Mines for 1901', QPP 1902, III, p.259: "Unfortunately the fair prospect with which the year opened has in some measure been dimmed, and confidence in the immediate future has to some extent been impaired. Almost coincident with the fall in the price of metals, a vicissitude which this State has shared with other mineral producing countries, came what may be termed the more domestic calamity of the Chillagoe collapse, and it is hardly to be wondered at that the latest exemplification of the fickleness of markets, and the somewhat belated disclosure of conflicting estimates and alleged mismanagement in connection with the most conspicuous of our recent mining enterprises, should have created a feeling of disappointment and distrust hurtful to mining in Northern Queensland." Cf. K.H. Kennedy, 'The North Chillagoe Mines Scandal', *North Australia Research Bulletin*, 3 (November 1978), pp.125-175.

1895, but expansion thereafter was checked by the drought of 1898-1904. Basically profitable at the turn of the century, sugar was also hampered both by the competition of European beet sugar in world markets and by highly competitive marketing arrangements in southern states. Moves to abolish the use of Pacific Island labour, considered by many to be the mainstay of successful sugar production, further unsettled the industry and restricted investment.¹²

The condition of labour in North Queensland at the beginning of the new century reflected the straitened economic circumstances. Drought was the determining factor: "When the pastoralists suffered almost to the point of extinction from 1899 to 1903", wrote one observer, "wages everywhere were low, work was scarce, trade was bad, and the industrial classes suffered exceedingly."¹³ Reports by state government agencies confirmed this impression. The cautiously optimistic remarks of the director of the labour bureau in 1900, suggesting an economic recovery, were replaced in 1902 by dismal comments about "the effect of the prolonged drought" and the "deplorable relations between supply and demand" shown by the increasing number of unemployed.¹⁴

It is extremely difficult to estimate the extent of unemployment in North Queensland at the time. Government labour bureau agents operated in most districts, but labour bureau work was only a secondary duty for them. They were immigration agents in Townsville and Mackay; court house clerks in other towns; police officers in smaller centres. Many unemployed did not register at their offices. Some who did were

12 See below, Ch. II; J. Laverty, 'The Queensland Economy 1860-1915' in D.J. Murphy, R.B. Joyce and C.A. Hughes (eds.), *Prelude to Power: the rise of the Labour Party in Queensland 1885-1915* (Brisbane, 1970), p.33; G. Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland: a study in economic nationalism* (St. Lucia, 1973), pp.132-133; H.T. Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry, an historical outline* (Brisbane, n.d. [1933]), pp.18-23.

13 H.C. Perry, *Memoirs of the Honourable Sir Robert Philp K.C.M.G.* (Brisbane, 1923), p.208. Robert Philp (1851-1922) born Glasgow, arrived Australia 1852, partner Townsville firm Burns Philp 1875. MLA Musgrave 1886-8, Townsville 1888-1915. Minister for Mines 1893-9; Treasurer 1898-9; Premier and Treasurer 1899-1903; 1907-8, knighted 1915.

14 *QVP* 1900, V, p.689; *QFP* 1902, I, p.1181.

merely seeking relief in the form of food rations; many were not interested in registering at all because they knew that a food hand-out was all they would receive. It was recognized that the number registered at the bureau bore little relation to the actual number unemployed. In fact it was claimed that men out of work would try every other source before applying to the labour bureau.¹⁵ In 1906 a trade union official told a royal commission that workers avoided the labour bureau, suspecting it as "an instrument of wage reduction".¹⁶

Undoubtedly, however, a large proportion of the work force was unemployed as a result of the drought. According to labour bureau reports, unemployment increased year by year from 1899 until 1903, the last year for which figures are available.¹⁷ In 1901 destitution among Townsville families was reported to be much in excess of former years: the closure of the meatworks and a reduced sugar harvest were blamed. In succeeding years demand for relief became exceptionally heavy in North Queensland, and in April 1902 soup kitchens were set up in Townsville.¹⁹ Replying to charges that many were unwilling to work and content to live sparingly on government rations, the Ravenswood *Mining Journal* asserted that "the majority of these unemployed...are *bona fide* working men honestly searching for employment to enable them to live".²⁰

15 Herberton clerk of petty sessions, *QVP* 1901, IV, p.1081. Cf. Townsville report, *QPP* 1902, I, p.1189; 'Report of the Director of Labour, year ending 30 June 1907', *QPP* 1907, II, p.305. In Mackay in July 1903 only 193 out of an estimated 500 unemployed were registered, *ibid.*, 1903, II, p.557. The *Worker* (Brisbane), 3 May 1902 alleged that 400 waterside workers and meatworkers were out of work in Townsville; labour bureau figures for April and May 1902 were 73 and 68 respectively, *QPP* 1903, II, p.544. Labor members claimed in parliament that the bureau recorded only 5% of the total unemployed: *Queensland Parliamentary Debates [QPD]* LXXXIX (23 September 1902), p.628. Cf. R. Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: a study of an Australian Urban Society* (St. Lucia, 1973), p.38.

16 'Report of the Royal Commission on Sugar Industry Labour', *QPP* 1906, II, p.619.

17 *Ibid.*, 1904-5, II, p.51. The usefulness of labour bureau figures is further lessened by the government's failure to publish any reports from 1903 until 1907, when the bureau's operations were extended. Figures after 1907 are more reliable, *ibid.*, 1907, II, p.297.

18 *Ibid.*, 1902, I, p.1189.

19 *Ibid.*, 1904-5, II, p.51; *Worker*, 3 May 1902; *QPD* LXXXIX, *loc.cit.*

20 *QPD loc.cit.*

P.G. Macarthy estimates that in Victoria at this time general unemployment fell below 10% of the work force only in the years 1898-1901 and after 1905. However, he uses data relating to skilled work only and goes on to say that "almost certainly unemployment among the unskilled was far higher".²¹ The necessary data to estimate figures for Queensland do not exist: nor is there necessarily any close relationship between the levels of unemployment in Victoria and in Queensland. Nevertheless, Macarthy's figures may well be indicative of conditions in Queensland since economic growth throughout Australia was generally retarded in this period. Butlin shows that there was no final recovery from the depression until about 1906: gross national product did not reach its 1891 level until 1903-04, remained stationary until 1906-07, then began to rise. After 1910 its rate of increase accelerated sharply.²²

Those whom recession most affected were unskilled, casual labourers who constituted the greater part of the North Queensland work force.²³ Even in the best of times employment for the general labourer was intermittent and seasonal; he usually had to travel in search of work. A recession such as that between 1900 and 1904 therefore meant a lengthening of the normal spells between work and a shortening of periods of work.

The employment situation was bleak even in those industries or areas which remained fairly prosperous. Thus in Charters Towers, where

21 The figures given are 1901 -6.6%; 1902 - 11.8%; 1903 - 13.1%; 1904 - 11.9%; 1905 - 9.5%. P.G. Macarthy, 'Labor and the Living Wage 1890-1910', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* [AJPH], XIII, 1 (April 1967), p.83; 'Wages in Australia 1891 to 1914', *Australian Economic History Review* [AEHR], X, 1 (March 1970), p.69; review of Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics in Labour History*, 10 (May 1966), p.67.

22 N.G. Butlin, *Australian Domestic Product, Investment and Foreign Borrowing* (Cambridge, 1962), p.461; cf. Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.155.

23 'Report of the Under-Secretary for Mines for 1899', *QVP* 1900, II, p.219; 'Report of the Director of Labour for 1903', *QPP* 1904-5, II, p.51: "As is usual in times of depression, the class known as casual or other labour predominated..." Cf. Macarthy, 'Labor and the Living Wage', p.68.

gold-mining was still profitable (and where employment opportunities actually increased yearly until 1905), many men from other areas came looking for work. There was a large surplus of labour at Charters Towers, not because the total number in employment fell but because the number seeking employment from less prosperous districts grew.²⁴

Government reaction to the drought crisis was predictable. The policy of the conservative Philp government (1899-1903) was economy and retrenchment, wage cuts and the suspension of public works. This did nothing, however, to alleviate the level of unemployment. The succeeding government, a coalition of a group of liberals and the Labor Party, initially took the same drastic steps to reduce the budget deficit. In the words of Sir Arthur Morgan, the then Premier:

Retrenchment became the order of the day
The pruning knife was applied with
 vigour and loan expenditure rapidly
 lessened.²⁵

Such policies only aggravated unemployment, and, indeed, may well have hindered rather than aided general economic recovery.

The situation improved gradually with the breaking of the drought. Cautiously at first, the government began various programmes of public works. Closer settlement plans, railway lines, harbour improvements and immigration schemes were the main features of government economic policy after 1905.²⁶ Unemployment was still wide-spread, but it was decreasing; pastoral and manufacturing industries reported upturns and employed more men.²⁷ As well, the phasing out of coloured labour in the sugar districts meant increased employment opportunities for many white men. The government also responded more sympathetically to requests for the provision of relief work for the unemployed. For

24 *QPP* 1903, II, p.545.

25 A. Morgan, *Our First Half-Century: a review of Queensland Progress* (Brisbane, 1909), p.49. Cf. D.P. Crook, 'The Crucible - Labour in Coalition 1903-1907', in Murphy *et.al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p.57.

26 Morgan, *op.cit.*, p.86. Cf. F.K. Crowley, '1901-1914', in F.K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne, 1974), p.297.

27 'Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops', *QPP* 1906, I, p.1584; 'Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for the year 1906-1907', *QPP* 1907, II, p.641.

example, in 1905, following protest meetings in Townsville, the state Treasurer arranged a loan to the harbour board for jetty construction. Aid was also given to prospecting parties in mining centres; work was provided clearing land and building tramlines in the sugar districts.²⁸ This economic revival formed the basis for the re-organisation and spread of trade unionism in North Queensland.

Incipient Labour Activity: 1900-1905.

There was only sporadic trade union activity in the period from 1900 to 1905. The restricted level of job opportunities, particularly among itinerant unskilled workers, hindered collective action. The only attempts at union organisation were tentative and usually ineffective.

One of these attempts had its origins in the industrial metal mining boom. The revival of mining in the Herberton and Chillagoe districts in the final years of the nineteenth century provided work for a considerable number of both skilled and unskilled labourers. With metal prices buoyant, the development of mines and the construction of roads, reservoirs, railways and tramways brought an influx of capital and population into the area. This activity impressed the local mining warden:

The general advancement of operations towards the economical development and production of the valuable metals from the extensive mineral deposits within the Walsh and Tinaroo Mineral Field has been marvellous - certainly quite without a precedent in the history of any mineral or gold field in this colony - showing every indication of the most permanent prosperity.²⁹

28 *QPD* XCIII (7 December 1904), p.1161; *ibid.*, XCIV (10 January 1905), p.86; *Worker*, 19 November 1904; *Port Denison Times* (Bowen), 21 January 1905, 28 January 1905, 4 February 1905, 7 February 1905; D.J. Murphy, 'William Kidston: a tenacious reformer', in D.J. Murphy and R.B. Joyce (eds.), *Queensland Political Portraits 1859-1952* (St. Lucia, 1978), pp.242-243.

29 *QVP* 1900, II, p.216.

In 1896 366 miners gouged a living from the Walsh and Tinaroo mineral field; three years later, this number had increased to 1823, with many more workers employed in the smelters and on construction sites.³⁰

The apparent prosperity attracted men from all over the state, with the result that, although there was a shortage of skilled labour, unskilled labour was greatly over-supplied.³¹

In mid-1901, however, industrial metal prices plummeted. Simultaneously there were disclosures of misleading share prospectuses and conflicting estimates of ore reserves. The Chillagoe Railway and Mines Company was forced to reduce operations, and the ensuing attempts to cut costs stirred the employees into action. Unions were formed at Chillagoe and Mungana to combat retrenchment and wage cuts, but they were quickly overwhelmed by the economic crisis.³² The Chillagoe company finally collapsed and closed the mines at the end of 1901. A government official at the neighbouring town of Thornborough witnessed the exodus:

In the town of Chillagoe in December there were probably 1800 souls and on New Year's Day there was not a drink sold in any of the hotels in Chillagoe, the town being so deserted from the closing down of the mines. This has caused a great number of those unemployed to come to Thornborough and pass through the district in search of work....The majority of these wanderers betook themselves to the sugar districts of the Mulgrave and the Mossman. All were strangers to the district, and in some cases, being Russian Finns, could not speak a word of English. The charity of the

30 *Ibid.*, 1897, IV, p.105; 1900, II, p.167.

31 *Ibid.*, 1900, II, p.219: "European miners are in considerable demand throughout the district, but the supply of labourers is much in excess of demand, causing a large number of unemployed to be roaming through the district unable to obtain work, and in numbers of cases obliged to seek Government aid (in rations) to enable them to travel elsewhere".

32 *Worker*, 7 September 1901, 5 October 1901.

miners assisted a great number,
otherwise I am sure a lot would have
suffered severely.³³

The inchoate union organisation in the base metal mining industry in the far north therefore quickly disintegrated. Despite the temporary renewal of profitable mining and smelting operations in 1902, there were no more attempts to form unions until economic constraints again caused industrial trouble in 1907.

Wharf labourers in the coastal towns had also established unions. Early in 1901 Townsville wharfies formed a union; they were followed in August by the Cairns Waterside Workers' Union [WWU].³⁴ By October the Cairns union had affiliated with the central labour organisation in Queensland - the Australian Labour Federation [ALF], reporting that all wharfies belonged to the union. By then, too, the WWU had won recognition of its rules from some employers.³⁵ Mackay waterside workers also formed a union in November 1901 after successfully striking for increased pay for sugar loading.³⁶ An important incentive to the formation of these unions came from waterside unions in southern states, which early in 1902 came together as branches of the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia [WWF]. The WWF was formed by W.M. Hughes and other federal parliamentarians from waterfront constituencies including F.W. Bamford, member for the North Queensland seat of Herbert.³⁷ In

33 *QPP* 1902, I, p.1188.

34 *Worker*, 17 August 1901. In the late nineteenth century wharf labourers' unions were formed in most North Queensland coastal towns. Unsuccessful strikes and depression, however, had made these early unions defunct. Cf. Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, pp.159, 207.

35 *Worker*, 17 August 1901. The ALF, formed in June 1889, aspired to provide strong central leadership to Queensland trade unions. It failed to fulfil its intended function, evolving instead into a "geographically decentralized federation based on the autonomy of constituent unions". Sullivan, *op.cit.*, p.viii and *passim*.

36 *Worker*, 9 November 1901, 16 November 1901; *Mackay Mercury*, 2 November 1901.

37 WWF Federal Council Minutes, 4 February 1902. T62/1/1, Archives Unit, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University [hereafter RSSH-ANUA].

April 1902 the northern unions joined the federation: Mackay reported a membership of 50, Cairns 177 and Townsville 200. Shortly after, the Bowen watersiders also applied to join.³⁸

In late 1901 the *Worker* called attention to this activity among wharf labourers, as well as to the signs of incipient organisation among Chillagoe and Ravenswood miners. It felt justified in claiming that "a wave of unionism is spreading all over the state".³⁹ However, the claim was premature for unionism in North Queensland. Union membership and morale in fact remained at a low level; moreover, as the full force of the recession made itself felt in rising unemployment, the newly formed unions suffered severe setbacks. The experience of the Bowen WWU was typical of many: after forming a union in May 1902 the wharfies demanded preference of employment and increased pay rates, but there was sufficient non-union labour available to handle shipping without delay and employers responded by refusing to engage union men at all.⁴⁰ The Cairns branch also succumbed to victimization of its members by the shipping companies: membership fell from 177 in November 1901 to 48 in August 1906. The union's bargaining strength in the intervening years was aptly described by one of the officials:

...it remained during this period inept and useless for bettering the industrial conditions of waterside workers....The local managers of the shipping companies at that time regarded the union with amusement, if not straight out contempt...⁴¹

Turner comments that "unemployment was falling, wages were rising, the unions were reforming; with the new century, a spirit of aggressive

38 *Ibid.*, 4 April 1902; *Worker*, 17 May 1902.

39 *Worker*, 19 October 1901.

40 *Ibid.*, 2 August 1902; *Port Denison Times*, 26 July 1902, 2 August 1902; *North Queensland Herald*, 19 July 1902.

41 *Worker*, 17 October 1908.

confidence was in the air."⁴² This is not, however, an accurate description of the state of the labour movement in North Queensland. It is true that the worker was probably better off than he had been during the worst of the depression years. There was also some spasmodic union activity. However, the recession and unemployment caused by drought on the one hand, and the problems in the mining industry, on the other, forced a postponement of the union renaissance for at least four years.

However, North Queensland labour could take some comfort from the relative success of the Labor Party in state and federal politics. In the 1890s the wave of disastrous strikes and an anti-union stance on the part of governments had accelerated the trend towards political action. It was then reinforced by the stifling of early attempts at industrial activity at the beginning of the century. Emphasis on political activity in these years was accordingly in large measure due to feelings of resignation and disappointment which permeated a moribund union movement.

In the Queensland elections of 1899, Labor won about 30% of the vote and 21 parliamentary seats. Its success in North Queensland was confined mainly to mining and pastoral electorates; a pattern of electoral behaviour which reflected not only the social composition but also the state of industrial labour organisation in each electorate. Support for Labor was strongest in those districts with substantial and well-organized working-class populations such as miners, shearers and pastoral workers. These groups traditionally voted Labor. On the other hand, in the coastal towns Labor polled reasonably, yet was only rarely successful - largely because of the very low level of political and industrial organisation among workers in urban centres and the strength of commercial and non-Labor interests. Thus the coastal sugar

42 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.16. P.G. Macarthy questions Turner's description also for New South Wales and Victoria. See 'Labor and the Living Wage' and 'Wages in Australia'. Macarthy argues that, in the years 1900-1907, unemployment was high; real wages fell or remained static; unionism's collective bargaining strength remained weak. Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, p.138, supports Macarthy's argument.

districts of the North surrounding the largest towns, notwithstanding their relatively large numbers of urban and rural workers, were usually safe non-Labor strongholds for the commercial and sugar-growing interests. In 1899, however, the journalist Tom Givens won Cairns for Labor on his third try. He was joined in parliament by northern miners William Maxwell (Burke), W.H. Browne (Croydon) and George Jackson (Kennedy); John Dunsford and Anderson Dawson represented the dual constituency of Charters Towers, and Charles McDonald the electorate of Flinders.⁴³

If success in state politics proved a tonic to Labor supporters, the victory of Labor in the two North Queensland federal electorates in 1901 was an inspiration (see Table I). Charles McDonald's win in the mining and pastoral Kennedy electorate was expected; but Fred

43 Thomas Givens (1864-1928), born Tipperary, Ireland, arrived Queensland 1882; sugar and bush worker, miner Eidsvold, Charters Towers. Proprietor *Cairns Daily Times* 1899-1902; MLA Cairns 1899-1902. Senator 1903-1928, President of Senate 1913-1926. Nationalist after 1916.

William Maxwell (1867-1921), born New Zealand, arrived Queensland 1886; goldminer Croydon, later oil company executive, New Caledonia; MLA Burke 1899-1909. Kidstonite after 1905.

William Henry Browne (1846-1904), born London, seaman, 1866 miner NSW, Tas., 1868 to North Queensland goldfields; president and secretary Croydon miners' union. Alderman Croydon; MLA Croydon 1893-1904. Leader opposition, chairman Parliamentary Labor Party [PLP] 1900-1903; Minister Mines and Public Instruction, 1903-1904.

George Jackson (1856-1938), born Manchester, England, arrived Rockhampton 1871; battery operator, mine-owner, Cape River, Ravenswood. President Ravenswood miners' union; MLA Kennedy 1893-1909. Minister Mines and Public Works 1904-1909. Kidstonite after 1905.

John Henry Dunsford (1855-1905), born Victoria, 1873 to North Queensland; 1876 goldmining Madagascar, South Africa; 1878 newsagent Charters Towers; MLA Charters Towers 1893-1905.

Andrew (Anderson) Dawson (1863-1910), born Rockhampton, miner Charters Towers; president miners' union; vice-president ALF, editor *Charters Towers Eagle* 1893-1900; MLA Charters Towers 1893-1901. Leader PLP 1899, Premier 1-7 December 1899. Senator 1901-1906, federal Minister Defence April-August 1904.

Charles McDonald (1861-1925), born Melbourne, watchmaker; 1888 arrived Charters Towers. President ALF 1890-92; MLA Flinders 1893-1901. MHR Kennedy 1902-1925, Speaker, House of Representatives, 1910-1913, 1914-1917.

Adapted from D.B. Waterson, *A Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929* (Canberra, 1972).

Bamford's⁴⁴ win in Herbert, where there was a large component of sugar growers, came as something of a surprise. It was partly a reflection of growing agitation for the exclusion of non-white labour from Australia. In North Queensland, this agitation was directed mainly against the employment of Pacific Islanders and Asians in the sugar industry. Bamford appealed to labour and liberals alike as the "White Australia" advocate.⁴⁵ In parliament and caucus he soon established a reputation as a spokesman on matters of race and immigration.⁴⁶

TABLE I

1901 Federal Election

Herbert	Bamford (Labor) 3,353 [51.64%] Brown (Protectionist) 3,140 [48.36%]
Kennedy	McDonald (Labor) 3,936 [62.86%] Barnett (Free Trade) 2,325 [37.13%] ⁴⁷

While union activity remained quiescent, labour hopes were pinned more and more on political action. At the 1902 state elections, Labor's share of the vote rose 5% to 35%; its representation increased by 4 to 24 members. In the North, Tom Givens was defeated, but the party was

44 Frederick William Bamford (1849-1934), born Dubbo, N.S.W.; 1886 inspector of bridges construction Cairns-Mareeba railway. 1888 editor *Bowen Observer* and hotel proprietor, Bowen. Alderman 1896-1899, mayor, Bowen. 1898. MHR Herbert 1901-1925. Minister for Home and Territories 1916-1917. Nationalist after 1916.

45 *Port Denison Times*, 26 March 1901, 19 November 1903. Cf. Murphy, 'Queensland', p.154: "In common with liberals, radicals and representatives of the working-class, the Labor party in Queensland maintained a strong attachment to a White Australia. This was not in all cases as radically racist in essence as that of [William] Lane, but most members seemed to place racial reasons at least on an equal plane with economic and social reasons in their desire to exclude non-Europeans. This was undoubtedly strongest in North Queensland, where Labor itself was strongest politically."

46 *Caucus Minutes 1901-1949: minutes of the meetings of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party* vol. 1 1901-1917, (ed.), P. Weller (Melbourne, 1975) [hereafter *Caucus Minutes*], 23 April 1902, p.84; 24 June 1903, p.100; 26 May 1909, p.228.

47 C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives 1901-1964* (Canberra, 1973), p.8.

consoled by regaining the mining seat of Woothakata and by winning Bowen for the first time.⁴⁸ Apart from Bowen, the electoral pattern of Labor support remained the same: Labor polled well in the north-west pastoral and mining districts, but failed to challenge the domination of the conservatives in most of the coastal towns and sugar districts.

The state Labor Party's moderate platform of practical reforms attracted more support at the following elections. The conservative Philp government collapsed in September 1903 and a coalition government of the liberal followers of Arthur Morgan⁴⁹ and the Labor Party took its place. The conservatives were discredited for alleged economic mismanagement, and in the elections of August 1904 electoral support for the new alliance was unequivocal: the coalition won 70% of the vote, Labor itself gaining 34 of the 72 parliamentary seats. For the first time, Labor made substantial inroads into the conservative strongholds along the North Queensland coast, taking Bowen, Cairns and one Mackay constituency. A feature of the election was the number of uncontested seats ceded to Labor; in the North alone, these included Bowen, Burke, Croydon, Flinders and Kennedy.⁵⁰

Heightened political activity at the local level contributed to this considerable electoral achievement, and in turn was stimulated by it. In contrast to the weak state of trade unionism, Labor Party branches were flourishing by 1904. In fact, this very emphasis on political activity to some extent retarded the growth of industrial labour organisation. The renowned British union leader and socialist, Tom Mann, commented disparagingly on this state of affairs, which he saw at first hand in 1905:

48 C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly 1890-1964* (Canberra, 1974), pp.38-45.

49 Arthur Morgan (1856-1916), born Warwick, Q; journalist, 1878 proprietor and editor Warwick *Argus*; mayor, Warwick 1886-1889. MLA Warwick 1887-1896, 1898-1906. Speaker LA 1899-1901; premier 1903-1906. MLC 1906-1916, knighted 1907; Lieut.-Gov. Queensland, 1908-1916. Cf. Crook, 'The Crucible - Labour in Coalition', pp.56-73.

50 C.A. Hughes, 'Labour in the electorates', in Murphy, *et.al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p.79.

It was one of those spells when practically all attention had been given to organization for the parliamentary campaign, leaving no energy - because no disposition - to deal with industrial affairs.⁵¹

Interviewed after visiting various mining districts and provincial towns in North and Central Queensland, Mann described the union movement as being in "the worst state of any civilized country". He went on to say:

I found industrial organization at a very low ebb; so low in some places as to have no existence, and in others but a feeble occasional wash as from a receding tide.⁵²

"A Major Renaissance of Unionism": 1905-1907.

Mann's disparaging assessment was made early in 1905, but by the end of that year trade unionism in North Queensland was showing signs of revival. The breaking of the drought, if not the only reason, was the major one. In the next few years the labour movement in North Queensland was regenerated, and developed the structural forms which it was to retain, with some modifications, for the next fifty years.

By 1905 labour leaders in Queensland had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of the Parliamentary Labor Party [PLP]. Accordingly, as trade unions began to recuperate or re-form, extra-parliamentary Labor and trade union officials such as Hinchcliffe and

51 *Tom Mann's Memoirs* (London, 1923), pp.190-191. Mann (1856-1941), leader London dockers' strike, 1889; founded International Federation of Transport Workers; visited Australia and New Zealand 1902-1909, founded Victorian Socialist Party 1905 and Socialist Federation of Transport Workers 1907. Propagandist for syndicalism and industrial unionism in Britain after 1910. Member Communist Party from 1921.

52 *Worker*, 27 May 1905.

Reid⁵³ turned their attention more to the industrial side of the movement. This sustained effort on the part of union officials and party leaders to nurture unions and unionism increased markedly when moderate Labor parliamentarians led by Kidston⁵⁴ increasingly took on the political hue of their cautious liberal partners in the coalition government. Of course there had always been a strong element of Labor thought firmly opposed to collaboration with non-Labor parties. In Queensland in 1903, however, the ascendancy of the political over the industrial wing, epitomizing a widely-felt need for urgent reforms, had forced the more militant section into reluctant acceptance of the "Lib-Lab" coalition. Nevertheless the fear remained that Labor principles might be compromised in the deal with the liberals - a fear only temporarily allayed when long-sought reforms were actually initiated by the government. In particular, labour was grateful for the *Shearers' and Sugar Workers' Accommodation Act* and the *Adult Suffrage Act*, the latter providing a more democratic electoral system which included the franchise for women and itinerant workers, as well as abolition of the property vote.

Dissension grew, however, as the Kidstonite section of the Labor Party determinedly maintained its piecemeal and moderate approach to government; rank and file supporters grew disillusioned with its

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- 53 Albert Hinchcliffe (1860-1935), born England; arrived Queensland 1866; printer's compositor, founder and secretary Queensland Typographical Association 1884-1912; secretary ALF 1890-1913; secretary Brisbane Trades and Labor Council, 1887-1889; member Central Political Executive [CPE] 1892-94, 1895-96, 1898-1916; secretary CPE 1892-94, 1896-1910. Manager *Worker* 1890-1917, *Australian Worker* (Sydney) 1917-1925. MLC 1904-1922.
- Matthew Reid (1856-1947), born Ayrshire, Scotland, carpenter, tailor; arrived Queensland 1880. MLA (Toowong) 1893-1896; MLA (Enoggera) 1899-1902; secretary Parliamentary Labor Party 1893-1896, member CPE 1892-94, 1895-96, 1901-09; president CPE 1905-09. Senator, Nationalist Party, 1917-1935.
- 54 William Kidston (1894-1919), born Falkirk, Scotland, ironmoulder; arrived Sydney 1882, bookseller, Rockhampton 1883. MLA (Rockhampton) 1896-1911; Treasurer and Postmaster-General, 1-7 December 1899; Treasurer 1903-1906; Premier and Treasurer 1906-1907; Premier 1908-1911. Labor to 1907, then own party, merged with Philp's conservatives, 1908. See Murphy, 'William Kidston', *passim*.

failure to introduce more far-reaching measures and with the personal failure of Kidston to acknowledge the authority of the extra-parliamentary organisation. At the Labor-in-Politics convention in March 1907 the split in the party finally became official: all but 14 of the 34 Labor parliamentarians followed Kidston out of the party. In North Queensland, of the 10 Labor members returned in 1904 only John Burrows⁵⁵ of Charters Towers remained loyal to the Central Political Executive [CPE] and the "straight Labor" interest. The defections brought defeat to the Parliamentary Labor Party rump at the 1907 elections. Labor's vote dropped to 25%. The party won only 18 seats overall; in the North, it took only 3 seats - Flinders, Carpentaria and Herbert. Bowen, Burke, Cairns, Kennedy and Woothakata were retained by sitting Kidstonite defectors, and Cook by a Morganite liberal. Conservatives won all seats in the double-member constituencies of Charters Towers, Townsville and Mackay. For Labor, only Flinders was successfully held by John May⁵⁶ though the party was comforted somewhat by picking up the new seats of Carpentaria and Herbert.⁵⁷

To the CPE and the ALF there was only one way up from this electoral nadir: to return to Labor's trade union base. The reviving union movement would give Labor a firmer foundation on which to organise political support. Political organisation was necessary and indispensable, reasoned men like Hinchcliffe, Reid and the new parliamentary leader Bowman,⁵⁸ but it had to be founded on a widely and

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- 55 John Burrows (1864-1925), born Clunes, Victoria, arrived Charters Towers 1876; 1888-1892 compositor and journalist; 1893-1901 proprietor Charters Towers *Eagle*; 1907-1913 editor, 1913 manager *Trinity Times*, Cairns. 1920 court reporter, Brisbane. MLA Charters Towers 1901-1907.
- 56 John May (1844-1917), born Kent, England; commercial agent Germany, London, U.S.A. Arrived Sydney 1887, stationhand and bushworker NSW and Queensland. 1902-7 secretary Hughenden branch AWU. MLA Flinders 1907-1917.
- 57 Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.59-65.
- 58 David Bowman (1860-1916), born Bendigo, Victoria, bootmaker, arrived Brisbane 1888, bootmaking business; director *Worker*, organiser Bootmakers' Union 1889-91; ALF organiser 1891-1893, Amalgamated Workers' Union organiser 1894-99. Vice-president AWU 1913-16; CPE member, 1892-94, 1895-96, 1898-1916, president CPE 1909-12; MLA Warrego 1899-1902; Fortitude Valley, 1904-16.

closely organised trade union movement. Only by these means would the Labor Party once again attain a position of power. In his annual report to the ALF in May 1907 Hinchcliffe repeated the criticism made by Mann two years previously:

The immediate outlook for the Union Movement is not as encouraging as it ought to be. There is a want of that keen interest and enthusiasm which characterised its history in the early nineties, and if there could be a revival of that spirit and enthusiasm it would be well for the advancement of our objects. The tendency to neglect industrial organisation and rely too much upon purely political effort has been the mistake of the past.⁵⁹

"Back to the unions" became the slogan of the ALF in its effort to revitalise the labour movement in Queensland.⁶⁰

Thus the spread of unionism in Queensland, already underway as a result of the improving economic conditions, gathered greater momentum as a result of disenchantment with Labor's performance in coalition. Industrial organisation was seen as the panacea. In 1906 the *Worker* exhorted the rebirth of trade unions throughout the state: "Bring the workers into the unions and all else we desire will follow."⁶¹

In North Queensland, as we have seen, earlier attempts at union organisation among miners and wharfies had proved entirely barren. The history of trade union activity between 1901 and 1905 was one of practically uniform failure. Even in Queensland as a whole, official statistics suggesting a period of slow growth (see Table II) very likely concealed a situation of actual stagnation, perhaps even decline; certainly, as the state registrar of trade unions was quick to point

59 *Minutes, Annual Reports and Balance Sheets of the Longreach, Hughenden and Charleville Branches of the AWU 1 June 1906-31 May 1907, together with ALF and "Worker" Reports and Balance Sheets for 1906* (Brisbane, 1907), p.29 [hereafter *ALF Reports*] [E154/47, RSSS-ANUA.]

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Worker*, 28 April 1906.

out, they gave an incomplete and unreliable impression of the strength of unionism. In the first place, many unions were so poorly organised that they did not even bother to register. In the second place, membership figures were often based on misleading estimates: during the drought years of 1901-04, for example, the names of unemployed members who had fallen into arrears with their dues still appeared on the rolls.⁶² Thus in 1903 membership figures were slightly higher than those of the previous year, though the registrar suspected an actual decrease: "The year was probably the worst on record in these Societies", he stated.⁶³

TABLE II

Trade Union Growth in Queensland, 1901-1910

Year	No. of Trade Unions	Membership
1901	16	4,590
1902	16	4,582
1903	17	4,901
1904	18	5,278
1905	19	6,297
1906	20	8,332
1907	25	11,236
1908	32	14,980
1909	33	16,423
1910	37	18,522

A much more useful index of the relative strength of unionism was the financial state of the registered unions.⁶⁴ In contrast to membership figures, union finances take a turn for the better only from 1905 and became healthy only in 1907 (see Table III):

62 *QPP* 1902, I, p.819; 1903, II, p.63; 1904-5, II, p.105; 1905, I, p.621.

63 *Ibid.*, 1904-5, II, p.63; cf. *ibid.*, 1906, I, p.1669: "Membership returns are unreliable, but show an apparent increase. Several unions, however, evidently refrained from striking off members who were in arrears, and consequently the figures given are of doubtful value; in fact, one of the largest, in reply to a question, stated that no record was kept of those who left."

64 Cf. Macarthy, 'Labor and the Living Wage', p.70.

TABLE III

Queensland Trade Union Finances, 1901-1910

Year	Income (£'s)	Expenditure (£'s)
1901	4,831	4,175
1902	4,891	5,088
1903	4,814	6,031
1904	4,730	4,857
1905	5,021	5,105
1906	7,159	7,195
1907	11,458	9,674
1908	15,679	12,730
1909	16,867	16,256
1910	25,790	25,428

Having regard both to the actual financial condition of the registered trade unions and the unreliability of membership figures, it would appear that union revival began only on a gradual and uncertain scale in 1905, then continued slowly until 1907 when there was a dramatic upturn. This conclusion appears the more warranted since membership statistics became reasonably accurate for the first time only in 1907:

The membership returns appear to be more reliable and in proportion to receipts, and there has undoubtedly been a very considerable increase of late....There is evidently much more complete organisation than was the case a few years since.⁶⁵

The union and Labor leaders who made the concerted effort to expand unionism set out to provide the labour movement both with a more socialistic ideology than that of the Kidstonite apostates and, by relying heavily on union support, with a more independent organisation. As John Armstrong has argued, the extent of the revival after 1906 was "directly related to the needs of the militant leaders of the labour movement who provided the co-ordinating force and ideological zeal necessary to change the developing union revival into a major renaissance of unionism".⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *QPP* second session 1908, II, p.223.

⁶⁶ J.B. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement 1900-1922*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1975, pp.43ff., 74.

Armstrong criticises historians such as J.B. Dalton and R.J. Sullivan who have attributed the trade union growth in Queensland in the first decade of the twentieth century solely to economic recovery. According to their interpretation, union growth occurred as workers strove to share in the increasing prosperity by joining existing unions or organising new ones.⁶⁷ Armstrong, however, attaches more importance to the influence of political developments, to the federation movement among other unions, and to the influence of the federal arbitration system which encouraged workers to organise and seek court awards:

To ascribe the slow but steady revival of unionism in Queensland to the breaking of the drought is too simplistic....The basic premise that with more prosperous times there came a spontaneous revival in unionism ignores the steady uninterrupted growth of unionism from 1902, at least two years before the drought ended, to 1906 and does not account for the dramatic increase after 1906.⁶⁸

Armstrong's thesis contains the most complete, rational and plausible account of the factors affecting union growth in Queensland. It is an account with which this study largely agrees. However, Armstrong's acceptance of trade union statistics published by the government throws some doubt on his argument regarding the *beginnings* of union growth. Having regard to the financial state of the registered unions and the registrar's repeated warnings about the unreliability of membership figures, which Armstrong ignores, it would seem unwise to speak of "the steady uninterrupted growth of unionism from 1902". Sustained growth began only in 1905, expanding tremendously from 1907, as Armstrong correctly argues, in part as a response to the political crisis in the Labor Party. It must also be emphasised that union growth on a Queensland-wide scale from 1905 onwards did unquestionably occur within a context of economic recovery. This is not to suggest that union expansion was related exclusively to the

67 e.g. J.B. Dalton, 'An Interpretative Survey: the Queensland Labour Movement', in Murphy *et.al.*, *Prelude to Power*, The A.L.F., p.237.

68 Armstrong, *op.cit.*, p.41.

upturn in the business cycle but simply that, with increasing job opportunities, declining unemployment and greater government expenditure on public works, the climate for trade union activity greatly improved.⁶⁹

One of the most significant developments in the great spread of unionism in Queensland was the resurgence of western pastoral workers in the largest union in the state, the Amalgamated Workers' Union, which in 1904 merged with the nation-wide Australian Workers' Union [AWU]. Here, union growth *was* related directly to the return of economic prosperity. As the wool industry recovered from the drought, the union took advantage of the employment opportunities thereby offered to increase its membership and win concessions from employers. The growth of the Queensland AWU after 1906, however, was also influenced by the extension of a federal arbitration award to Queensland.

In North Queensland specifically, the new unionism appeared in 1905. Labour awoke from its quiescent state for the first time since activity on the waterfront petered out in 1901-1902. Those who led the awakening were sugar industry employees. Industrial organisation among cane-cutters, field labourers and mill hands owed little to the breaking of the drought, which perhaps lends force to the argument stressing factors other than the trade cycle as determinants of union growth. The formation of sugar workers' unions in North Queensland was the result simply of the enormous influx of white labour into the industry for the first time.

69 Cf. Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, p.138; Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.160; see also S.K. Proctor, 'Brisbane Unionism and the Plumbers' Union 1904-1915', in Murphy *et.al.*, *Prelude to Power*, pp.141-143. Proctor anticipates some of Armstrong's arguments regarding the relative importance of economic revival as a factor in union growth.

CHAPTER II

ORGANISING SUGAR WORKERS, 1904-1910

*The Transition to White Labour*¹

Throughout the late nineteenth century the Australian labour movement campaigned vigorously against the presence of non-European workers in the country. In Queensland the main complaint was against the continued employment of Pacific Islanders in the sugar industry. Many workers simply believed that "kanaka" labour denied white Australians an avenue of employment, but an influential section of Queensland labour, led by William Lane, loudly denounced Islanders, Asians and all non-Europeans as a threat to both racial and moral purity.² Agitation against the employers and supporters of coloured labour apparently succeeded in 1885 when the Queensland government declared that no more indentured Islanders would be introduced after 1890. In response to a financial crisis in the sugar industry, however, in 1892 the government reversed its decision, allowing an indefinite extension of time for the labour trade. During the 1890s the question of coloured labour was a prominent, bitterly-fought issue in Queensland politics.³

The struggle against Pacific Island labour illustrated a recurrent phenomenon of the trade union movement in North Queensland: brotherhood and solidarity were the exclusive preserve of a homogeneous group of white, predominantly British workers. Most unions strictly forbade membership to Asians and Melanesians. The attempts by indentured black sugar workers to form unions or to rebel against harsh

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- 1 A substantially revised version of a major portion of this chapter was published in 1978: D. Hunt, 'Exclusivism and Unionism: Europeans in the Queensland Sugar Industry 1900-1910', in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds), *Who Are Our Enemies?: racism and the working class in Australia* (Canberra, 1978), pp.80-95.
 - 2 See A. Markus, 'White Australia? Socialists and Anarchists', *Arena*, 32-33 (1973), pp.80-84.
 - 3 W.J. Harris, 'The Struggle against Pacific Island Labour, 1868-1902', *Labour History*, 15 (November 1968), pp.40-48. P.M. Mercer, *An Analysis of Racial Attitudes towards Melanesians expressed in the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Newspapers, 1877-92*, B.A. Hons thesis, James Cook University, 1972.

conditions were either ridiculed or elicited as proof of the unruliness of the kanakas and therefore as further justification for their exclusion from Queensland.⁴ The ethnocentrism of the labour movement in the North was also evident - though perhaps not as virulent - in its attitude towards immigrants from southern Europe.⁵ The movement to phase Pacific Island labour out of the Queensland sugar industry gathered force with the federation of the Australian colonies and the subsequent federal election in 1901. The Labor election campaign in Queensland concentrated on the issue to the virtual exclusion of all others, and the party's success in winning the seats of Wide Bay and Herbert, which included most of the state's sugar-growing areas, was interpreted as a conclusive victory over the coloured labour interests. "All the Sugar Districts have gone for a White Australia", rejoiced the *Worker*.⁶ In fact, the new parliament was dominated by supporters of the policy from all states and from all political parties. As the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, subsequently claimed:

When I said that a stop must be put to the importation and the employment of Pacific Islanders in Australia, I expressed the overwhelming public opinion, not only of the rest of Australia, but of Queensland, as demonstrated. . .by the result of the Federal elections.⁷

Consequently, against the protests of the sugar growers and the state government, in June 1901 federal legislation was introduced prohibiting the importation of Pacific Islanders after 31 March 1904.

4 *Worker*, 25 March 1898; Harris, *op.cit.*, pp.41-43; A. Markus, 'Divided We Fall: the Chinese and the Melbourne Furniture Trade Union, 1870-1900', *Labour History*, 26 (May 1974), pp.7-8.

5 Italians and Greeks were often grouped with "kanakas, Japs and Chows" as undesirable elements: *Worker*, 24 August 1901, 10 July 1913.

6 *Ibid.*, 6 April 1901. The *Bulletin*, 27 April 1901, published a verse entitled "White at the Core - Queensland Federal Election Verdict, 1901", cited by R. Evans, K. Saunders and K. Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: race relations in colonial Queensland* (Sydney, 1975), p.341.

7 Barton to Philp, 12 November 1901, *CPP 1901-1902*, II, p.865.

It also provided for the deportation of practically all Islanders in the country after 31 December 1906.⁸ The sugar industry was to be shielded from probable adverse economic effects by a protective duty of £6 per ton on imported sugar. To encourage the use of white labour, an excise of £3 per ton was to be placed on Australian-produced sugar, of which £2 would be refunded as a bounty on sugar manufactured from cane that was grown and harvested solely by Europeans.⁹ The federal legislation thus notified a major social and demographic change in North Queensland: whites were to replace blacks in the difficult and menial tasks of cultivating, harvesting and crushing sugar cane, and the workers upon whom the industry had relied for nearly forty years were to be repatriated.

The magnitude of the proposed transformation is indicated by the fact that in 1901 there were 9327 Pacific Islanders in Queensland, of whom 7521 worked in the sugar fields. The remainder of the non-European labour comprised some 800 Japanese, about 600 Chinese, 180 Indians and Cinghalese, and 270 members of "other Alien races", including Javanese and Malays. An indeterminate number of Europeans - possibly as many as 3000 during the crushing season - also worked in the sugar industry.¹⁰ Pacific Islanders were excluded

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- 8 Initially only those Islanders born in Australia, or continuously resident there since 1879, were exempted from deportation. In 1906 grounds for exemption were made more liberal; in particular, by allowing many family groups to remain. P. Corris, "'White Australia' in Action: the repatriation of Pacific Islanders from Queensland", *Historical Studies*, 58 (April 1972), pp.237-250.
- 9 A. Birch, 'The Implementation of the White Australia Policy in the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1901-1912', *AJPH*, 11, 2 (August 1965), pp.198-210.
- 10 'Census of Queensland, 31 March 1901', *QPP* 1902, II, pp.1256-1289. The number of Europeans employed in the industry is difficult to estimate. The census category of "sugar planter (worker)" included both growers and labourers (*ibid.*, p.937). Further, there were separate enumerations of "farmers" and "sugar-mill owners, etc.", which probably included some cane growers, and also of "agricultural labourers" and "labourers, undefined", which may include sugar workers (*ibid.*, pp.1250-1254). The problem is compounded because the census was not taken in the harvest season, thereby omitting itinerant European cane cutters and mill hands. Birch, *op.cit.*, p.203 stated that there were 2152 Europeans employed in the industry in 1901, but this figure appears to be calculated merely by subtracting the number of coloured "sugar-planters (workers)" from the state total.

by state legislation from employment outside agriculture; but many of the Asians worked in sugar mills. The mills also employed most of the Europeans, who were mainly, though not exclusively, in skilled and supervisory positions. With the breaking-up of the large plantations and the growth of small farms in the 1890s, the nature of the workforce had been slightly modified: some sugar growers, unable to afford Islanders on a permanent basis, planted and cultivated the cane by themselves and contracted European and Asian cane cutters in the harvest season. This tendency was more pronounced in the southern sugar districts where the trend to small farms was most developed. In general, however, where the white labourer was employed in field work, it was "chiefly in such that is performed by use of implements, and which commands a higher rate of compensation and from which the Pacific Islander is debarred".¹¹

The transition from a black, indentured and permanent sugar industry work force to a white, free and seasonal one did not go unresisted. On the contrary, sugar-growing interests and conservative politicians strenuously opposed the legislation. They argued on the one hand that the industry could not afford economically to relinquish black labour; on the other hand there would be insufficient white labour available to replace the kanaka. In a report commissioned by the Commonwealth government in 1901, the director of the Queensland sugar experiment stations, Dr Maxwell, argued that white men could never satisfactorily replace non-European labour in the sugar industry north of Townsville. He cited an array of figures showing that the Pacific Island labourer worked longer hours; lost fewer days through sickness and cost less to employ than white workers. This situation was more marked as one went further north. Maxwell reported that in the Cairns district white mill employees were unreliable, unstable, and had a lower "personal endurance"; this was, he suggested, due to climatic conditions

11 'A Report upon some factors relating to the Cane Sugar Industry of Australia by Walter Maxwell, Director of the Sugar Experiment Stations of Queensland', *CPP* 1901-1902, II, p.967.

rendering continuous labour by the white man, even in the kinds of work reserved to him by the Polynesian Labourers' Act, a great physical strain and difficulty; while for the classes of work, such as trashing and cutting cane, which are done by the lower types of labour, the white man is practically unfit.¹²

Some of the opponents of the federal legislation argued that the threat to white Australian society came from Chinese and Indians, rather than Melanesians:

The Kanakas are a bulwark against the Asiatic settlement of North Queensland. . . . [We] see no danger to the purity of the race from the presence of Kanakas, but have observed serious evil influence morally and socially, from the presence of Asiatics.¹³

Others continued to question the efficacy of white labour in the tropics, reinforcing economic persuasions with the argument that menial labour was beneath the dignity of the white man. Many believed that there was a natural Anglo-Saxon repugnance for manual labour in a hot climate. In 1901, a Bundaberg cane grower, W.C. Miller, thus conceded that there was some field work, such as that involving horses, suitable for the white man, and that sugar mills also required a considerable European staff - "tradesmen and intelligent labourers". The most strenuous and menial work such as cutting, trashing and loading sugar cane, however, had in all tropical countries "always been done by low-class labour; and nearly always coloured, as the lowest and cheapest available".¹⁴ According to Miller:

12 *Ibid.*, p.974. Maxwell compared the situation of white and black labour in the northern districts to that of horses and mules: the one hand greater powers of initiative and organisation, but in certain climatic conditions the other was more economical and had more stamina.

13 *North Queensland Herald*, 9 November 1901.

14 Paper read by W.C. Miller at the annual agricultural conference, Bundaberg, July 1901, in *Mackay Mercury*, 25 July 1901.

Before a white man undertakes to make his livelihood by such labour, it were well for him to stop and consider that in doing so he is entering into competition with the lowest labour in the world. . . .Happily, but few white men fall so low in their social status as labourers as to covet such work for themselves, but nothing is too low for the political blatherskite to claim.¹⁵

In fact, there was a dilemma inherent in the labour movement's approach to the entire question of coloured labour. On the one hand, labour spokesmen decried the continued employment of kanakas, extolling the capacity of manly white Australians to work satisfactorily in the sugar fields: "the stamina of the white race is far and away superior to the black, and its power of adapting itself to new climates and conditions is greater immeasurably than that of the Pacific Island savage".¹⁶ On the other hand, the actual worker on the spot was very often loth^a to do work usually done by blacks.¹⁷ A northern Labor newspaper acknowledged the difficulty:

. . .Admittedly the application of white labour to an industry hitherto run by servile races is a more or less touchy matter, or at least one that requires careful and sympathetic handling.¹⁸

However, in refusing "black man's work" the North Queensland worker was not motivated solely by a concern for social status: he also rejected the very low wages, poor working conditions and accommodation that went with it. Thus the Mackay labour agent reported that itinerant workers refused the contract cane-cutting work available: "they wanted day wages or they would go further -

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Worker*, 10 January 1901.

17 See Hunt, 'Exclusivism and Unionism', pp.85-90.

18 *Trinity Times* (Cairns), cited in *Worker*, 7 January 1905.

and they went".¹⁹ In parliament, the Labor member for the sugar-growing district of Bundaberg echoed the feelings of many labourers about work in the sugar mills:

When you are asked to sleep in a place which has been empty for six or nine months, swarming with vermin, with stagnant water lying around the building and close to the kanaka quarters, I don't think any decent man would stay longer than he could possibly help.²⁰

For the first four years under the federal legislation, Pacific Island labour continued as the main manpower source for the sugar industry; more lucrative and congenial employment in the mining and pastoral industries and racial prejudice against sugar work discouraged the white worker. Many growers also used the period of grace up to 1906 to make the most of coloured labour: they made no attempt to employ whites despite the £2 bounty incentive. The proportion of cane cultivated by white labour increased from only 15% to 25% between 1902 and 1905, with most of that in southern districts.²¹ Alan Birch has noted that most growers retained their kanaka labour for as long as possible,²² a state of affairs which some contemporary observers did not relish:

There are numbers of strong, willing and able young men "humping bluey" through the Proserpine, in search of employment. Work which should fall to the lot of our white brother is being done by the Kanaka, while the life and the bone and the sinew of our state is being sucked out and sapped by hunger and exposure.²³

19 *QPP* 1902, I, p.1185b.

20 *QPD* XCV (24 August 1905), p.504.

21 *QPP* 1903, II, p.656; *ibid.*, 1906, II, p.26.

22 A. Birch, 'The Organisation and Economics of Pacific Island Labour in the Australian Sugar Industry, 1863-1906', *Business Archives and History*, VI, 1 (February 1966), p.72.

23 *Port Denison Times*, 24 May 1902.

Yet in the early years of the transition from black to white labour, complaints about the quality of white workers were common. There were several grounds for the complaint: many labourers were unaccustomed to the arduous physical demands of the work; there was a high labour turnover; alcohol was a great problem.²⁴ Such difficulties prompted a large meeting of Cairns cane-growers early in 1905 to declare that "unless some relief is found by way of a supply of reliable labour whereby the sugar cane crops can be cultivated and harvested, the industry in this district cannot successfully continue after the year 1906".²⁵ The workers themselves reacted angrily to the doubts expressed about their suitability:

. . .the pernicious and foul sneer is often hurled at us - "Is the white man reliable?" I have often got a bit ruffled in temper at this question coming up so often from sensible farmers who know right well that if conditions are fair and good the white workers will indeed be found reliable.²⁶

Nevertheless, growers clung steadfastly to their customary black workforce, particularly in areas north of Townsville. In 1904 the proportions of cane grown exclusively by white labour were:

Cairns-Ingham	7% cane harvested
Ayr-Mackay	43% cane harvested
Wide Bay-Burnett	31% cane harvested
Maroochy-Moreton	87% cane harvested ²⁷

In 1905, following Maxwell's recommendations that an increase in the excise and bounty would hasten the change to white labour, the federal government increased the excise payable to £4 per ton and

24 *Mackay Mercury*, 6 April 1905; Morgan, *Our First Half-Century*, p.94. On the prevalence of drunkenness: 'Report of the Royal Commission on Sugar Industry Labour', *QPP* 1906, II, p.732 and 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', *CPP* 1912, III, pp.1050, 1090, 1096-1097.

25 *Mackay Mercury*, 29 April 1905.

26 *Worker*, 24 March 1906.

27 *QPP* 1905, II, p.492.

the bounty to £3 per ton.²⁸ Thereafter, the proportion of white employees increased markedly; the excise discouraged the use of black labour and growers found that under the bounty system they could afford to pay higher wages as cane prices rose. Living conditions for workers also improved: *The Shearers' and Sugar Workers' Accommodation Act of 1905* prescribed minimum standards of food and accommodation for white workers in both field and mill labour.²⁹ Thus more whites appeared ready to take on the work as the number of Pacific Islanders in Queensland declined. In 1907, the year in which the majority of Islanders was deported, the percentages of white-grown cane were:

Cairns-Ingham	78%
Ayr-Mackay	85%
Wide Bay-Burnett	96%
Maroochy-Moreton	95% ³⁰

Gradually, an acclimatised, experienced and homogeneous workforce emerged, and with it the quality of labour also improved. By 1910, the federal legislation had largely achieved its dual purpose - "removal of the Kanaka" and "causing the sugar industry to be carried on by white labour". Initial difficulties in securing sufficient labour had been overcome. For five or six months each year the sugar districts were regularly inundated by thousands of itinerant workers both from southern states and from pastoral and mining areas of Queensland.³¹

28 *CPP* 1905, II, pp.1363-1367.

29 One significant provision of this Act forbade "Asiatics" from housing or eating with Europeans. *QPD* XCV (24 August 1905), pp.667-669.

30 *QPP* second session 1908, III, p.155.

31 'Report by Dr Maxwell upon the Conditions of the Sugar Industry of Australia, 6 January 1910', *CPP* 1912, III, pp.1021-1033. Cf. Morgan, *Our First Half-Century*, p.148; Mackay report, in the 'Report of the Director of Labour, year ended 30 June 1908', *QPP* second session 1908, II, p.320: ". . .the class of men arriving in this district is a great improvement upon former years".; 'Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for 1908-1909', *QPP* second session 1909, II, p.288: ". . .there is a general feeling that, especially in the sugar districts, the class of men offering their services is improving each year".

Perhaps the most fortunate - if fortuitous - circumstance in the transition from black to white labour was the decline in the mining industry in the first decade of the century. An acclimatised labour force was thereby released into sugar industry employment at the very time it was needed. Dwindling gold production at Croydon, Ravenswood and Charters Towers forced many miners to seek temporary or seasonal employment on the coast as field hands, cane cutters and mill workers. After 1905, miners in ever-increasing numbers both from the goldfields and industrial metal fields moved down to the coast during the winter and spring months to work in the mills and fields. For some years many divided their time between the cane and the mining districts. Gradually, however, a large number of ex-miners settled in the sugar districts, some with sugar farms of their own, others retaining their status as "wages men".³²

The possibilities for union organisation thus created by the entry of a mass of white labourers into the northern sugar industry were quickly recognised by Brisbane trade union officials. ALF secretary Albert Hinchcliffe toured the northern coastal districts in 1903, asking local labour representatives at Cairns and Mackay about the prospect of enrolling sugar workers in unions. His report, however, was not encouraging:

32 Some indication of the prevalence of inter-industry migration from mining to sugar is given in the 'Report of the Royal Commission on Sugar Industry Labour', *QPP* 1906, II, pp. 515, 716, 737. Cf. 'Report of the Under-Secretary for Mines for 1901', *QPP* 1902, I, p.1188; The official in charge of government relief attributed a "remarkable decrease" of unemployed and under-employed in Charters Towers in 1906 to the growing demand for white labour in the coastal canefields, *QPP* 1907, II, p.358. Cf. 'Report of the Director of Labour, year ended 30 June 1908', *QPP* second session 1908, II, p.319.

At both places the prevailing opinion is that the time is not opportune for taking up this important work for two reasons: first the men who are on the fields are penniless and have no hope of getting anything to do until the end of the present or beginning of the next month and second that it will take some time before the white labour system will be sufficiently well in hand to enable effective organising work to be carried out.³³

Local Unionism and the ASWU

As the proportion of white workers in the sugar industry rose the prospects for unionism grew brighter; at the same time, the unionisation of migratory, seasonal workers was neither spontaneous nor easy. Their very itinerancy was a major obstacle to organisation. Since many workers moved on after only a few weeks and most left the district entirely at the end of each season, trade unions found few stable foundations on which to build. Cane workers were interested mainly in picking up a cheque in as short as possible a time to tide them over the slack. They were slow to be convinced of the need for organisation. Propaganda to this end therefore aimed as much at reassuring employers as at persuading employees:

Unionism among the cane workers is especially wanted in North Queensland, . . . In this, unionism will help the employer by binding the men together in common interest, in causing them to take an intelligent concern in the work, and in enabling certain rules to be formed and made compulsory on the whole body of workers. Every good union, while it demands certain conditions from the employers, offers certain assurances in return.³⁴

33 Hinchcliffe to ALF executive, 19 June 1903. [M50/06 R555-ANUA].

34 *Trinity Times*, cited in *Worker*, 7 January 1905.

There were thus considerable difficulties in organising seasonal sugar workers. On the other hand, the very nature of inter-industry migration among North Queensland rural workers itself proved a formative influence in the establishment of the first sugar unions in 1905. It is impossible to say how many AWU members were itinerant workers, but there is ample evidence that many sugar workers were AWU members from western Queensland. Hinchcliffe certainly hoped that the entry of pastoral workers and miners, already accustomed to unionism, would aid the organisation of sugar workers: "Many white men from pastoral and other districts are coming into the sugar districts, and especially to Mackay, and in the near future there will be a good field for a capable organiser".³⁵

The first sugar workers' unions were formed in Mackay and Cairns at about the same time, following some agitation during the 1904 crushing season. Many of the first organisers and officials were AWU men.³⁶ Charles O'Malley, a former shearer, was the organiser of the Mackay union. Asking why sugar workers should not have an organisation "the same as the gallant, staunch, Western union men",³⁷ O'Malley nonetheless found his task far from easy. After one month only twenty-five men had spent the ten shillings necessary for a union ticket. He remained confident, however, predicting a membership of four or five hundred by the end of the 1905 season and exhorting the sugar workers "to show that they have at last awoken from their long slumber of indifference, by uniting and co-operating to better their present scandalous industrial conditions".³⁸

35 Hinchcliffe to ALF, 19 June 1903, *loc.cit.* The *Worker*, 24 June 1905, reported a good opportunity of forming a strong union among Mulgrave sugar workers, "especially as there are a lot of Western workers in the district". See also *QPD XCV* (24 August 1905), p.487.

36 *Worker*, 13 October 1906.

37 *Ibid.*, 10 June 1905.

38 *Ibid.*, 24 June 1905.

Working conditions in fact were far from good. Long hours at arduous tasks - both field and mill employees worked a 12-hour day - together with the most rudimentary of eating and sleeping arrangements were major grievances. Accordingly, after a season in a Mackay sugar mill, a Townsville waterside worker considered the "sugar squeezers":

the most apathetic lot regarding union principles that I have had the misfortune to be thrown amongst. They want organising badly, for if ever there were hells on earth they are to be found at the Mackay sugar mills.³⁹

Government officials provided only slightly more moderate descriptions of the accommodation provided for mill hands:

. . .it was found that the conditions of living of the white workmen were not such as to induce white men to remain permanently in the service of the mills. . .hardly any practical distinction has been exercised between coloured labour and white labour so far as the living conditions were concerned. . . .The bunk or sleeping provisions for the workmen were of the crudest character, and in many cases were seed beds of vermin and disease. The bunks were fixtures, and the bedding used was dry grass, cane tops or begass [*sic*] from the mill, and in no cases were mattresses provided.⁴⁰

Execrable accommodation, poor working conditions, and wages considerably lower than those paid in other industries formed the basis of collective action by the workers. Gradually the trade unions grew in membership. From only 162 members at the end of the 1905 harvest season, the Mackay sugar workers' union increased to 214 in 1906, 384 in 1907, and 460 members in 1908.⁴¹ Branches were

39 *Worker*, 10 June 1905.

40 'Report upon the Government Central Sugar Mills', *QPP* 1905, II, pp.631-632; Cf. *QPD* XCV (29 August 1905), p.522; John Mann (Cairns), read a letter from a Mossman mill-worker describing unsavoury and unhygienic sanitary arrangements.

41 *Worker*, 22 August 1908.

also established at Mossman, Nelson, Geraldton (Innisfail), the Burdekin, Ingham and Proserpine in the North, as well as Bundaberg and Childers in the South.⁴² After 1907 growth was particularly rapid owing to active encouragement by the ALF and the Labor Party;⁴³ in that year the various local sugar unions formed a loose federation called the Australian Sugar Workers' Union [ASWU] with headquarters in Mackay. The ASWU issued uniform tickets, but each branch retained autonomy - which subsequently was jealously guarded - in the fields of finance and industrial relations. Although the ASWU's authority and financial reserves thus remained limited, by 1909 its membership had grown to more than 2000.⁴⁴

The aims and objectives of the infant sugar workers' unions were moderate and practical. No reference was made to high-minded socialist principles. For example, the first platform of the Mackay SWU read simply:

1. Equitable wage in all branches of the industry.
2. White labour only to be employed in the industry.
3. Shorter working day.
4. Better accommodation and food.⁴⁵

By 1909 official ASWU policy was no more aggressive even if it had become more articulate:

42 *Worker*, 20 July 1907, 3 August 1907, 28 September 1907.

43 e.g. *ALF Report for 1907* (Brisbane, 1908), p.29.

44 *Worker*, 12 March 1910; *Pioneer* (Mackay), 26 February 1910.

45 *Worker*, 26 August 1905. O'Malley commented, *loc.cit.*: "Mild, you may say, but not unjust. Fair play is all we ask and mean to get".

The objects of this Union shall be to counteract influences that may be working against the members' interests, to initiate reforms, to enable members to fill their positions with interest to themselves and advantage to their employers. To obviate as far as possible the necessity of strikes. To promote a good understanding between employers and employees, the better regulation of their relations, and the settlement of all disputes between them by a Board of Conciliation, Arbitration, or other lawful means. . .this Union is not formed to work in antagonism to their employers - on the contrary, they are to show by their ability and strict attention to their work that their being members of this Union is a guarantee to mill owners, managers, or farmers, that they are consulting their own interest by employing them.⁴⁶

Politically, the ASWU followed the ALF line during and after the 1905-1907 split in the Labor Party. The union viewed political action as an important adjunct to industrial action in the struggle to secure reforms and ameliorate conditions.⁴⁷ However, this did not mean that sugar workers were affirming their faith in socialism, for to most - as indeed to the majority in the Labor Party itself - the term conveyed little more than a vague and ill-defined notion of social democracy.

A noteworthy feature of ASWU policy was its belief in some form of compulsory arbitration as the principal means of redressing grievances. In this the ASWU was in general agreement with most of the labour movement in Australia. The disastrous experience of strikes and depression in the 1890s had convinced unionists of the need for government industrial tribunals and government enforcement of awards. Despite growth in both the numbers and membership of unions in the first few years of the twentieth century, trade union

46 *Rules of the Australian Sugar Workers' Union* (Brisbane, 1909). [Mitchell Library].

47 E.g. *Pioneer*, 25 June 1910: "The Australian Sugar Workers' Union attempts to follow the lead of the A.W.U. Bracketing political with industrial agitation, exercising its influence where'er its organiser operates, its power for real live unity cannot be questioned".

industrial strength remained relatively weak and the chances of successful direct action therefore small. As Macarthy remarked, "By 1906, large sections of the labour movement appear to have been finally convinced of the advantage of industrial regulation, or at least preferred it to (the futility of) direct action".⁴⁸

From the beginning of the century, labour in North Queensland had affirmed its desire for the introduction of compulsory arbitration legislation.⁴⁹ It was a major plank of the Labor Party platform. Candidates assured the public that "if there was anything more than another [sic] that Labor and Labor leaders hated it was strikes".⁵⁰ In 1904 the creation of a federal government industrial arbitration court provided an impetus to union growth since only employees of registered organisations could approach it. The federal legislation thus encouraged agitation in Queensland for a state industrial court: unionists saw it as a means of achieving a larger share of the community cake at a time when trade unions were weak. The campaign was clearly linked with that trust which the labour movement then reposed in political action:

Arbitration will take from us, it is said, and truly, the power to cease work. But while we have the power to vote that will not matter a great deal. We can hit Capitalism harder at the ballot box than we ever did on strike.⁵¹

Labour hoped that compulsory arbitration legislation would be introduced by the Liberal-Labor coalition of 1903-1907; when the government failed to implement the promised reform, workers were

48 Macarthy, 'Labor and the Living Wage', p.78. Cf. Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.141. R.A. Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales: a history of their Union 1860-1960* (Melbourne, 1963), p.110.

49 E.g. Petition seeking a Compulsory Arbitration Bill from 358 Cairns Workers, *QVP* 1900, I, p.1045; cf. *QPD* LXXXIV, p.572, 681; LXXXV, pp.1450, 1660ff.

50 *North Queensland Herald*, 27 February 1899.

51 *Worker*, 26 March 1904.

bitterly disappointed. Indeed this was a major factor in growing unionist disillusionment with their parliamentary representation under Kidston. One disaffected sugar union official complained that

At the close of last season I told the mill hands there was a hope of a change for the better, in the event of a Conciliation and Compulsory Arbitration Act coming in force. But alas, we are doomed to disappointment through political shufflers. We expected better things from men who pretended to be loyal to the fundamental principles of our Platform. . . .If ever a compulsory Arbitration law was needed it is in the sugar mills and meat works of Queensland. The long and trying hours of toil are crushing and brutal, driving men to vice and dissipation. And we wonder at the crime and drunkenness of this so-called enlightened age!⁵²

Faith in arbitration as a panacea for industrial evil was a result of the unionists' perception of their weak position in the process of industrial bargaining. Financially insecure and imperfectly organised, they were largely ignored by employers. At the very least, it was thought that arbitration would provide a means of enforcing negotiation. In later years a section of the labour movement became disenchanted with the results of the industrial court system, and "arbitration *versus* direct action" became a fundamental issue of internecine conflict in the North Queensland labour movement. For the time being, however, incomplete unionisation and hostility on the part of employers and government made a belief in arbitration almost universal amongst workers.

In the minds of many European workers, wages and working conditions in the sugar industry continued to be associated with those provided for the Pacific Islanders. Accordingly, one way to build up union strength - and thereby to improve conditions - was to hasten the exclusion of all non-Europeans from the industry. This

⁵² *Worker*, 25 August 1906.

was a prime demand of the infant SWUs. With the growth of a substantial supply of European labour, pressure against the remaining coloured labour became even more intense. There was no question of union brotherhood embracing non-European workers. The ASWU was unequivocal upon this matter:

The union shall be open to all white wage earners engaged in the sugar industry. . . .No Asiatics, South Sea Islanders, Kaffirs, Chinese or other coloured aliens shall be admitted to membership.⁵³

This hostility was also extended to non-whites employed outside the sugar industry. Thus the Ingham SWU in 1907 notified local publicans that union members would refuse to patronise their hotels while they continued to employ coloured aliens.⁵⁴ A few years later, a Mackay unionist voiced the same sentiments:

. . .only two hotels in Victoria Street employ a white cook. What d'ye call that? Scabbing on the girls I calls it, and it's only sugar workers who allow it. Look at the North and Western chaps! D'ye think they'd part' in a bar where John or Jappy is in the kitchen? Not much. I know a chap turned teetotal 'count o' that. An' we stand them in the kitchen, which our money pays for, what's the difference working WITH THEM. Why don't ye's be consistent? Y'gas about a White Australia, while Jappy is laughing at ye in the kitchen. . .get them to get a wriggle on and shift every slanteye and pig tail from the hotels they frequent and give the girls a chance to earn the same wages.⁵⁵

53 *Rules of the ASWU, loc.cit.* Many Australian trade unions had similar rules, e.g. those of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union, cited in R.N. Ebbels (ed.), *The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907* (Sydney, 1960), pp.114-115; and those of the Amalgamated Workers' Union, cited in W.G. Spence, *Australia's Awakening: thirty years in the life of an Australian Agitator* (Sydney, 1909), p.49.

54 *Worker*, 3 August 1907.

55 *Pioneer*, 12 February 1910.

The intention of Australian workers was clear: only whites were privileged to labour under the North Queensland sun. A wide section of the community agreed with them.

The question of non-white - and more especially "non-British" - labour was one which would always perplex industrial relations in the sugar industry. Although by 1911 only 6% of Australia's sugar was produced by coloured labour,⁵⁶ unionists and Laborites continued to complain of the numbers of non-whites employed in the mills and fields.⁵⁷ Most of the coloured labour was employed north of Townsville and included Japanese, Ceylonese and Indians ("the planters alleging that white men will not, unless at prohibitory wages, face the muggy heat of the cane-brake").⁵⁸

The ALF and the Beginnings of Militancy, 1907-1909

In response to incipient agitation among their employees, growers and millers also began to organise themselves in industrial combinations. In most districts, farmers were already grouped in local farmers' associations. Meetings of district delegates took place, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company [CSR] lent its support, and in 1907 sugar industry employers united in the Australian Sugar Producers' Association [ASPA]. The organisation included both canegrowers and millers, which became a source of frequent internal conflict. Many farmers complained that the ASPA

56 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', CPP 1912, III, p.1061.

57 Cf. *Worker*, 28 January 1911; *ibid.*, 22 April 1911: "Undoubtedly the Fatman dearly loves his nigger, and he is not particular as to his breed. Chinese, Japs, Kanakas, Malays, Hindoos, any old sort, are employed wherever possible in the sugar mills of the North"; *ibid.*, 10 July 1913: "In travelling from Lucinda to Ingham I noticed that the tramway is maintained by Japs and Chinamen. . . .At Macnade sugar mill there is a lot of Asiatic labour employed. . ." Cf. Miles Ferricks, in QPD CV (13 July 1910), p.21.

58 Morgan, *Our First Half-Century*, p.94; 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', CPP 1912, III, p.1061.

represented millers' interests exclusively and that it was dominated by the CSR. Certainly the CSR - a milling and refining colossus - was a major contributor to ASPA finances yet was only indirectly concerned with growing. Growers also accused millers of paying unfair prices for cane and thus making unfair profit at the farmers' expense.⁵⁹

Sugar growers and millers were united, however, in their hostility to the infant sugar unions. The historian of the Johnstone River district, Dorothy Jones, remarked that

The rising militancy of unionism found at first not only little sympathy in the Johnstone but a climate absolutely alien for its growth. The small farmer, so recently a worker himself, might have been expected to show some concession to demands for higher wages even if the traditional enemies, the big planters, could not have been expected to provide a background of encouragement. The small cane farmer, who despite his grizzles preferred the Kanaka, was inundated with Europeans walking in looking for work and, suddenly finding himself an employer who had to husband every penny was himself hypercritical of the quality of labour available. He wanted a fair day's work for his money even if he himself as a worker would not have considered it a fair day's pay.⁶⁰

In the initial stages of unionism among sugar workers, mills and growers largely ignored the demands of the still feeble workers' organisations. Indeed the first slight improvement in wages and conditions owed little to collective action by the workers themselves: as prices rose under the protective tariff and bounty system, growers

59 The Royal Commission of 1912 detailed the conflict of interests between millers and farmers and lent some credence to the farmers' complaints, *ibid.*, pp.1056-1057. Cf. J.M. Bertei, Non-Labour Politics in North Queensland 1907-1929, B.A. Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1960.

60 D. Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: the story of Innisfail and the Johnstone Shire* (Cairns, 1973), p.262.

found not only that they could afford to pay higher wages but that they frequently had to in order to attract sufficient labour. Living conditions were also gradually improved by legislative means, for example, the *Shearers and Sugar Workers Accommodation Act*. In 1907 the federal department of trade and customs fixed a minimum wage for field labourers of 22/6 per week and found in the slack season and 25/- per week and found during harvesting as one of the conditions for payment of the bounty to growers.⁶¹

Nonetheless, some betterment in wages and conditions was unquestionably due to union action. For instance, in July 1906 field workers at Fairymead plantation, Bundaberg, successfully struck for an increase in wages, prompting one northern newspaper to comment drily:

This demand for an increased wage at the moment when the farmers have made all arrangements for the year's harvest illustrates one phase of what was meant in the Kanaka labor controversy by the word "reliable".⁶²

Predictably, union officials claimed that any improvement in wages or conditions was a direct result of their efforts. However, a more realistic assessment of the efficacy of union agitation was made by John Swan, a Mackay organiser:

I am sorry the union had not been able to secure the 30/- per week minimum in the mills, for the men at the cane-carriers and the firemen well deserve that wage. It is hard work, and the long 12 hour shifts make the men restless and discontented. . . .I often pity the old

61 *CPP* 1912, III, p.1023. Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, p.32.

62 *North Queensland Herald*, 23 July 1906; *Worker*, 21 July 1906.

men who generally take on the work at the carriers, for they are scandalously sweated, only getting 22/6 a week, and 2/6 bonus if they remain the season. This is a rise of 2/6 on last year's rates at most of the mills, but the wage is low for the class of work.⁶³

Industrial disputes in the sugar industry became more frequent as the labour force became more homogeneous and as unionism grew year by year. A revitalised labour movement began to take more interest in the cause of the sugar workers who lacked in wages and conditions what workers in other industries regarded as basic. In Queensland generally the industrial labour movement recovered and expanded after 1907; with it, the organisation of sugar workers also became more complete.

A major stimulus was that of the ALF, which, after a period of industrial enervation, again set about fostering the spread of unionism. Most active in that role was the new ALF general organiser, Charles Collins, whose tasks specifically included the organisation of northern sugar workers.⁶⁴ Collins' tour of North Queensland in 1908 was fairly successful. He enthusiastically threw himself into the work of addressing meetings, forming union branches and - not least importantly in ALF strategy - espousing the cause of the Labor Party and enrolling workers on the state electoral rolls.⁶⁵ In districts, however, Collins found the sugar workers poorly organised, working long hours for meagre reward. At the Mulgrave mill south of Cairns, some men worked over 65 hours a week for 22/6. To Collins, it was the lowest-paid labour which was the hardest to organise:

63 *Worker*, 25 August 1906.

64 ALF executive minutes, 6 April 1908. [M50/06 (c), RSSS-ANUA].
Charles Collins (1867-1936); born England, arrived Maryborough 1883; sugar worker, 1884-86 Gympie miner; 1886 Kimberley goldfield; 1890-91 labourer Vic.; 1908 general organiser ALF; 1912-15 AWU organiser N.Q. MLA Burke 1909-1912, Bowen 1915-1936.

65 *Worker*, 20 June 1908; *ALF Report for 1908* (Brisbane, 1909), p.15.

It seems to me that it will take nearly a revolution to wake these people up. The same old feeling - afraid of the boss; or, in other words, afraid that they might lose their chains.⁶⁶

Sugar workers became more militant as a result of the improved organisation which followed ALF support. Provoked, too, by the continuance of unsatisfactory working conditions despite evidence of a general economic upturn, they came to the third annual conference of the ASWU in Mackay (January 1909) in a determined mood. As at previous conferences, they eschewed consideration of theoretical or even political aims, concentrating on matters of internal organisation and industrial policy. The key decision was a unanimous resolution calling for a universal 8-hour day in mill and field and for a minimum wage of 30/- per week and keep⁶⁷ - this at a time when mill and field workers worked a 10 or 12-hour day and when the minimum wage rate for many workers remained as low as 22/6 per week.⁶⁸

To employers, the ASWU demands were completely unreasonable, even ludicrous. Far from ignoring the union, however, as they had done in the past, employers now became increasingly concerned with the "labour problem". As the director of the state government central sugar mills had perceived a short time before, this was an "almost dominating concern". The nub of the problem was that:

. . . On the one hand, capital is stating that the present rate of compensation to labour is greater than the industry can bear. On the other hand labour is still protesting that it is under-paid.⁶⁹

66 *Worker*, 24 October 1908.

67 *Ibid.*, 6 February 1909.

68 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', *CPP* 1912, III, pp.1052-1053.

69 *QPP* second session 1908, III, p.213.

The 1909 crushing season was hampered in all districts by disputes, stoppages and strikes - tests of strength which usually resulted in victories for the employer and left a residue of bitterness and recrimination on both sides. Only the first clash of the season resulted in victory for the unionists. In late July, firemen at Mossman mill struck for a wage increase of 5/- per week - from 36/- to 41/- and found - and for an end-of-season bonus of 5/-, instead of 2/6, per week. They were soon joined by other millworkers as well as some cane cutters. Sugar growers reacted indignantly:

There were over 700 tons of cane in trucks in the mill yard or lying cut in the fields, and it was felt that whether the men's demands were fair or not they had acted in a very unreasonable way by striking at such short notice, and without even consulting the executive of their own union.⁷⁰

Farmers began to man the mill in place of the striking workers, a compromise was eventually found through negotiation: the firemen won their 5/- increase but the end-of-season bonus remained at 2/6 per week. The union victory was also tempered by an agreement that the workers would not ask for further concessions for the rest of that year.⁷¹

The ASWU made no further gains in 1909. Whenever a dispute led to a strike the union was defeated. Thus a widespread stoppage at the CSR-owned Goondi mill on the Johnstone River made no headway at all after a month-long strike; despite extensive support from mill hands and cane cutters the strike collapsed in the face of determined resistance from the mill management and farmers. The CSR company simply engaged indentured labour from the south to replace those on strike and gave direct financial assistance to the

70 *Australian Sugar Journal* (official organ of the ASPA), 9 September 1909.

71 *North Queensland Herald*, 7 August 1909; *Worker*, 21 August 1909.

local farmers' association.⁷² The lesson was clear for most sugar workers: the existing state of union organisation was inadequate to combat the resolute opposition of millers and cane growers. Strike action as a means of bettering conditions was likely to fail.

Underlying the sugar industry disputes of 1909 was a large range of accumulated, sometimes unspoken, grievances. The Goondi strike was ostensibly over employee wage demands, but the local Labor member of parliament pointed to a more basic reason for the dispute when he claimed that "had the inspection work under the *Shearers and Sugar Workers Accommodation Act* been properly carried out in the North. . .the unfortunate strike which occurred at Goondi about a fortnight before the last general election would have been averted".⁷³

Thus the specific demands put forward by unions were also symptoms of a more general resentment towards employers which sugar workers felt. If strike action aimed at remedying a particular grievance was unsuccessful, this resentment only compounded the failure, leaving a legacy of bitterness. In the pages of the *Worker* union organisers catalogued the list of workers' grievances, each an element of the wider resentment: one-sided contracts which workers were forced to sign; unsanitary accommodation and poor food (said to cause numerous cases of "scrub fever" and typhoid); unspecified meal break times in the mills; the continued presence of "large numbers of Japs, Chows and other coloured aliens".⁷⁴ In late 1909,

72 *Worker*, 25 September, 2 October, 9 October, 16 October 1909; *North Queensland Herald*, 9 October, 16 October 1909. The CSR donated £100 to the Johnstone River cane-growers' association shortly after the strike was over; *ibid.*, 23 October 1909.

73 QPD CIV (16 December 1909), p.1002.

74 *Worker*, 11 December 1909, 1 January 1910; *Pioneer*, 11 June 1910.

Edward Theodore,⁷⁵ a talented young mining unionist from Chillagoe and recently elected to state parliament, also voiced concern for the plight of the sugar workers:

. . .in the sugar mills 12 hours a day were being worked, and there was no exception in the mills managed by the Government. It was 12 hours incessant work. . .and the men had only half an hour off in the middle of the day, and they had to get their meals at any time they could. The wages paid were very low. . . .⁷⁶

Grievances of this kind among rank and file sugar industry employees produced many conflicts in the 1910 crushing season and a major strike in 1911. In the meantime, the militancy evident during 1909 seemed only to make employers more intransigent. Complaints about the quality of labour available again became frequent. The Mackay correspondent of the *Australian Sugar Journal* hoped that a cane-harvesting machine would be perfected before long,

as the labour problem is still with us, and with a record crop, and the mills fully taxed to cope with it, what more could be desired to afford the ubiquitous labour agitator the longed for opportunity to strike, and thus rule the situation.⁷⁷

75 Edward Granville Theodore (1884-1950), born Pt Adelaide, S.A.: 1902-06 miner Broken Hill; 1907 Vulcan tin mine, Irvinebank N.Q.; organiser AWA 1907-09; president AWU, Q. 1913-16; vice-president ALF 1910-13. CPE-QCE member, 1912-13, 1917-25. MLA Woothakata 1909-12, Chillagoe 1912-25; MHR Dalley (NSW) 1927-31. Deputy-leader PLP, 1912-19, leader 1919-25. Treasurer and secretary public works, 1915-19. Premier, 1919-25. Deputy-leader federal PLP, 1929-31; federal treasurer 1929-30, 1931.

76 QPD CIV (7 December 1909), p.729.

77 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 9 December 1909, cf. *ibid.*, 3 November 1910; "Much of the labour is most unreliable, and some of the mills have to keep their pay clerk pretty fully occupied in making up time and paying off men who after a shift or two are determined to 'snatch it' - contemplating with feverish relish a pilgrimage to the nearest 'pub', where the cheque can be knocked down, and a long thirst quenched".

The unsuccessful forays onto the industrial battlefield in 1909 had a disheartening effect upon the unions. The mood of the February 1910 conference of the ASWU was notably chastened in comparison with that of the 1909 conference. Many branches had suffered losses in membership; all reported disappointing finances. In fact the branches hardest hit were those which had taken strike action in 1909. The Mossman branch had been forced to dispense with the services of its paid organiser;⁷⁸ Mackay had lost 150 members and began the new year with a financial deficit of £18;⁷⁹ the Geraldton (Innisfail) branch was said to have been "crippled through the late strike".⁸⁰ Despite rank and file bitterness, the conference delegates could not even agree on the motions of basic importance. For example, one motion called upon members not to work alongside non-unionists; another proposed a universal levy to assist strikers in particular districts.⁸¹ But both failed. The disappointment of union officials was also evident in their criticism of the ALF, the central labour body in Queensland. The ALF had not supported the Geraldton branch during the Goondi strike, though shortly afterwards it had voted £50 to striking Newcastle waterside workers.⁸²

Of course the spirit of dejection at the 1910 conference merely highlighted, if only in a negative way, the unacceptable conditions in the industry which again produced strikes at harvest-time later in the year. Unionists in the Cairns district refused to sign an agreement demanded by employers. The introduction of strike-breakers from Sydney and Tasmania brought feelings to fever pitch; the tension flared when Charles O'Malley, secretary of the Mossman SWU, was arrested and charged with conspiring to dynamite the local mill machinery. O'Malley and four other strike leaders charged with incendiarism were subsequently acquitted, but unionists

78 *Worker*, 2 April 1910.

79 *Pioneer*, 15 January 1910.

80 *Fourth Annual Conference of the Australian Sugar Workers' Union opened at Bundaberg, Thursday, February 24, 1910* (Brisbane, 1910), [Mitchell Library].

81 *Ibid.*, pp.3, 7.

82 *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

suspected that their leaders had been arrested and held in custody with the sold object of disorganising the rank and file. If so, the ruse was successful, for the strike collapsed.⁸³

In Mackay, too, the ASWU confronted sugar millers with a series of demands for better food, an 8-hour day and 30/- per week minimum wage, but the employers flatly refused. A strike was mooted by some of the more militant workers, but to no avail; crushing proceeded smoothly.⁸⁴

Thus by 1910 the ASWU had largely failed to protect its members. The *Worker* offered a plausible explanation for its failure:

The old style of a union for the sugar workers alone has been tried and found wanting. Perhaps some good might have been done if the whole of the workers in that industry had been members of one union, but they were not. In each district a separate union was formed, which lasted for the season - and died. The following year it was resurrected to again die at the end of the season, just at the very time it should have been most militant. The new season's agreements and prices are fixed in the slack. With no union in existence there was no one to watch the interests of the workers, and consequently the cockys and the mill directors had their own way and fixed prices which suited them.⁸⁵

To some sections of the sugar workers, the solution seemed to lie within the jurisdiction of the federal arbitration court: the 1910 ASWU conference resolved to bring a case to the court, "all agreeing that the sooner it was brought about the better".⁸⁶ To the Mackay Labor newspaper, the *Pioneer*, it was the conference's "most important decision. . .nothing but good could accrue to the sugar industry as a whole and the wage earners in particular by getting a decision

83 *Worker*, 4 June, 25 June, 23 July, 20 August, 24 September 1910.

84 *Ibid.*, 18 June 1910.

85 *Ibid.*, 12 November 1910.

86 *Fourth Annual Conference of the ASWU*, p.2.

from the highest industrial tribunal in the land".⁸⁷ Others, however, perhaps more aware of the practical difficulties involved in submitting the industry to federal arbitration or sceptical of the efficacy of such a body, found it unnecessary to look so far afield for a solution. To these people the underlying problem was the jealousy and self-centred autonomy of the local branches. Local officials resented any interference by the ASWU executive and doggedly retained their authority over industrial policy and finance. Another major problem was the seasonal nature of the work, which meant that employees were difficult to organise: most southern itinerants were interested only in making a substantial cheque as quickly as possible during the four or five months that they spent in the North; miners and pastoral workers were often members of other unions and regarded work in the sugar mills and fields as stop-gap employment to provide them with the wherewithal to move on to the next town or to the nearest hotel; in some cases, even union officials left the district at the end of the crushing season. Finally, the employer still had the power to withhold employment from known union activists. As Gordon Childe said:

The attempt to organise such migrants into sectional unions was almost impossible and profoundly uneconomical. They had no fixed trade, but were cane cutters one month, miners another, and shearers or navvies in a third.⁸⁸

All these problems pointed to the need for a wider, composite organisation which indeed was the trend of labour thinking throughout Australia. Progress could be achieved through more centralised control and through the backing of a more securely organised union. It happened that there was such a union more than willing to welcome sugar workers into its ranks - the experienced, confident, successful and ambitious Amalgamated Workers' Association of North Queensland.

87 *Pioneer*, 12 March 1910.

88 V.G. Childe, *How Labour Governs: a study of workers' representation in Australia* (2nd edition, Melbourne, 1964. First published 1923), p.87.



Plate 1. Pacific Island sugar workers, Freshwater (Cairns), n.d., early twentieth century.
[History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland.]

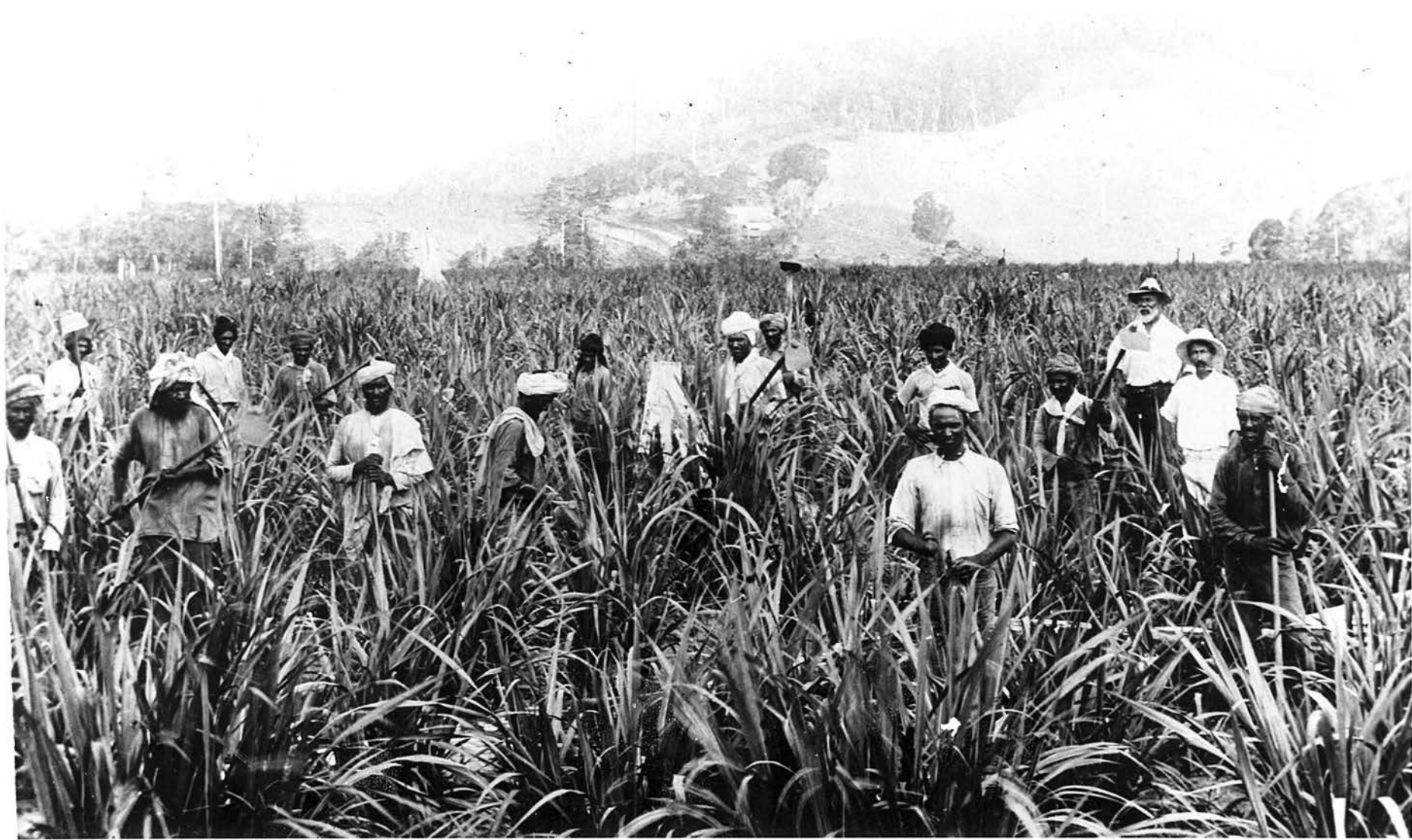


Plate 2. Indian sugar field workers, Mossman, n.d., early twentieth century.
[History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland.]



Plate 3. Transporting cut cane, Mossman, n.d., early twentieth century.
[History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland.]



Plate 4. Mossman sugar mill, n.d. [History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland.]



Plate 5. Mule-drawn cane planter, Mossman, n.d., early twentieth century.
[History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland.]

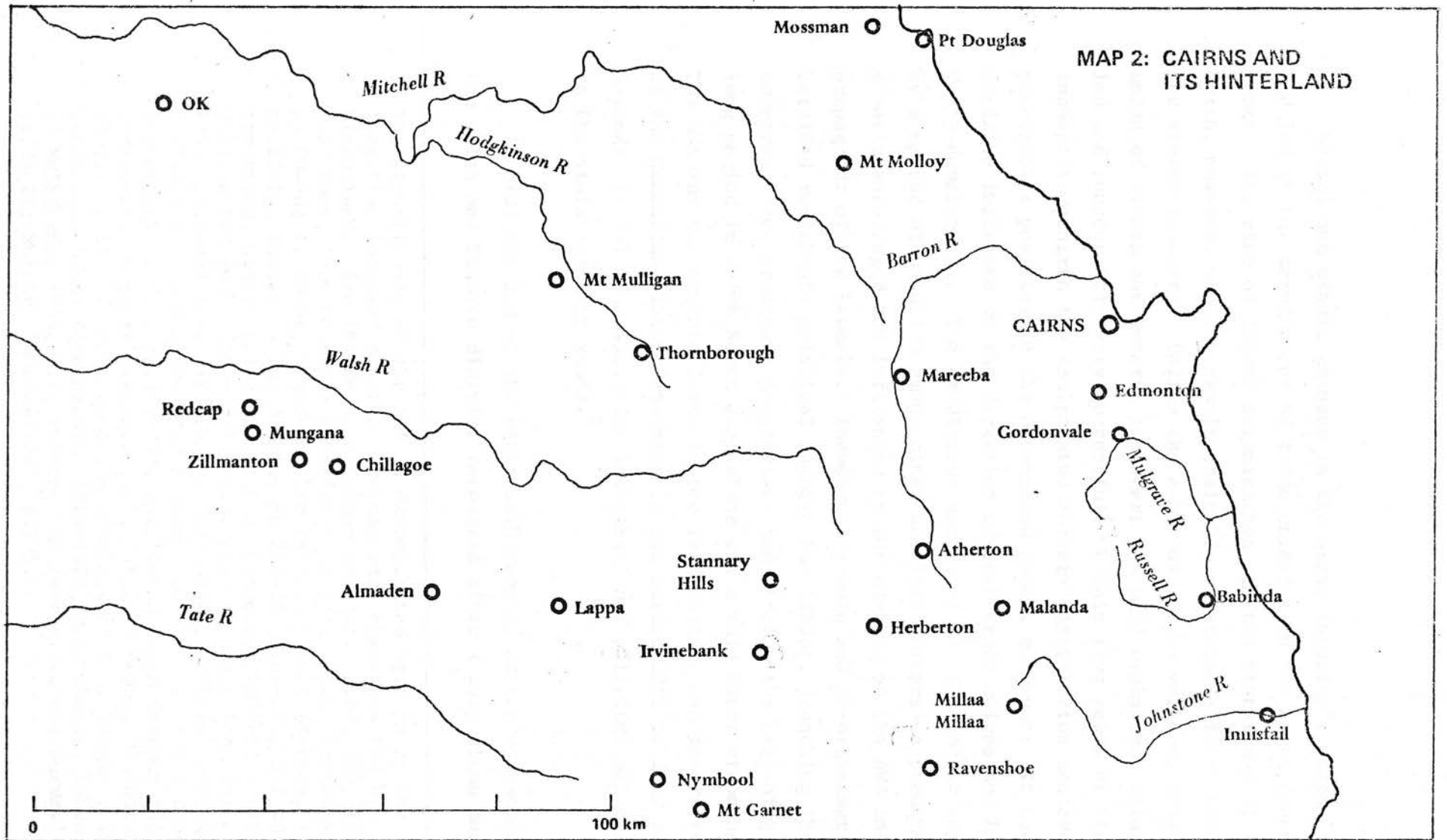


DINNER_CAMP OF CANE CUTTERS.

Plate 6. Dinner camp of cane cutters, Mackay, c.1910. [Oxley Library]

CHAPTER III

"THE FIGHTING AWA", 1907-1910



Social and ethnic changes in the sugar industry's labour force had led to the development of trade unionism on the North Queensland coast. The rise of labour organisation in the hinterland of the far North, however, was the result basically of economic fluctuations in the mining industry. Unlike the embryonic sugar workers' unions, the union of miners and general labourers was well organised, astutely led and consequently very successful. Within five years of its inauspicious birth the Amalgamated Workers' Association achieved a pre-eminent position in the Queensland labour movement; it had a decisive influence on the direction of both trade unions and Labor Party development. The prodigious ascent of the AWA was accompanied by a spread of unionism among other northern workers - a phenomenon greatly encouraged and influenced by the example of the AWA and the propaganda of its leaders. Industrial growth and re-organisation heralded remarkable political success for labour, launching the careers of two prominent politicians and marking the beginning of a long period in which North Queensland was a safe Labor stronghold. The AWA was the dynamic force in the rejuvenation and restructuring of the Queensland labour movement in the period 1907 to 1910 and beyond: it laid the basis for industrial and political alignments in the state for many years.¹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century mining operations in the Walsh and Tinaroo district recovered after a long slump and

1 The significance of the AWA is demonstrated perhaps by the attention focussed on it by contemporary observers and by historians. See Childe, *How Labour Governs*, pp.87, 100, 113-117; E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: reminiscences of a rebel* (Brisbane, 1939), pp.88-96; I. Young, *Theodore: his life and times* (Sydney, 1971), pp.11-18; Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, pp.242-243, 260-262, 391-404; Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, ch.5; K.H. Kennedy, *The Public Life of William McCormack 1907-1932*, Ph.D. thesis, James Cook University, 1973, pp.1-68; 'The Rise of the Amalgamated Workers' Association', *Lectures in North Queensland History*, 2nd series (James Cook University, 1975), pp.189-213, and 'Theodore, McCormack and the Amalgamated Workers' Association', *Labour History*, 33 (November 1977), pp.14-28. Note also the comments of E.M. Higgins, *The Queensland Labor Governments, 1915-1929*, M.A. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1954, p.8; Dalton, 'An Interpretative Survey', pp.21-22; Murphy, 'Queensland', p.175.

began to expand. In late 1902 a further rise in industrial metal prices on the world market presaged a dramatic boom in the district's copper, silver-lead, tin and wolfram mines. With an influx of southern and overseas capital, employment opportunities expanded, attracting labour from all parts of the country. Established towns such as Irvinebank and Herberton assumed a look of renewed prosperity; crude, unsophisticated mining settlements like Chillagoe, Mungana, Nymbool, O.K., Mt Molloy and Smith's Creek were reinvigorated. Stimulated by the high prices, new mines were established, abandoned mines re-opened, and existing mines developed more thoroughly. New machinery was installed, communications improved, smelting works built; the share market soared. In his report for 1906 the local mining warden claimed that:

Never has the district gone through a more prosperous and progressive year than the one under review. Of course, the high price of minerals has no doubt created the incentive to prospect, and, as it is a district of such vast and rich resources, the miner and the capitalist feel justified in giving their labour and money with every possibility of a satisfactory return for their outlay.²

A feature of the Walsh and Tinaroo mineral field was the co-existence of individual alluvial prospectors and miners with large-scale company concerns employing hundreds of wage earners. In 1906-1907 over one thousand men won a living independently from alluvial tin and wolfram; mining and construction companies employed a further four and a half thousand workers. As surplus labour was attracted from less prosperous areas, however, a number of unskilled workers found themselves unemployed. Independent prospectors also sought regular employment intermittently when short of money or supplies, swelling the labour force. The large companies thus had a fairly rapid turnover of employees. Men periodically left their jobs to work claims on their own account, or moved to the coast in winter and spring, seeking employment in the canefields and sugar mills.³

2 QPP 1907, II, p.1092. Cf. Blainey, *Rush That Never Ended*, p.287, and Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.286-289.

3 QPP 1907, II, p.1013; *ibid.*, 2nd session 1908, III, p.452.

In the buoyant mood of 1906 and early 1907 the mining warden discerned in the settlement of Chillagoe "a more prosperous and contented feeling among the community. . . a feeling of permanency".⁴ Most other observers gained an exactly opposite impression: the mining towns were bawdy, brawling places that "still had a raw edge of impermanency about them".⁵ Amenities were few, women scarce and living conditions crude in these isolated communities. The principal recreations were drinking and gambling. Working conditions above ground were poor; below they were unhealthy and often dangerous. Dust, damp, outbreaks of fire and earth slides were constant hazards. Lung disease was a common ailment. Long hours and only moderate wages with which to purchase highly-priced goods compounded the grievances of employees and marred industrial relations.

Despite these grievances, initial attempts to form unions failed in the face of worker apathy and employer resistance. Most such efforts were unco-ordinated and confined to particular worksites. Moreover, many wage earners worked for short periods simply to finance their own small claims; they showed scant interest in improving conditions. Thus in April and May 1907 a series of sporadic, poorly organised strikes by employees of the large Vulcan tin mine at Irvinebank failed.⁶ As Young says:

Attempts had been made to organise the workers, but rugged individualism, a capacity for endurance, frequent movement of people, and, above all, a lack of knowledge about trade union techniques made corporate action difficult.⁷

4 *Ibid.*, 1907, II, p.1092.

5 Bolton, *op.cit.*, pp.291-292. Bolton recounts a number of colourful descriptions of these towns. Cf. [?], Mining days in the Chillagoe district, typescript ms. (n.d., James Cook University Library): "O.K. was a rip-roaring Wild West type of mining settlement. . . with fist fights, gunfights, and stabbings of frequent occurrence . . . fever took many lives."

6 *North Queensland Herald*, 4 May 1907, 11 May 1907.

7 Young, *Theodore*, p.11.

In the second half of 1907 there was a sudden and severe fall in the price of industrial metals. The world copper market, inflated by over-trading, was struck by financial panic: prices tumbled from £112 per ton in March to £98 in June and £62 in December 1907. Silver-lead and tin prices fell simultaneously: lead from £22 per ton in January to £14 in December 1907; tin from £190 to £120 per ton in the same period.⁸ Few of the smaller mines survived the fall; large companies were forced to restrict their operations. The bleak mood at the end of 1907 contrasted strikingly with that at the beginning of the year: ". . .the enthusiasm which exalted every copper-stained rock to the dignity of a mine was followed by a despondency perhaps equally unreasonable."⁹

Most of the mines that survived now concentrated on development work and repair of roads and railways in readiness for a hoped-for market revival. The ranks of retrenched employees swelled as prospectors and small-scale miners abandoned claims and leases which were no longer payable. Rising discontent among workers increased as employers attempted to cut costs by reducing wages, increasing hours and generally tightening up on disciplinary conditions.

Although the miners and labourers of the far North were slow to take action to secure wage rises or improvements in working conditions, they were more ready to resist moves to lower existing standards. Indeed it was in the adversity of the 1907 slump that a threat to labour standards created favourable conditions - paradoxically it would seem - for the birth of trade unionism. Some workers at Herberton asked the AWU and ALF to send an organiser to the North.¹⁰

8 QPP 2nd session 1908, III, p.443; *Queensland Government Mining Journal* [QGMJ], September 1907, p.453.

9 QPP 2nd session 1908, III, p.455. Cf. *loc.cit.*, p.443: ". . .the sudden and severe fall in the industrial metals has proved disconcerting to forecasts and projects based upon values that have been found to be unnatural and unstable. The goodly prospect has been obscured, and the dejection of the hour contrasts strangely with the exuberant optimism of the earlier months of the year."

10 *Wild River Times* (Herberton), 7 August 1907, 25 September 1907; *Worker*, 5 October 1907.

A more positive attitude was adopted by a group of Irvinebank workers who in September 1907 launched the Amalgamated Workers' Association.

The leading activists in the new trade union were Ted Theodore and William McCormack. Theodore was recently arrived from Broken Hill where he had worked for over four years, thus acquiring a knowledge of trade union activity. An energetic, large and pugnacious young man of twenty-three years in 1907, he was an avid student of socialist and economic literature. McCormack was twenty-eight years old, a gregarious character with a strapping physique. He was employed at Stannary Hills, having arrived on the field from Mt Morgan in 1904.¹¹ Theodore's brilliance and organising genius coupled with McCormack's administrative ability, energy and capacity for sheer hard work, transformed a small, local union of miners and labourers into the most powerful trade union in the state.

The AWA began as a defensive organisation. It was formed to combat the hardening attitude of mining companies hit by falling world mineral prices. However, there is little that is particularly novel about the birth of a trade union in a period of declining industrial prosperity - especially if, as in 1907, other industries and the economy generally are on the upturn. Many unions came into existence, as the AWA did, originally as defensive associations, to preserve an already existing standard:

11 William McCormack (1879-1947), born St Lawrence, Q.; 1904 (1903?)* miner Stannary Hills; general secretary AWA 1908-1912; vice-president AWU (Q) 1913-1914; MLA Cairns 1912-1930. Speaker LA 1915-1919; Home Secretary 1919-1923; Secretary Public Lands 1923-1925; Premier and Treasurer 1925-1929; leader Opposition 1929-1930. Member CPE/QCE 1912-1916, 1918-1930 (elected to the CPE in 1910, but did not attend meetings until April 1912, following his election to parliament).

* 1904 is suggested by K.H. Kennedy, 'William McCormack: forgotten Labor leader', in Murphy and Joyce, *Queensland Political Portraits*, p.341, but there are grounds for doubt. In a photograph of the Nymbool football team in 1903, one of the players is listed as W. McCormack; he bears a very close resemblance to McCormack the unionist. [The photograph is held by the Cairns Historical Society.]

Fear of a fall in the standard of living has always been the strength of labour agitation. The cautious man who will take no risk to add to his wages will fight the hardest to maintain them.¹²

The outstanding feature of the AWA derived not from the circumstances in which it emerged, but from its subsequent success in operation, often in the face of adverse circumstances. This success was mainly due to the drive and ambition of its leaders. Under the guidance of Theodore and McCormack the union expanded rapidly. Branches were soon established at Stannary Hills, Smith's Creek and Herberton. In December 1907 it affiliated with the ALF. "The Irvinebank Amalgamated Workers' Union [*sic*]", commented the *Worker*, "is becoming a real live organisation under the guidance of an energetic committee and executive".¹³ In February 1908 the AWA strengthened these links with the mainstream of labour organisation in Queensland by sending representatives to the ALF Provincial Council meeting in Brisbane - the only northern union to do so.¹⁴

In April 1908 Theodore and McCormack initiated a conference at Irvinebank to amalgamate the various AWA branches with the O.K. and Mungana Miners' Smelters' and General Workers' Union. Theodore's report of the conference indicated that the AWA had wide and far-reaching aims. The purpose of the conference was:

to found a scheme for the complete amalgamation of all existing unions in the north, under one constitution and one controlling body, and for the purpose of propounding a system for the better organisation of the workers of northern Queensland generally.¹⁵

12 E. Welbourne, *The Miners' Union of Northumberland and Durham*, cited by H.B. Davis, 'The Theory of Union Growth', in W.E.J. McCarthy (ed.), *Trade Unions* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.211.

13 *Worker*, 14 December 1907, 7 March 1908. Cf. *ALF Report for 1907*, p.16.

14 *Worker*, 15 February 1908.

15 *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers), 28 April 1908; *Worker*, 9 May 1908.

Hitherto, the various AWA branches had remained autonomous local organisations; now, together with the O.K. and Mungana unionists, they were brought under the control of a central executive which met regularly at Irvinebank. The AWA now had 600 members. Theodore was appointed to the only full-time paid office of general organiser, while W.F. Lobban became general secretary.¹⁶ Shortly afterwards, Lobban resigned, fearing victimisation by the Irvinebank company for his union activities. McCormack, previously vice-president, replaced him, and the executive headquarters were moved to Stannary Hills.¹⁷

One of the first steps taken by the modified AWA was to affiliate directly with the Labor Party; it also asked the CPE to recognise the union as "the leading Political Labor Body" in the local Woothakata electorate.¹⁸ The move was of dual significance: it indicated that the AWA looked upon politics as a legitimate and necessary sphere of trade union activity; it also signalled the intention of the AWA leaders to play an active role in politics. By securing CPE recognition as the electorate's "leading" branch, or head centre, the AWA hoped to confirm its dominance over the existing Labor electoral centre, the Herberton Socialist League [HSL]. On this occasion the CPE refused to comply with the AWA's request, instructing McCormack to "communicate with the registered organisation at Herberton"; but the AWA ultimately replaced the HSL as Woothakata head centre in September 1909.¹⁹

Shortly after the April 1908 conference the AWA was involved in its first major industrial dispute - a strike of construction workers employed on the Etheridge railway. The AWA's entry into the dispute

16 AWA executive council minutes, 25 May 1908. [M44/30/105, RSSS-ANUA.]

17 *Ibid.*, 25 July 1908.

18 *Ibid.*, 14 June 1908.

19 Minutes of the Central Political Executive of the Queensland Labor Party, [CPE minutes], 11 May 1908, 29 June 1908, 7 September 1909. Formed in 1907 after the Labor Party split, the HSL was partly an expression of the drive to make the labour movement more consciously socialist.

served further notice that Theodore and McCormack planned to foster a mass union of general labourers, not merely a parochial miners' union.

Under the *Etheridge Railway Act*, the private railway from Almaden to the Etheridge mineral field was being privately constructed by the Chillagoe Company. Trouble amongst employees had been simmering for some months before Theodore visited the navvies' camps in July 1908. Grievances centred upon the company's continued refusal to comply with one of the conditions of the Act, namely, to pay the ruling rate of wages in the district. The workers claimed 9/- per day as the minimum rate, but the company paid no more than 8/- per day.²⁰

Taking advantage of the discontent on the line, Theodore enrolled the workers in the AWA and secured his executive's approval for a cessation of work.²¹ Three hundred and fifty navvies formed strike camps, which were maintained by compulsory levies on union members unaffected by the dispute. In addition, the financial and moral support of the ALF was sought; it was willingly given, and the strike fund swelled by donations from many trade unions.²² ALF organiser Charles Collins visited the trouble spot and reported favourably on the AWA and its conduct of the strike.²³ Regular lengthy reports to the *Worker* maintained the continued interest and support of all Queensland unionists in what was widely seen as a crucial struggle for a fair wage:

20 *Worker*, 25 July 1908; *Cairns Post*, 7 July 1908; W. Lennon (Herbert), in *QFD CI* (18 April 1908), p.1016.

21 AWA executive council minutes, 4 July 1908.

22 *Worker*, 22 August 1908; Cairns branch WWF minutes, 30 July 1908, 16 August 1908, 27 September 1908. [WWF Hall, Cairns].

23 *Worker*, 22 August 1908; *ibid.*, 19 September 1908, Collins wrote that the AWA "seems destined to become a great power in the North", and *ibid.*, 26 September 1908, that at Chillagoe ". . . a better lot of executive officers it would be hard to find anywhere".

The conditions which have been foisted upon the men right through the construction of the line have been worse than rotten, the men having to submit to the most arbitrary rule on the part of despotic supervisors, and in almost all cases having to work more than the recognised eight hours. . . .The sanitation of camps has been bad - scores of men have died on this line, some of the camps being veritable fever beds.²⁴

After several weeks the strike had reached a stalemate: the men remained firm in their demand for a minimum 9/- per day; the company was equally as firm in refusing the claim. At this stage Theodore's earlier tactics in gaining the support of the wider Queensland labour movement paid off: Labor parliamentarians and ALF officials waited upon the Secretary for Railways, a conference was arranged between the disputing parties,²⁵ and on 25 September 1908 the Chillagoe Company gave way, granting the 9/- and other concessions to the Etheridge navvies. The important role played by the ALF and Labor parliamentarians in resolving the dispute was demonstrated when not only Theodore but also ALF secretary Hinchcliffe and PLP leader Bowman signed the agreement on behalf of the AWA.²⁶

Nevertheless, much of the credit for the successful conduct of the Etheridge railway strike was clearly due to Theodore, whose organising ability and foresight in establishing contacts with Brisbane-based labour leaders eventually won the day for the AWA. The solidarity and discipline of the striking navvies was maintained rigorously: ". . .during the whole period of the dispute there was not a backslider among them - every man stood solid as a rock, and the united front they presented was impregnable."²⁷

24 *Ibid.*, 25 July 1908.

25 *Cairns Post*, 13 August 1908; *Worker*, 15 August 1908.

26 *Wild River Times*, 30 September 1908; *Worker*, 3 October 1908.

27 *Worker*, 3 October 1908.

Two other factors also had considerable bearing on the outcome of the strike. First, the navvies seemed to have the support of a large section of the general public.²⁸ Second, some members of the Kidston government, including the Secretary for Railways, George Kerr,²⁹ were concerned at the Chillagoe Company's evasion of a clause of the *Etheridge Railway Act*. Indeed, it was Kerr who persuaded the company to meet the union and who was therefore partly responsible for the final settlement of the dispute.³⁰ With public opinion and sections of the government at least tacitly in support of the strikers' cause (if not of their action), it was not surprising that the company capitulated.

Victory in the Etheridge railway strike demonstrated the value of a composite general labourers' union, encompassing all classes of wage earners in a variety of industries. Alone, the navvies would very likely have been defeated, but with the backing of the AWA miners and their fellow ALF affiliates, they were remarkably successful. The strike confirmed the AWA as an effective industrial union capable of protecting its members. According to Theodore, defeat would have meant "a severe set-back to unionism in the North".³¹ Success, on the other hand, gave a great impetus to the spread of unionism generally in North Queensland. One of the first tangible effects was that navvies on the Atherton to Herberton line also sought AWA membership and demanded higher wages.³²

28 *Cairns Post*, 20 August 1908; *Wild River Times*, 22 July 1908, 14 October 1908.

29 George Kerr (1853-1930), born England. Blacksmith. MLA (Barcoo) 1893-1909. Labor until 1907; leader PLP 1904-1907; Secretary for Railways 1907-1908.

30 *Cairns Post*, 13 August 1908, 11 September 1908; *Worker*, 15 August 1908.

31 *Worker*, 25 July 1908.

32 *Wild River Times*, 14 October 1908. Cf. *Worker*, 3 October 1908: ". . . a desirable impetus to unionism must ensue. The Amalgamated Workers' Association has fought the industrial battle for the wage-earners of North Queensland and won." Cf. Hinchcliffe, in *ALF Report for 1908*, p.15: "This satisfactory termination to a long struggle naturally gave an impetus to Unionism not only in the North, but on other railway construction works, notably in the Gladstone and Moreton districts."

The Etheridge strike thus encouraged other northern workers to join the AWA which grew rapidly in strength. New branches were established at all mining settlements and railway camps in the district, though methods of organisation were still rough and ready. Recruiting procedures, for example, were not very scrupulous. As Bolton says, "if one may believe all the tales",

. . . some members were persuaded to join after a stand-up fight, others after losing their money to Theodore at two-up. One miner at Irvinebank who refused to strike found himself followed home from work every afternoon by a group of unionists whistling the "Dead March" from *Saul*.³³

Those who neglected the discipline of the AWA incurred as much opprobrium as those who refused to join. Theodore reported shortly after the Etheridge strike that "some scabs sought exoneration from the strike committee". They received short shrift from the AWA:

It was decided in each case that the culprit was guilty of an unpardonable offence against their fellow workers, and they were left to the fate of inexorable public scorn. The feeling shown towards these misguided men amounts to almost unutterable contempt.³⁴

At the end of 1907, before the Etheridge strike, the AWA had 196 members and £61 in the bank. Twelve months later, by dint of astute organisation and efficient administration, it had 1348. Finances were still shaky after the costly three-month long Etheridge strike but stood at an improved £394.³⁵

33 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.293; cf. *Worker*, 1 August 1908: ". . .this union has had reason to exert its power of putting a certain amount of social pressure, even to a high degree of tension, to induce non-members to take their share of duty in respect of their fellow members."

34 *Worker*, 14 November 1908.

35 'Report of the Registrar of Trade Unions', *QPP* 2nd session 1908, II, p.240; *ibid.*, 2nd session 1909, II, p.56.

On 10 February 1909 delegates from eleven branches³⁶ met in Chillagoe for the first annual AWA conference, the main purpose of which was to ratify the draft constitution and rules of the union. The conference confirmed the existing highly centralised executive control; a significant feature was the decision to pay the general secretary a full-time salary of £200 per annum, placing the office "beyond the pale of interference of victimising mine managers".³⁷ As well, all effective authority was vested in the executive committee, which in practice gave control of the union to the two paid officials - the general organiser (Theodore) and the general secretary (McCormack). At the same time the union headquarters were removed to Chillagoe.

The centralised executive control of the AWA contrasted markedly with the sugar workers' union: ASWU branches retained practically complete autonomy in the areas of finance and policy. This difference partly explains the success of the AWA and the failure of the ASWU; the other main factor was the skilful leadership of the AWA and the indifferent performance of ASWU officials.

The aims and objectives of the AWA, as expressed in the constitution and rules adopted by the 1909 conference, were concerned largely with working conditions, that is, with the immediate economic concerns and sectional interests of the members. The "fighting platform" stated simply:

1. Advocacy of a Minimum Wage in North Queensland.
2. Advocacy of a 44 hour week in the Mines.
3. Advocacy of State control of the Conditions of Employment in all Industries.
4. Abolition of all forms of Alien Labour.
5. Better Inspection of Mines.
6. Official Recognition of the Union of Employees.³⁸

36 Delegates were W. McCormack (Stannary Hills and Nymbool); E. Theodore (Etheridge and Wolfram Camp); J. White (Herberton); R. Jamieson (Mungana); K. Barry (Bamford); J. Cleary (Irvinebank); F. Martyn (O.K.); G. Cunningham (Einasleigh); J. Benbow (Chillagoe). C. Lindgren was president. *Worker*, 6 March 1909.

37 *Ibid.*; Kennedy, McCormack, p.16, and Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.113, misquote this as "beyond the reach of victimising mine managers".

38 *Worker*, 6 March 1909.

Here obviously, was a moderate and practical program, eschewing reference to any form of socialist ideology. Yet in its over-riding concern with economic conditions, the conference did not disavow the AWA's expressly political aspirations. On the contrary, the constitution called for union representation on municipal bodies and required the AWA to conduct plebiscites in conjunction with local WPOs "for the selection of parliamentary candidates to run in the interests of Labour".³⁹

The AWA therefore aligned itself with orthodox Labor Party politics in Queensland. The union's leaders saw industrial strength as the basis for political success; conversely, political influence exerted by trade unions was to be the basis of industrial gains. Industrial action and political action were seen as complementary methods of improving wage-earners' conditions.⁴⁰ In pursuit of this policy both Theodore and McCormack eventually entered state parliament; both became cabinet ministers and ultimately premiers of Queensland. The policy of union involvement in politics became an entrenched tradition after the AWA merged with the AWU in 1913. Thereafter, the AWU dominated both the industrial and political wings of the labour movement in North Queensland.

As with organised labour elsewhere in Australia, AWA members opposed non-white labour. Indeed, agitation against the employment of aliens was often the first form of collective action that unionists took. In September 1907 hotel owners at O.K. yielded to local workers' demands that they dismiss their Asian cooks. The victory was seen as both an industrial and a racial one: "The yellow cook was paid at the rate of £2.10s per week, but white

39 *Ibid.*

40 Such an attitude was by no means exclusive to the AWA. Bede Nairn records: ". . . a basic tenet of the New South Wales Labor movement: that industrial action and political action were complementary. It was not a doctrine unanimously and consistently held, much less grounded in ideology and perfectly developed. It was a persistent, pragmatic belief that accompanied the striving of wage earners to improve their material conditions." N.B. Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism: The Labor Movement in New South Wales 1870-1900* (Canberra, 1973), p.8.

cooks now get £4."⁴¹ In March 1908 angry public meetings at Mungana persuaded two publicans to dismiss their Japanese and Chinese employees, while a few months later the Herberton AWA branch became concerned about the feared "invasion" of "hundreds of Hindoos".⁴² In January 1909 the Chillagoe AWA branch boycotted hotels employing non-white domestic staff.⁴³

Unionists in the far north seemed united in their racialism, but some dissension arose at the AWA 1909 conference over the exact delineation of a colour line: some branches had admitted Syrians as members, while others had rejected them. Unable to resolve this issue after a lively discussion, conference decided to leave the matter in the hands of the various branches.⁴⁴

The conference also considered the propensity of many mine employees to travel to the coast seeking work during the cane harvest season; it called for consultation with the ASWU with a view to including the sugar district of Mossman in the AWA's organising area.⁴⁵ In the event, the union did not directly organise sugar workers until 1911, but by enrolling miners, engineers, railway navvies and construction labourers, it was already well on the way to becoming a mass union of general workers. Through efficient management, it commanded a high degree of loyalty from its members; in return, it offered effective protection of their welfare. The competence of the AWA as an industrial organisation was soon to be tried and tested on a number

41 *Worker*, 14 September 1907.

42 *Ibid.*, 14 March 1908, 30 May 1908.

43 *Ibid.*, 16 January 1909; cf. G. Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell* (Melbourne, 1954), p.191, who says of the mining area of western Tasmania that "the main bias of the miners was against the Chinese rather than the companies"; and that a fear of an influx of Asians was "enough to arouse for the first time a militant spirit in the working men of Lyell".

44 *Worker*, 6 March 1909.

45 *Ibid.*

of occasions as it fought to secure and maintain two of its main objectives: a 44-hour week in mines and recognition of the union by employers. In fact, at the very time that the union delegates were meeting in conference, the AWA was involved in an acrimonious dispute with the managements of the Irvinebank and Stannary Hills tin mines.

The metalliferous mining industry elsewhere in Australia was hindered by industrial disputes at this time; the most important culminated in a lengthy strike at Broken Hill early in 1909. Owing to the low prices of silver and lead, and the depletion of the more economically accessible high-grade ore, Broken Hill Proprietary [BHP], the largest employer on the field, reduced wages by some 13%. The miners' union's resistance to this decision precipitated a bitter and violent four-month strike.⁴⁶

Industrial turmoil in the Chillagoe and Herberton mining region occurred in somewhat similar circumstances to those at Broken Hill. After the metal prices slump in late 1907, companies concentrated on the development of ore reserves, the installation of more efficient machinery and the improvement of transport facilities with a view to the more economical extraction and treatment of mineral ores. In succeeding years, the problem of continued low prices was aggravated by the depletion of local ore bodies. Management responded by economising on production costs, which to employees might mean retrenchment, longer hours or reduced wages. Having regard to the collective strength of the workers now organised in the AWA, such cost-cutting moves would very likely cause discontent and provoke confrontation.

In November 1908 a conference of mine managers met in Chillagoe to draw up a common industrial policy for the district. The meeting resolved that from 1 January 1909 the rates of wages and hours of labour current at Chillagoe should be adopted by all mines in the

46 G. Osborne, 'Town and Company: the Broken Hill Industrial Dispute of 1908-1909', in J. Iremonger, J. Merritt and G. Osborne (eds), *Strikes: studies in twentieth century Australian social history* (Sydney, 1973), pp.26-50.

district.⁴⁷ Since the wages paid at Chillagoe were considerably lower than elsewhere, and since Chillagoe worked 48 hours while other mines worked 44 hours, the employers' action represented a concerted and direct attack on the workers' organisation. To survive as an effective trade union, the AWA had to resist this attack militantly:

The hour is coming when we must prove our manhood by decisive and courageous action. Our interests are seriously imperilled by non-descript mineowners of North Queensland, and we must recognise that all who are not with us are against us.⁴⁸

Early in December 1908 the AWA notified the Irvinebank Tin Company and the Stannary Hills Mines and Tramway Company that their employees refused to accept the proposed new terms, which amounted to a 15% wage reduction and an increase in working hours from 44 to 48. The AWA suggested a conference with the employers, expressing its willingness to negotiate an agreement. However, the companies refused to acknowledge the existence of the union and ignored its approach, whereupon the union prepared for the struggle. Theodore and McCormack visited Stannary Hills and Irvinebank in mid-December to marshal the workers and improve union organisation.⁴⁹

On New Year's Day 1909 miners at Stannary Hills stopped work to protest the wage cuts and increased hours. The strike soon spread to the Vulcan tin mine at Irvinebank, and later to the rare metal mines at Wolfram Camp and Bamford. Union solidarity was enhanced when the engine-drivers and carpenters employed at the mines also ceased work in sympathy with the striking miners.⁵⁰ The AWA announced that it was prepared to meet the management in

47 *QGMJ*, January 1909, p.41.

48 *Worker*, 19 December 1908.

49 *Ibid.*, 9 January 1909, 16 January 1909; AWA executive council minutes, 1 December 1908.

50 *Worker*, 9 January 1909.

conference at any time, or to submit the matter to an independent arbitrator; the employers, however, refused to acknowledge even the union's right to represent the employees. According to the manager of the Stannary Hills company:

. . .the majority of miners have been urged against their will to make trouble, and have gone out at the bidding of men, who, unlike the worker, have nothing to lose but receive fat salaries to stir up strife and discontent and bring more sorrows to the home of the worker.⁵¹

Incensed at the companies' outright rejection of their overtures, the AWA angrily denied such claims. Hostility between management and labour intensified. Indeed, McCormack's bellicosity now seemed to eclipse the AWA's professed wish to settle the matter by peaceful negotiations:

The intolerance of our opponents, their arrogant attitude towards our pacific proposals and ill-dissembled hostility to our right to combine has necessitated a reckoning at the point of the industrial bayonet. . . .In order to convince [the mine owners] and their servile janissaries that despotic ukase and arbitrary fiat in the industrial affairs of a free community are only incantations of impotence - we must carry the fight into the enemies' camp and turn their own guns against them.⁵²

The strike was well organised. Levies were struck on AWA members; donations were solicited from other trade unions; the services of ALF organiser Collins were secured to aid in the on-the-spot conduct of the strike. In order to supplement strike relief, strikers were organised into union-subsidised prospecting parties.⁵³

51 *Wild River Times*, 13 January 1909.

52 *Worker*, 13 February 1909.

53 *Ibid.*; AWA executive council minutes, 12 January 1909.

After four weeks, the AWA reiterated its proposal that the dispute be submitted to the arbitrament of a district or supreme court judge. Again the companies refused, provoking a predictable response from the union:

The olive branch of peaceful arbitration offered by the miners has therefore been scornfully rejected, reason has been set aside, and the exploiting bosses of Capitalism have determined, if possible, to enforce their despotic will.⁵⁴

The strike continued and the workers showed little sign of surrender. At length, however, as the tin mines remained idle, the Stannary Hills company recognised the union and agreed to submit the dispute to an arbitrator. Initial negotiations proved abortive since the parties could not agree on the question of working hours, but finally on 1 April 1909 the Stannary Hills workers accepted new proposals offered by the management: slight wage increases were awarded to all hands; the working week was increased from 44 to 48 hours; the company was to pay the AWA's legal expenses at arbitration; no striking unionists were to be victimised. A similar settlement was also reached at Irvinebank.⁵⁵

Thus, as in most industrial disputes, the strike settlement involved compromise. An important gain for the AWA was the mere fact of its recognition by employers. The increase in wages, when the companies had hoped for wage reductions, was also a substantial concession. The Stannary Hills Mines and Tramway Company was successful in having working hours increased, but this proved a Pyrrhic victory: two months after the lockout ended, the company was wound up; a new company was formed to carry on mining operations in the area.⁵⁶ Naturally, the suspension of company operations tempered any feelings of triumph amongst the employees. The

54 *Worker*, 6 February 1909.

55 *Ibid.*, 3 April 1909; *QGMJ*, April 1909, p.200.

56 *QGMJ*, June 1909, p.271: ". . .the old company had struggled along for eight years under adverse circumstances, and when some return might have been expected, they had exhausted their capital. The men had made demands for wages and conditions which made it impossible to carry on the industry profitably."

unemployment level in the district, already high before the strike, was adversely affected by the three-month long lockout. Further, the Ivanhoe mine, the largest in the district, remained idle until January 1910, having been flooded along with many other mines when the engine-drivers manning the pumps withdrew their labour in the previous January.⁵⁷

The disruption caused by the strike aroused disaffection amongst union members, many of whom did not regain their jobs. Some workers criticised the AWA for provoking the dispute; others attacked the union executive for its surrender of the 44-hour week. To the first charge, McCormack replied that the AWA had not sought the dispute but rather had been forced into it by the companies' aggressive action; to the second, McCormack argued that in view of the unfavourable economic conditions and high local unemployment, the AWA had obtained "a very fair compromise".⁵⁸ To most AWA men this probably seemed a reasonable assessment; certainly, any disquiet was quelled by the powerful executive and by more obvious success in other industrial conflicts.

Throughout 1909 and early 1910 industrial trouble flared at the wolfram, bismuth and molybdenite mines at Wolfram Camp and Bamford. The issues in this lingering dispute were the same as formerly: the union's determination to maintain a 44-hour week, and the employers' refusal to recognise the union's existence. This time, however, the AWA's bargaining position was even stronger: the high prices ruling for rare metals enabled the striking workers to prospect profitably on their own account. Finally, in February 1910, the union's demands were conceded.⁵⁹

In July 1909, AWA unionists at Mungana struck work in support of an engine-drivers' demand for a pay increase. The Mungana mines - Lady Jane and Girofla - had perhaps the most oppressive and dangerous

57 *Ibid.*, February 1910, p.88.

58 *Worker*, 8 May 1909, 6 March 1909.

59 *Ibid.*, 8 January 1910; *QGMJ*, June 1909, p.299, February 1910, p.87, March 1910, p.149; AWA executive council minutes, 12 January 1909; *QPP* 1911-1912, III, p.317.

working conditions in the district; discontent there had simmered for months before finally erupting in the engine-drivers' strike. After only one week the company capitulated, granting increased wages not only to engine-drivers but to all underground hands as well.⁶⁰

These successes for the AWA, however, were attended by setbacks at the Big Reef mine on the Etheridge field, and at the O.K. copper mine. At Big Reef, a Chillagoe Company operation, employees went on strike in early August 1909 in opposition to an increase in their working week from 44 to 47 hours. Big Reef was a fairly small, isolated mine, where union organisation was vulnerable; the company consequently had little trouble in persuading many workers to return to work under the new conditions. The AWA could do nothing to resolve the issue: months later few Big Reef miners were unionists and the 47-hour week remained in force.⁶¹

The union suffered a more significant defeat at O.K., where the decline in metal prices had affected the copper mines and smelters more severely than elsewhere in the district. Although the mine - opened only in 1902 - paid high dividends in 1905, 1906 and 1907, the company directors had installed outmoded and inefficient smelting equipment; they had also neglected to provide a light railway to the railhead at Mungana. (Camels, and subsequently traction engines, carried ore and supplies between the two centres.)

In October 1909 the O.K. management reduced the number of men working each shift in the smelters, promising, however, to provide alternative work for those who lost their jobs. A general meeting of the local AWA branch decided to oppose this decision, and all work at the mines and smelters stopped. The traction engine drivers also joined the strike.⁶² Somewhat reluctantly, the AWA executive

60 AWA executive council minutes, [n.d.] July 1909; *Worker*, 24 July 1909; *North Queensland Herald*, 24 July 1909.

61 AWA executive council minutes, 4 August 1909, 7 August 1909, 5 November 1909, 22 November 1909, 19 January 1910.

62 *Worker*, 23 October 1909; *QGMJ*, November 1909, p.559.

at Chillagoe endorsed the strike, but appeared less than sanguine of success: ". . .as the O.K. members were unanimous in the action taken they could not do otherwise than sanction the affair; and do their best to uphold them in their difficulty."⁶³

McCormack's misgivings about entering the dispute were quickly confirmed when he visited O.K. and found that the local union leaders had acted rashly. The apparent solidarity of the men had been dissipated: "The great majority of the men seemed to [be] of an opinion that the trouble was uncalled for." McCormack told the AWA executive that the union had a poor case: "The issue seemed to be too small for such extreme measures." The executive concurred, blaming the O.K. branch officers for "an unfortunate mistake"⁶⁴ - the more unfortunate, so it appeared to some - when the O.K. company could use the dispute as a means of closing down the now unprofitable works without alienating public sympathy.⁶⁵

At first sight, the settlement of the O.K. strike after five weeks seemed a reasonable result. The original cause of the strike - a reduction in the number of men in shifts - remained, but the company conceded slight wage increases for work in wet ground and for machine operators. The management also agreed not to victimise any striker; it further guaranteed the existing pay rates and the 44-hour week underground. Despite any private misgivings he may have had, Theodore publicly defended the settlement: "The men actually had materially bettered their status by making a stand against the constant irritating encroachments upon their conditions."⁶⁶

Any satisfaction gained proved transitory, however, when the O.K. mine and smelter indeed remained closed until late January

63 AWA executive council minutes, [n.d.] October 1909.

64 *Ibid.*, 5 November 1909. There thus seemed some basis for the company's claim that ". . .the feeling of the majority of the men is distinctly against the strike; but that the trouble was engineered by agitators". *North Queensland Herald*, 30 October 1909.

65 Cf. Theodore, in *QPD CIV* (4 November 1909), p.46: "The company are undoubtedly using the dispute as an excuse for closing down their claim."

66 *Worker*, 27 November 1909.

1910.⁶⁷ The continuing unemployment prolonged disaffection among the AWA rank and file, much of it now directed against the union executive. McCormack defended himself by reiterating that the O.K. men had blundered: the executive had no option but to sanction the dispute since the branch had decided to strike by ballot.⁶⁸

McCormack's recriminations and his personal abuse of the O.K. branch members aroused considerable enmity, contributing to his defeat by Jim Kennedy in the election for general secretary in January 1910. A few months later, however, Kennedy resigned and McCormack was re-appointed to the position.⁶⁹

Industrial setbacks such as that at O.K. were eclipsed by the AWA's political success. From the outset the AWA had organised for political ends as well as industrial action. It therefore came as no surprise when the union's general organiser was announced as the official Labor candidate for the local Woothakata electorate. The *Worker* applauded Theodore's candidature: "Brainy, sober and straight, he is the man best fitted to represent a mining constituency like Woothakata."⁷⁰

Since 1902 the electorate had been held by Mick Woods,⁷¹ a former Chillagoe railway engine-driver who had defected from the Labor Party with Kidston in 1907. He retained the seat at state elections in 1907 and 1908, easily defeating the Labor candidate, Alf Pain, a Herberton miner, who was also president and secretary of the Herberton Socialist League. As the name implied, the HSL held more radical views than the AWA leaders, in 1909 espousing the syndicalist tenets of the Industrial Workers of the World [IWW].

67 *QGMJ*, January 1910, p.34. The mine and smelter closed permanently in late 1910. *Ibid.*, September 1910, p.447.

68 AWA executive council minutes, 11 December 1909.

69 *Ibid.*, 25 June 1910.

70 *Worker*, 4 September 1909; CPE minutes, 15 September 1909.

71 Michael Joyce Reginald Woods (1860-1934), born Parramatta, NSW; engine-driver Chillagoe private railway; Queensland railways staff, Cairns, 1910-1930. MLA Woothakata 1902-1909.

The HSL offered some challenge to AWA dominance of Labor politics in the district; while Pain was secretary of the Herberton branch of the AWA, it continually criticised the executive, demanding more rank and file control of the union.⁷²

Outside Herberton, support for the HSL was insubstantial. The great majority of miners, navvies and labourers of the far north were more attuned to the pragmatic reformism of Theodore and McCormack. It was only a short time before the AWA demolished this challenge to their authority. Pain was easily defeated in his bid for the position of general organiser in December 1909; his influence in the union was completely destroyed in 1910 when the annual AWA conference censured him for making allegations of mismanagement against McCormack.⁷³ Most AWA members agreed with A.E. Church of Chillagoe:

I sum up this Herberton so-called IWW-ism as bombastic, unpractical, foreign and unsuitable to Australian sentiment and conditions, and conducive to political sectarianism.⁷⁴

On 2 October 1909 Theodore narrowly won Woothakata by a margin of 91 votes.⁷⁵ His victory vindicated the belief of both the AWA

72 *Worker*, 27 November 1909; AWA executive council minutes, 22 November 1909: "in view of the attitude and deviation [*sic*] of the Herberton Socialist League towards the AWA it would be advisable. . .that the AWA have control of political matters in Woothakata". Cf. CPE minutes, 29 June 1908, 7 September 1909. On the latter date, the CPE granted the AWA the position of head electoral centre.

73 *Worker*, 26 March 1910.

74 *Ibid.*, 29 January 1910.

75 Woothakata election, 1909:

Earl, E.C. (Ministerialist)	849 (21.29%)
Theodore, E.G. (Labor)	1713 (42.97%)
Woods, M.J. (Kidstonite)	1424 (35.73%)

After the distribution of contingent votes, the final figures were:

Theodore	1735 (51.35%)
Woods	1644 (48.65%)

From Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.85, 87.

and the ALF that strong union organisation would foster political success. Hinchcliffe had earlier predicted that "the practical evidence of a unionistic revival all over the State. . . must be assuredly followed by a much healthier political atmosphere".⁷⁶

Theodore's election enabled him to increase the influence of the AWA in the Queensland labour movement. The AWA was now attracting much attention and respect for the obvious ability of its officials, its organising success and its active policy in industrial disputes. This was demonstrated in February 1910 when Theodore was elected vice-president of the ALF,⁷⁷ and in May 1910 when McCormack was elected to the Central Political Executive of the Queensland Labor Party.⁷⁸ The activities of the AWA delegates at the trade union congresses of 1910 and 1911 further contributed to the growing esteem in which the AWA was held.⁷⁹

More remarkable in the union's ascendancy was the fact that in 1909 there were fewer miners employed on the Chillagoe and Herberton mineral fields than in any year since 1902. Employment opportunities picked up slightly in 1910, but it was obvious that the days of heady optimism and high profits had gone from the district for good.⁸⁰ Despite these adverse circumstances the AWA continued to expand, partly because of the enrolment of railway construction workers as far south as Proserpine. Union membership stood at 1650 in December 1909, compared with 1348 a year previously. By December 1910 the AWA boasted 2300 members.⁸¹

76 *Worker*, 23 May 1908.

77 Eleventh annual session of the Queensland Provincial Council of the ALF, 11 February 1910 [E154/47, RSSS-ANUA].

78 *Official Report of the Sixth State Labour-in-Politics Convention, Townsville, May 1910* (Brisbane, 1910), p.16.

79 *Official Report of the First Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress, Trades Hall, Brisbane, August 1910* (Brisbane, 1910), and *Official Report of the Second Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress, Trades Hall, Brisbane, August 1911* (Brisbane, 1911).

80 *QPP* 1910, III, pp.639-723; *ibid.*, 1911-1912, III, pp.265-358.

81 *Ibid.*, 1910, II, p.723; *ibid.*, 1911-1912, II, p.345.

Industrial trouble continued in 1910. The Lady Jane mine at Mungana closed after a subsidence and a serious underground fire; at Girofla the high-grade ore had been exhausted, and the diminishing profitability of the low-grade lodes did not augur well for future mining operations; the Mt Molloy copper mines and smelters closed down permanently in 1909; the O.K. works, which had resumed early in 1910, also ceased operations later that year. A rise in the price of tin in 1910 was offset by the exhaustion of many payable lodes, leading to the closure of tin mines at Smith's Creek, Stannary Hills and Herberton. On the other hand, the price for wolfram remained high, giving some encouragement to large companies as well as small-scale miners. The completion of the Chillagoe Company's railway to Charleston also saw the revival of many auriferous copper mines on the Etheridge field.⁸²

TABLE I⁸³

BASE METAL MINERS EMPLOYED IN THE CAIRNS
HINTERLAND, 1901-1915

<u>A</u>	<u>Hodgkinson</u>	<u>Walsh & Tinaroo</u>	<u>Total</u>
1901	70	997	1067
1902	90	1028	1118
1903	160	1650	1810
1904	450	2267	2717
1905	410	2717	3127
1906	500	3139	3639
1907	658	3081	3739
1908	367	2098	2465
<u>B</u>	<u>Chillagoe</u>	<u>Herberton</u>	<u>Total</u>
1909	716	942	1658
1910	1098	1258	2356
1911	931	1179	2110
1912	857	1323	2180
1913	849	1356	2205
1914	558	993	1551
1915	639	844	1483

82 *Ibid.*, 1910, III, p.639 ff; *ibid.*, 1911-1912, III, p.265 ff.

83 Calculated from the figures published by the Department of Mines in *QPP*. In 1909 the Hodgkinson and Walsh & Tinaroo mineral fields were replaced by two new districts, Chillagoe and Herberton. The Herberton mineral field included much of the old Hodgkinson field. Consequently, the total figure is most valuable as an indicator of mining activity in the Cairns hinterland.

Despite the overall bleak prospects for the mining industry, the AWA persevered in its determination to expand its activities and protect the welfare of its members. Since "employers could not afford to be generous, even had they so wished,"⁸⁴ disputes between management and labour continued, often involving the union's longstanding antagonist - the Chillagoe Company.

AWA unionists at Charleston stopped work in February 1910 in protest at the Chillagoe Company's decision to increase working hours at their recently acquired Queenslander and Nil Desperandum mines from 44 to 48 hours per week.⁸⁵ The company gave way. Even the government was confronted by the industrial muscle of the AWA: in June, construction navvies on the Herberton to Ravenshoe railway went on strike for a rise in the minimum wage rate. The AWA organiser, Fred Martyn, attributed their victory to "the splendid class of workers" employed, "95 per cent of whom are AWA members".⁸⁶ But Martyn overlooked the very vital support given by local residents who, anxious for the railway to be completed, called a series of successful public meetings, angrily blaming the government for the delay in construction and urging it to accede to the navvies' "reasonable request".⁸⁷

The AWA's next test came at Koorboora, arising out of its efforts to enrol mine workers. The mine manager dismissed some employees who joined the union, whereupon all workers downed tools. Management promptly capitulated and recognised the union.⁸⁸ A brief strike over wage cuts at Charleston met with similar success.⁸⁹

84 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.294.

85 AWA executive council minutes, 7 February 1910.

86 *Worker*, 1 October 1910; cf. ALF executive committee minutes, 5 July 1910 [M50/06(c), RSSS-ANUA].

87 *Wild River Times*, 15 June 1910, 22 June 1910, 29 June 1910, 6 July 1910.

88 AWA executive council minutes, 24 August 1910; *Worker*, 30 July 1910, 17 September 1910.

89 *Worker*, 22 October 1910.

By now, the *Worker* habitually referred to the far northern union as "the fighting AWA", a sobriquet bestowed out of deference to its organising zeal and its readiness to use direct action to further its objectives.⁹⁰ The title was well-earned since the AWA *was* prepared to resort to direct action, but not in any syndicalist pursuit of ideological goals. The militancy of the AWA was most often defensive - a reaction against the belligerent attitude of mining employers who refused to negotiate with the union or even to recognise it as its members' advocate. In the often-depressed market conditions of the base metal industry in far North Queensland, a trade union's adherence to a policy of protecting labour standards meant that it would be involved in strikes while northern employers consistently refused to grant reforms and in fact tried to lower the existing standards of working conditions.

The characteristic prelude to trade union militancy on Australian metal-mining fields was a price slump, as Blainey correctly argues:

So long as a copper or lead field was new or the price of its metals high, there was small danger of a sharp rift between owners and men. But once workers' capitalism declined and metal prices fell, tensions quickly marred personal relations. As Broken Hill revealed, the economics of base-metal fields were such that workers' capitalism tended to decline more quickly than on a goldfield. Moreover, unlike gold, the price of which was fixed, base-metals on the world market behaved erratically, and thus a sudden fall in price imposed sudden tensions on the mining fields. When companies suffered a drastic fall in profits they tried to cut wages or exact more work from men. The men resisted the attack.⁹¹

90 *Ibid.*, *loc.cit.*; *ibid.*, 17 September 1910. Cf. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p.88: "The AWA in many a hard fought battle had established a reputation for militancy second to none, and was popularly known as the 'Fighting AWA'."

91 Blainey, *Rush That Never Ended*, p.304.

Thus most of the early strikes in which the AWA became involved were the result of employers' attempts to cut wages or to alter working conditions. Its frequent recourse to strike action was also influenced by three other factors: its determination to survive as an industrial union; the employers' adamant refusal to recognise the union until forced to do so; the legal situation in Queensland at the time, which as yet did not provide for an alternative system of arbitration.⁹²

Further, a problem which the mining settlements of Herberton and Chillagoe had in common with metal-mining towns the world over, may also be relevant: isolated communities dominated by, and dependent for their livelihood on a single employer, and with a restless, predominantly unmarried workforce, have historically engendered tough industrial relations.⁹³

However, the AWA generally explored every avenue of negotiation before authorising a stoppage of work. McCormack stressed as much at the time of the Stannary Hills lockout:

. . .it will be noted that the Executive made every effort to bring about a conference between the mine managers and our members who are affected, and that they took the extreme step of calling out the members only when all means to bringing about a peaceable adjustment of the difficulty had been exhausted.⁹⁴

92 In 1908 the state parliament had passed an act to make provision for Wages Boards. These bodies, however, had very limited powers and "did not in any way recognise the existence of trade unions and made no provision for organisations either of employers or employees", J. Matthews, 'A History of Industrial Law in Queensland with a summary of provisions of the various statutes', *Journal of the Historical Society of Queensland*, IV (1949), pp.150-181.

93 G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* vol.III: *The Second International 1889-1914* (London, 1956), pt. 2, pp.791-792, 945. Cf. Osborne, 'Town and Company', pp.26-27, and H. Pelling, *American Labor* (Chicago, 1960), pp.109-110.

94 *Worker*, 6 March 1910.

Such tactics were the guiding principles behind the AWA's conduct of industrial relations. On occasions when the union rank and file hastily precipitated strikes - for instance at O.K. and later at Selwyn in the Cloncurry district - the executive publicly endorsed the dispute but privately rebuked the local officials for causing "unnecessary loss of time and money to members".⁹⁵ Shortly after the AWA merged with other North Queensland unions in December 1910, McCormack complained about the number of small strikes occurring in Townsville. He advised the union district secretary to intervene in disputes before the men actually ceased work: there would then be a better chance of successful settlement without a strike.⁹⁶

Often, when the AWA entered a dispute, it was partly with the object of gaining more members and thereby more industrial strength. Conversely, as union action proved successful in maintaining or improving working conditions and wages, it attracted more workers into its ranks. McCormack reasoned: "nothing is gained by ignoring a dispute and it helps us in the organising."⁹⁷

As employers came to recognise the AWA and negotiate with it, so the union used the strike weapon less frequently. It is noteworthy that in 1910 most of the industrial conflict in which the AWA was involved, occurred on the Etheridge field or at Koorboora - areas where the union had not hitherto been active. On the other hand, its major achievement in the Chillagoe-Herberton district - a negotiated increase in the minimum wage at the Chillagoe smelters from 8/- to 9/- per day, without any withdrawal of labour - occurred

95 McCormack to W. Pemberton (secretary Selwyn branch AWA), 13 March 1912, AWA General Secretary's Letterbook, 24 March 1911-8 June 1912 [M44/30/104, R555-ANUA]. Cf. Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, pp.107-111.

96 McCormack to P.B. Barton, 24 March 1911, AWA Letterbook.

97 *Ibid.*

in an area where the AWA was well established.⁹⁸ In 1913 Theodore lauded the fact that employers were now more willing to negotiate with the AWA:

It is a favourable commentary on the work of the union that employers adopt a much less bellicose attitude now than formerly, and are more ready to meet the representatives of the union in peaceful confab to discuss matters of mutual concern.⁹⁹

As the AWA's use of direct action aimed primarily at achieving recognition and negotiation, so it never opposed an ancillary means to the same end: contrary to what its record might suggest, the AWA preferred some form of arbitration to direct action. In fact, Theodore's very first speech in parliament advocated an Arbitration Act:

There have been so many disputes in connection with railway construction and with the mining and sugar industries during the past two years that I think it incumbent upon the Government to make some provision against the dislocation of industry brought by such disputes. . . . The dispute which took place at Stannary Hills this year could have been avoided had there been provision for arbitration.¹⁰⁰

On occasions Theodore and McCormack appeared to condemn arbitration, but their criticism was largely aimed at specific features of Queensland or Commonwealth legislation, not at the principle of arbitration *per se*. Thus at the AWA conference of

98 *Worker*, 9 July 1910: "It is the most important industrial settlement in the North, as it is recognised that increasing the minimum wage is always the hardest fight of the workers. . . . As the Chillagoe Coy is the largest employer of labour in the hinterland of Cairns, and is one of the most stable concerns in Northern Queensland, the increase represents one of the greatest concessions yet obtained from the employers in that district."

99 *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA* (Brisbane, 1913), p.4 [M50/1(d), RSSS-ANUA].

100 *QPD CIV* (4 November 1909), p.46.

January 1913 McCormack stated that: "Personally he did not believe in arbitration, because it was fictitious. Judge Higgins had laid down a very beautiful sentiment until one came to look at it."¹⁰¹ Previously, however, McCormack had admitted the benefits of arbitration: it forced the disputing parties to come together, and gave the workers an opportunity to air their grievances.¹⁰² Indeed, although McCormack professed a lack of "belief" in arbitration at the 1913 conference - a sentiment echoed by other prominent AWA officials present - this did not prevent the very same conference from resolving to make arrangements for the sugar workers to seek a Commonwealth Arbitration Court award.¹⁰³

The apparent opposition to arbitration which McCormack and other AWA officials expressed at the 1913 AWA conference was in fact directed primarily at the New South Wales AWU. The latter's delegates to an amalgamation conference in June 1912 had shown great concern that a merger with the AWA would endanger the AWU's position under the Commonwealth *Conciliation and Arbitration Act* and imperil the pastoral award.¹⁰⁴ McCormack and Theodore were eager to reassure the AWU that the AWA had no desire to seek the jurisdiction of the federal court. The remarks at the 1913 conference were also directed at the AWA's own membership, the traditional section of which feared that amalgamation with the AWU might circumscribe their industrial strength. McCormack hoped to allay their qualms by declaring that there was no plan to approach the court for an award covering North Queensland miners, "because today that trade enjoyed better conditions than they could get from an Arbitration Court award, and could secure better conditions by the methods ordinarily employed".¹⁰⁵

101 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.13.

102 *Official Report of the Amalgamation Conference, Sydney, 20-24 June 1912* (Sydney, 1912), pp.12-14 [M50/1(b), RSSS-ANUA].

103 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.38.

104 Cf. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.125: "They were indeed satisfied that they could safely include other pastoral and rural workers, but boggled at miners and navvies."

105 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.10.

When a Labor government took office in Queensland in 1915, Theodore and McCormack became staunch defenders of arbitration - indeed they came into bitter confrontation with trade unionists who refused to accept it. This was attributable in part to the differing responsibilities and aspirations of trade union officials and politicians. More importantly, however, the politicians believed that the disabilities under which trade unions had previously operated were in fact removed by ameliorative Labor legislation, notably the *Trade Union Act* of 1915 and the *Industrial Arbitration Act* of 1916. These measures, both introduced by Theodore, instituted an industrial court with both arbitral and legislative powers and provided for the registration of trade unions and the amalgamation of unions by agreement.

The AWA's attitude towards arbitration reflected the consistently pragmatic approach to trade union problems that its leaders always adopted and which indeed was the major factor in the union's phenomenal success. The leadership was not guided by theoretical considerations or socialist principles; rather it followed a practical, almost *ad hoc* policy of protecting the members' interests by whatever means possible, including direct action. This did not involve a deliberate policy of strike action, as claimed by Sullivan,¹⁰⁶ nor a consistent militancy, as claimed by Lane.¹⁰⁷ The AWA preferred compromise to confrontation; conciliation to conflict; its leaders wanted to cope with capitalism, not overthrow it.

Nevertheless, in the context of trade unionism in Queensland in this period, the AWA was certainly the most progressive and dynamic union in the state. Not only did it conduct successful strikes but it also pursued a policy of direct involvement in

106 Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, pp.391-404.

107 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p.90: ". . .the AWA consistently pursued a militant policy in the never-ending struggle for the betterment of working conditions."

politics at a time when most trade unions were content to leave direct political organisation to the Labor Party. Moreover, its actions were indeed militant by comparison with those of other Queensland unions which lay quiescent. The AWA did not seek strikes "deliberately" and "consistently", but neither did it avoid them as a means of furthering its objectives. If a strike appeared unavoidable, the union entered the dispute wholeheartedly with all the resources at its disposal.



Plate 7. Great Northern Tin Mining Company's Battery, Herberton.
[QGMJ, 14 May 1910]



Plate 8. Ivanhoe Tin Mine, Stannary Hills. [QGMJ, 15 June 1909]



THE ZILLMANTON MINE, CHILLAGOE.

Plate 9. The Zillmanton Mine, Chillagoe. [*QGMJ*, 15 September 1910]



Plate 10. Township of Chillagoe. [*QGMJ*, 14 August 1909]

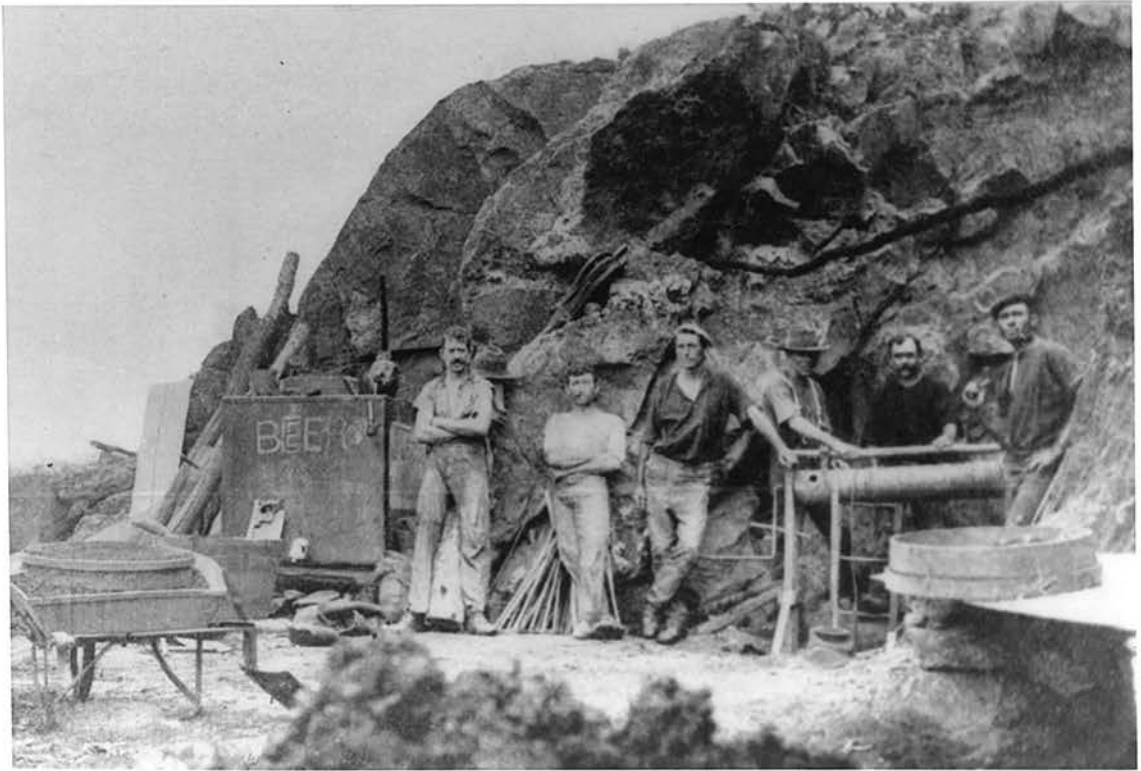


Plate 11. The Paddymelon Wolfram Mine. [QGMJ, 15 July 1910]

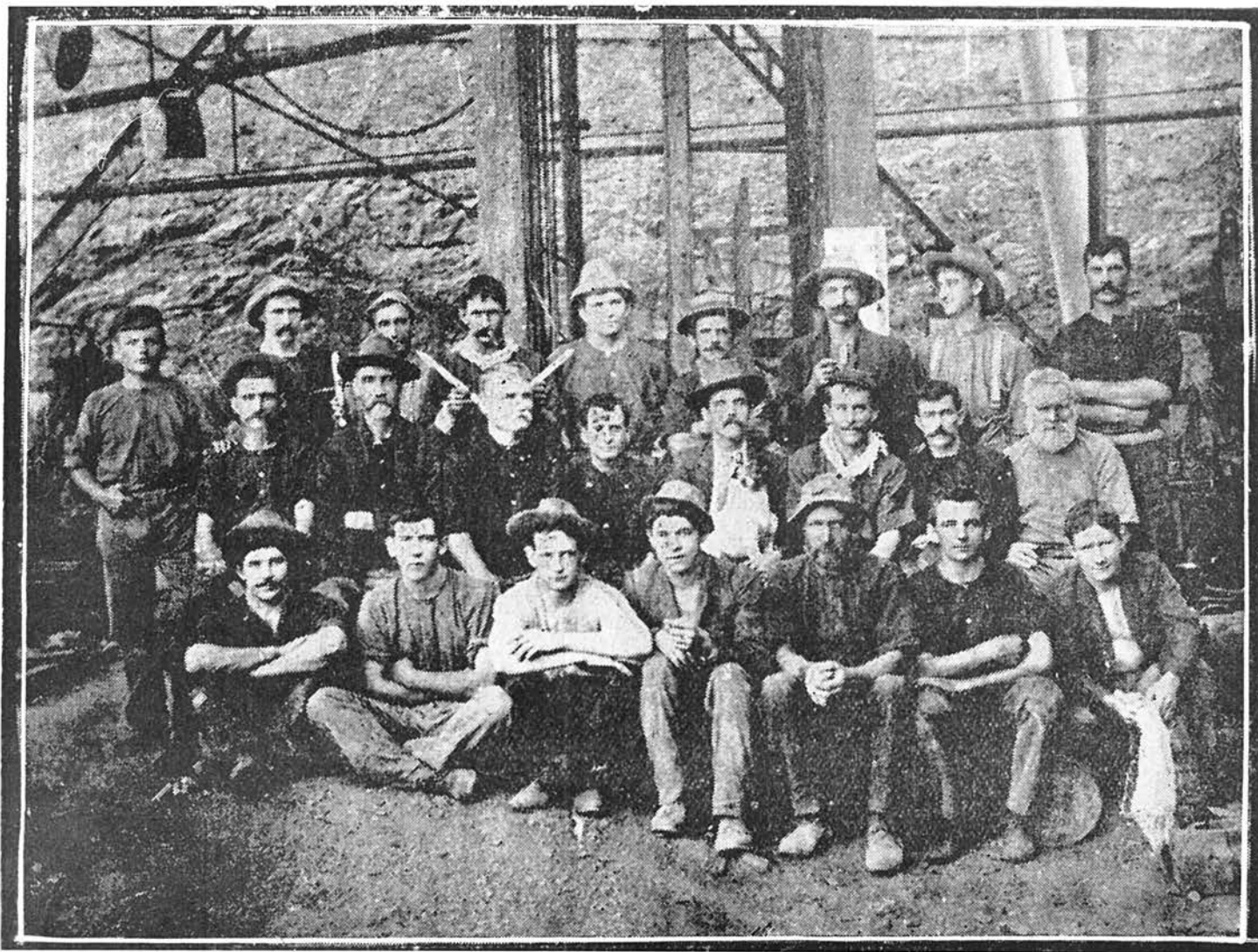
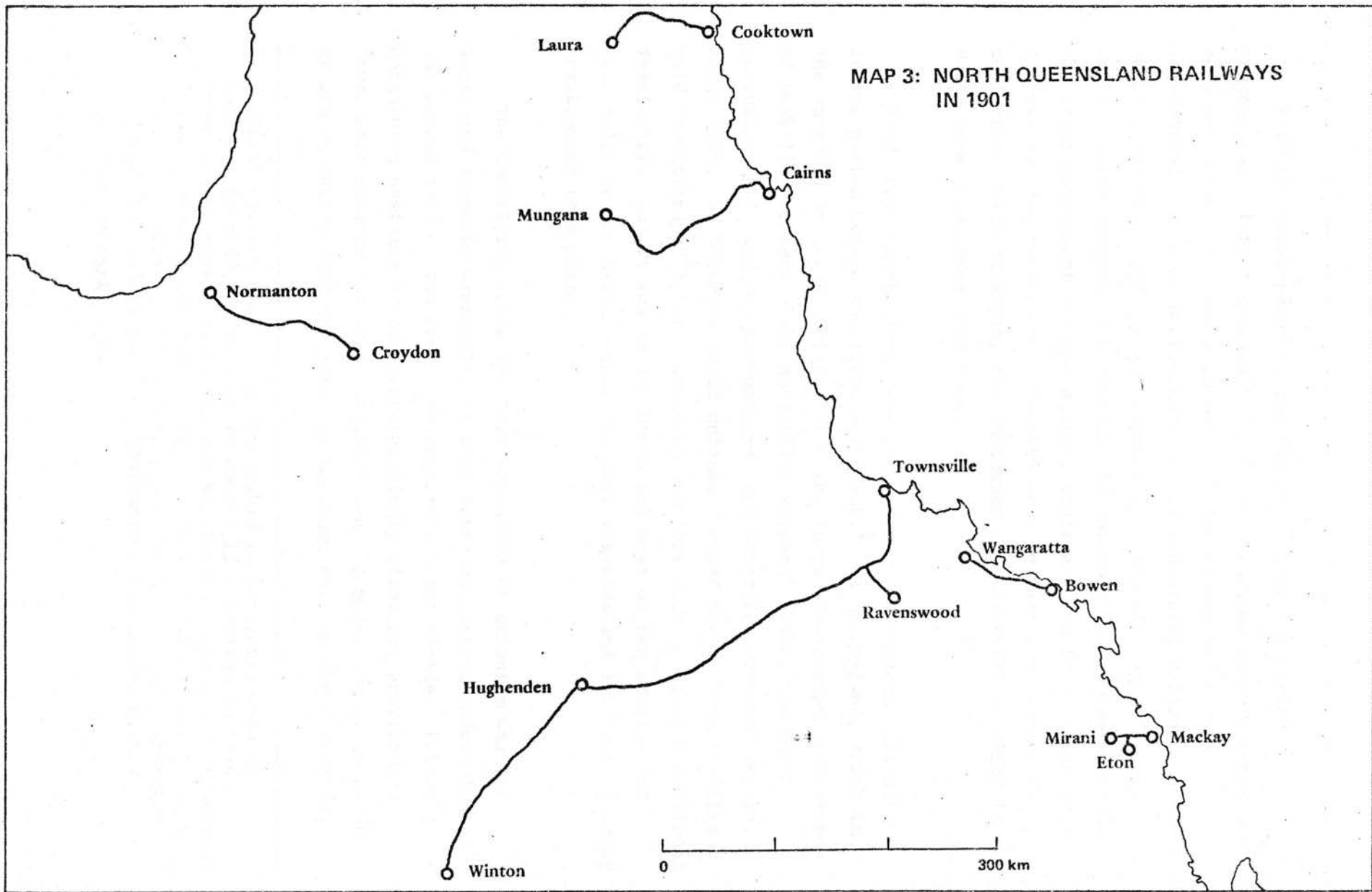


Plate 12. Miners at the Vulcan Tin Mine, Irvinebank. [*North Queensland Register*, 25 November 1912.]

CHAPTER IV

UNIONISING THE NORTH, 1907-1912



With the development of the AWA as a major industrial organisation, labour generally in North Queensland grew stronger and more assertive. New trade unions were formed and older ones rejuvenated. Miners, meatworkers, wharf labourers, railway employees, skilled craftsmen and general labourers joined with sugar workers in an impressive upsurge of unionism. As unions grew, so employers and the state government reacted against their efforts to regulate and improve working conditions. Despite some serious limitations to collective union strength, the incidence of industrial conflict in North Queensland thus also rose.

Trade union membership grew tremendously throughout Australia in the period before the first world war.¹ In Queensland, those in the vanguard of union activism were the large non-metropolitan unions of unskilled workers - the Australian Workers' Union, the North Queensland AWA, and the meatworkers' and waterside workers' unions. After 1909, the Brisbane craft unions, dormant for so long (critics said "reactionary"²), also expanded and lost much of their traditional insularity. But it was in the North and West of the state - and especially in the North - that the most vigorous and influential union development took place.

The underlying basis for this expansion of unionism was the increased economic prosperity of most North Queensland industries in the second half of the twentieth century's first decade. Labour's bargaining position became correspondingly stronger, providing a favourable climate for union organisation. A major factor in union growth in this period was also, as Hobsbawm says of Great Britain,

1 Official estimates of union membership in Australia show an increase from 97,000 in 1901 to over half a million in 1914. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Labour and Industrial Branch Reports [Labour Reports]*, 2 (1912), 5 (1914). See Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.34; Sutcliffe, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, p.169; Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.160.

2 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p.94.

"the part played by agitators, propagandists and organisers, armed with new ideas and new methods, and ready to carry them into hitherto inert and unorganised areas."³ Federal union officials were responsible for the initial renaissance of the Queensland waterside workers' and meatworkers' unions in 1906; and after the state Labor split in 1907, professional trade unionists and party officials within Queensland made a concerted effort to rebuild the union movement. These labour leaders transformed a growing union revival into a significant political and industrial renaissance, for there was as yet no visible dichotomy between political and industrial labour. Both worked together for the twin goals of union strength and parliamentary success.

The achievements of the AWA in the far northern mining districts inspired workers in other industries and other areas to organise and improve their own working conditions. As the AWA began to recruit itinerant labourers outside its traditional Chillagoe-Herberton area, other trade unions were encouraged to expand their membership and confront employers. The presence of experienced AWA members on the sugar fields and among navvies and western miners aided the growth of the sugar workers' unions and the Cloncurry-based Western Workers' Association [WWA].⁴ Similarly, AWU members seeking employment in the pastoral industry's slack season also augmented these unions.

The WWA

Lacking adequate transport facilities and capital, the Cloncurry copper field had stagnated until the first decade of the century. Then, as Blainey relates,

3 E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Economic Fluctuations and some Social Movements since 1800', *Labouring Men*, p.146.

4 *Worker*, 4 September 1909, 24 December 1910; *ALF Report for 1908*, p.15.

In 1906 and 1907 copper averaged £87 a ton on the London market, the highest price for 30 years, and the Cloncurry fields suddenly pulsed with life. In two years, four of its mines were floated on the Melbourne Stock Exchange and furnished with funds. At the same time, the rails of steel were advancing west across the searing plains. The time was close when smelter stacks would rise and the field would pour its wealth.⁵

The government mining warden thought that 1906 was "an epochal year. . .the outlook for the future of this field is roseate". His optimism seemed borne out by statistics: between 1906 and 1909 the population of the Cloncurry mineral field doubled; by 1912 it doubled again. Despite a serious fall in copper prices from late 1907 to 1910, the value of the field's output increased steadily.⁶ When the market slumped a number of leases were abandoned, but the main mines in the district - particularly those at Hampden and Mt Elliott in the south of the field - continued to progress. Cloncurry was linked by rail with Townsville in December 1908; in August 1910 the railway reached Mt Elliott. The adverse effect of low copper prices was therefore largely offset by lower transport costs. By 1911 Mt Elliott boasted "an army of miners receiving the best wages in the State, an organised township of 1,000 inhabitants, a mine earning a monthly profit of £15,000 and distributing £200,000 per annum in local expenditure".⁷

The Cloncurry mines also suffered less from the copper slump than did the mines of Chillagoe and Herberton because the western field was developed later. Accessible copper ore reserves at Cloncurry were therefore less exhausted than those at Chillagoe in 1907. The far northern mines had been rather hastily and inexpediently

5 Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, p.34. Cf. K.H. Kennedy, *The Profits of Boom: a short history of the Cloncurry Copper Field*, ms., author's possession, 1978.

6 *QPP* 1907, II, pp.1057-1059; 1910, III, p.693; 1913, III, p.685.

7 *Ibid.*, 1912, III, p.699; Kennedy, *Profits of Boom*, pp.7-9.

developed in the copper boom. When the slump came, it particularly hit those mines based on low-grade ores; mines which had been developed sensibly, such as those of the Chillagoe Company, survived longer. The major Cloncurry mines not only survived but progressed.

TABLE I⁸

MINERS EMPLOYED IN THE CLONCURRY DISTRICT, 1901-1915

	<u>Gold</u>	<u>Copper</u>	<u>Total</u>
1901	23	25	48
1902	34	20	54
1903	24	52	76
1904	30	75	105
1905	40	160	200
1906	4	396	400
1907	4	650	654
1908	14	720	734
1909	15	601	616
1910	7	660	667
1911	7	840	847
1912		1555	1555
1913		1607	1607
1914		823	823
1915		1020	1020

The fall in the prices nevertheless forced some of the lesser Cloncurry mines to close; others cut costs by retrenchment. Consequently, in 1909 the number of miners employed fell (see Table I). Most of those workers affected, however, found jobs on railway construction in the district. It was in these unsettling economic circumstances that the WWA came into existence in February 1909.⁹ From its inception the WWA was a general workers' union, enrolling not only miners, smelter hands, navvies, and other labourers but also the women employed in hotels and boarding houses. The union's first action was a successful bid for a wage increase for these domestic workers. Soon afterwards a brief miners' strike was also successful in retaining an underground 44-hour week against the companies' proposal to

8 Compiled from Mines Department reports in *QPP*.

9 *Worker*, 27 February 1909.

increase it to 48 hours. Reporting on these victories, WWA secretary Jack Dash forecast that "soon there will not be a working man here who will not be in the union". He later indicated that the WWA shared the exclusivist White Australian attitude then common among trade unions: "we have also passed a resolution that no member of our union patronise any Chinaman starting in business as we want this town for white men".¹⁰

Harsh working and living conditions on the Cloncurry copper field led to frequent disputes between management and labour. As in the Chillagoe-Herberton district, industrial relations exhibited on a small scale the endemic conflict often found in large, isolated mining towns such as Broken Hill in New South Wales or the metal mines of Colorado and Idaho in the United States of America. Until low copper prices eventually brought about the extinction of the field in the 1920s, the Cloncurry miners maintained a reputation for militancy which major strikes in 1913 and 1918-1919 only highlighted.

Not surprisingly the main recreation was drink, the importance of which was attested by a bitter social conflict in late 1910: workers declared a "beer strike" in protest against the high price of liquor sold in local hotels. The strike - or rather the boycott - continued for eleven weeks, with constant picketing of the hotels to prevent thirsty recalcitrants from purchasing their refreshment. An occasional outbreak of violence indicated the seriousness of the situation, leading one Cloncurry resident to wire anxiously to a Townsville newspaper: "More police are urgently needed here, mob rule prevailing. There was almost a riot last night when fully 100 men followed a man to kick him out of the town". Finally, the trouble was settled when hotel owners surrendered and lowered the price of drinks.¹¹

10 *Ibid.*, 14 August 1909. John Dash (1882-1952); born Blackall, Q. Stockman, miner Mt Elliott; 1909-1910 secretary WWA; 1911 organiser and district secretary AWA/AWU until 1920. President AWU, Q., 1925. MLA Mundingburra 1920-1944; Minister for Transport 1932-1939.

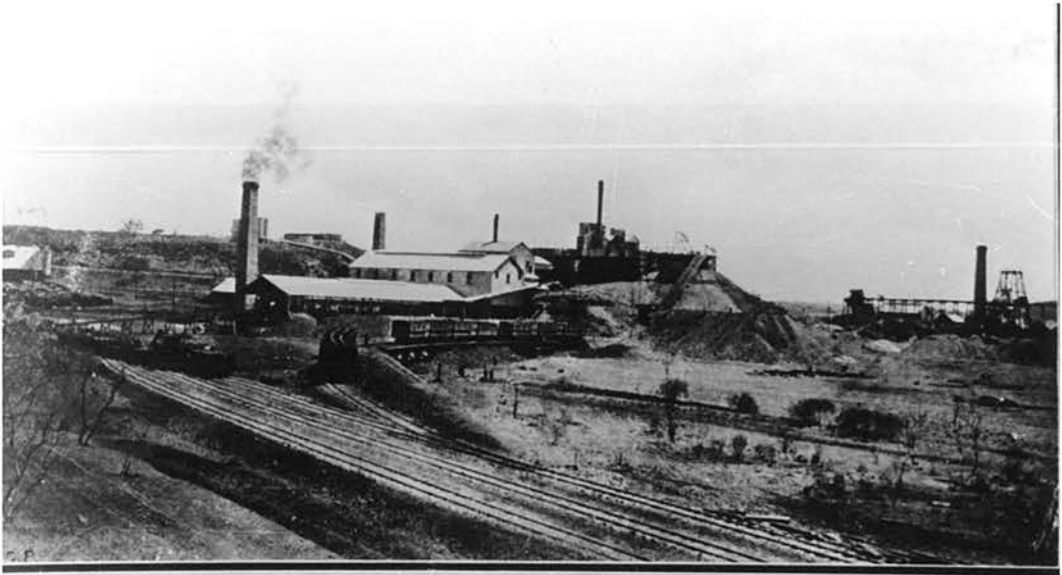
11 *North Queensland Herald*, 17 September 1910, 24 September 1910, 12 November 1910; *Pioneer*, 1 October 1910.



TOWNSHIP OF SELWYN.

TERMINUS OF THE CLONCURRY-MOUNT ELLIOTT RAILWAY.

Plate 13. Township of Selwyn. [QGMJ, 15 April 1911]



MOUNT ELLIOTT COPPER MINE AND TREATMENT WORKS, CLONCURRY FIELD.

Plate 14. Mt Elliott Copper Mine and Treatment Works. [QGMJ, 15 February 1911]

A realisation of their geographical and social isolation caused the WWA's 800 members to respond favourably when in mid-1910 the AWA proposed amalgamation. It was thought that, with the backing of wider organisation and larger resources, north-western workers would have greater success in their struggle to improve labour standards. Since both the AWA and WWA embraced the same kinds of workers - indeed many belonged to both unions - amalgamation seemed not only logical but desirable.

The WWF

With the end of the 1901-1904 drought and the recovery and expansion of the pastoral and sugar industries, wharf labourers in the northern coastal towns also revived their trade unions. The more favourable trade conditions, the general upsurge of unionism and the active encouragement of federal WWF executive officials all aided this resuscitation of unions which had flickered briefly in 1901-1902 but which had since been practically defunct.

In 1906 the WWF executive in Melbourne decided to register with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, with the eventual aim of obtaining a national award. In preparation for this, the general secretary, Joe Morris, toured the Queensland coast to re-organise the federation's branches.¹² A direct result of his visit was the rejuvenation of the Townsville and Cairns waterside unions.

Prior to Morris' visit the Cairns WWF had 48 members; when he addressed a meeting in Cairns on 14 September 1906, 31 new members joined. At the end of the year the branch had a full-time secretary and 151 members. "We had captured the port for unionism," wrote the branch secretary, "and as all the workers were enrolled we intended to profit by our success".¹³ With the assistance of the federal

12 *Worker*, 22 September 1906; James Healy, Brief History of the Australian Waterfront and the Waterside Workers' Unions, cyclo-styled ms. [Mitchell Library 1049/3]. The first federal waterside workers' award was delivered in 1914; before that, however, the WWF secured some individual port agreements which were registered with the arbitration court and thus had the legal status of an award for the port concerned.

13 *Worker*, 17 October 1908.

officials - Morris himself and the president, W.M. Hughes - the Cairns WWF secured a favourable agreement with the shipping company. To most local wharfies, the benefits of inter-state union federation thus were demonstrated:

The effects of that federation on the industrial conditions of the workers of this port should point a moral to other branches when they feel like "going alone". . . . Let it be here remembered that this success was impossible of achievement without our being an integer in a grand federation, also without the assistance of the powerful men composing its Executive Council.¹⁴

The Mackay and Townsville branches of the WWF likewise proved stronger from late 1906. They, too, entered into agreements with shipowners which the federal executive negotiated on their behalf and then registered with the arbitration court. In 1909 the Townsville branch secretary organised the waterside workers at Bowen.¹⁵ By October 1913 WWF branches in North Queensland had a combined membership of 1,109, comprising Mackay (240), Bowen (70), Townsville (540), Innisfail (12), Cairns (220), Port Douglas (7) and Thursday Island (20): in other words, the great majority of northern waterside workers.¹⁶

Wharf labouring was often heavy, usually hot and sometimes dangerous work. Moreover, it was irregular: shipping news was unreliable and men often waited for hours on the wharf unpaid. When a ship came in it had to be unloaded and re-loaded without delay; shifts of 48 hours straight were not unknown, the men snatching whatever sleep they could on the wharves and hatches during meal and

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 30 January 1909, 10 April 1909; *North Queensland Herald*, 24 July 1909.

16 The strength of other Queensland branches was: Brisbane - 1,200; Maryborough - 65; Bundaberg - 65; Rockhampton - 330. W.J. Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers, their unionism and leadership, 1872-1916*, Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1973, p.282.

"smoko" breaks. Having loaded a ship, workers might wait days for another job. In all northern ports except Townsville waterside work was geared to the busy sugar export season in the second half of the year. There was much seasonal unemployment, and many wharfies were forced to look for other jobs. On the other hand, earnings from overtime offered some compensation for the irregularity of the work and the long hours; the work itself was not as monotonously laborious as either mining or sugar-cane cutting; there was also some variety according to the type of cargo.

The nature of waterside work engendered a "restless, strained atmosphere of industrial relations".¹⁷ The major grievance was the absence of union preference in employment. Preference agreements were current in some ports at various times - for example, in Townsville in 1909¹⁸ - but the shipping companies persistently claimed the right to employ non-union labour. Efforts to win preference often included agitation against the employment of Asian crew members of overseas ships in handling cargo. In order to put an end to the practice, the Cairns branch prohibited its members altogether from working with Asians - a rule rigidly enforced by imposing fines on any members who transgressed it.¹⁹ It was possible to justify the measure on the industrial grounds that Asian seamen were non-unionists taking the jobs of WWF members; but overt racialism was the more likely explanation since on one occasion, when a "Hindoo" applied for union membership, his application was unanimously rejected.²⁰

Another significant grievance was the casual hiring or "bull" system of job selection which prevented an equal distribution of work (and therefore earnings) among wharf labourers. Shipping company

17 Lewis, *Ports of Queensland*, p.150. Cf. Hobsbawm, 'National Unions on the Waterside', in *Labouring Men*, pp.204-207; C. Kerr and A. Siegel, 'The Interindustry Propensity to Strike - an international comparison', in A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin and A.M. Ross (eds), *Industrial Conflict* (New York, 1954), pp.191-192.

18 *Worker*, 20 February 1909. The absence of union preference was reportedly the chief source of discontent in Cairns, *ibid.*, 17 October 1908.

19 WWF Cairns branch minutes, 8 December 1907, 30 July 1909, 17 July 1910.

20 *Ibid.*, 24 May 1908.

stevedores simply selected their labour each day from among the workers who presented themselves at the wharves. This meant that wharfies endowed with above-stoppage strength and endurance enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the best-paid work. The system was open to victimisation, favouritism, and corruption on the part of the stevedores; it led to much ill-feeling between workers and their employers. Since union moves to eradicate it were opposed not only by the shipping companies but also the "bull" section of workers, they invariably failed - as, for example, a strike in Townsville in June 1908 did.²¹

The federal WWF executive was in large part responsible for the recovery of the northern branches after 1906 and was often acclaimed by waterside workers for its success in winning concessions from shipowners. Yet its authority was resented and its directions often ignored by the local branches. Each cherished a strong tradition of local autonomy and tended to regard local port conditions as *sui generis*. As Mitchell remarks,

The numerous Queensland groups were anxious for the help of the WWF, yet each, believing its conditions were unique, did not always take readily to the notion of WWF restraint for the sake of unions in other ports which had not the same problems.²²

In other words, each branch placed its immediate sectional interests first, and each reserved the right to act independently regardless of the effect on the federation as a whole. The federal executive, on the other hand, mindful that most benefit for the majority of waterside workers would be gained from a concerted national policy,

21 *North Queensland Herald*, 27 June 1908. Cf. *Pioneer*, 3 September 1910, which complained that on the Mackay waterfront "a favoured few of 10 or 12" received the first call every day. This system of casual hiring was not completely abolished until the 1940s. Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers*, p.192.

22 Mitchell, *op.cit.*, p.319. Cf. Healy, *Brief History*, p.11: "The Federation's greatest weakness was at the point where the internal divisions were greatest, and its highest success was reached when the maximum unity was achieved between its component parts around its National policy". The latter did not occur until Healy himself became general secretary in 1937.

emphasised the importance of presenting a united front both to employers and the arbitration court. This emphasis on the overall needs of the union often meant that the peculiar problems of individual branches were ignored; in the process the federal executive frequently lost contact with the rank and file, thereby forfeiting its confidence. For example, in August 1911 the Mackay wharfies expressed concern over a lack of communication with the head office of the union and over lack of support from the federation in their current conflict with employers.²³ Later that year, the Cairns branch denounced a new agreement which the executive had made with the shipping companies, shortening the locally accepted "smoko" times for night work. Members unanimously censured the federal executive "for the manner in which they have deceived this Branch". Matters were not helped when Morris replied peremptorily, demanding an apology.²⁴

The parochial sectionalism of the North Queensland waterside workers' unions *vis-à-vis* the WWF executive was reinforced - in a sense, paradoxically - by their vigorous involvement in the wider labour movement. They early affiliated with both the ALF and the Labor Party; they were also closely associated with other local trade unions.²⁵ The Cairns WWF gave organisational and financial support to the Etheridge railway navvies in 1908 and to striking Mossman cane cutters in 1910.²⁶ In 1911 the Townsville and Cairns waterside workers refused to handle sugar declared "black" by the AWA, in defiance of initial WWF directives.²⁷ Northern wharfies

23 WWF Mackay branch minutes, 5 August 1911.

24 WWF Cairns branch minutes, 11 December 1911, 21 January 1912.

25 *Ibid.*, 8 December 1907, 30 June 1912; WWF Mackay branch minutes, 11 August 1912; CPE minutes, 29 June 1909, 30 August 1909. However, for a few months in 1910 conservative "non-political" unionists controlled the Mackay branch, *Pioneer*, 25 June 1910.

26 WWF Cairns branch minutes, 19 July 1908, 30 July 1908, 20 June 1910, 15 August 1910.

27 *Ibid.*, 2 July 1911; WWF Mackay branch minutes, 3 July 1911; *North Queensland Herald*, 22 July 1911; *Bowen Independent*, 26 August 1911.

likewise went on strike in support of the ALF in the Brisbane general strike in 1912, again occasioning conflict between the branches and the federal executive.²⁸ North Queensland waterside workers were more oriented to, and more loyal to, regional trade unionism than they were to the federation head office in far-away Melbourne.

The AFBEU/AMIEU

In the pattern of overall growth within the Queensland trade union movement, one of the most phenomenal success stories was the rise of the Australian Federated Butchers' Employees' Union [AFBEU] from a membership of 35 in 1905 to 2,600 in 1910.²⁹ Just as federal officials of the WWF fostered the local waterside unions, so the southern AFBEU provided the initial impetus for the organisation of butchers and meatworkers in Queensland. A loose federation of existing meat industry unions (predominantly composed of skilled slaughtermen), the AFBEU was created in New South Wales and Victoria in 1905. At the prodding of southern unionists the Brisbane butcher's union joined the federation, and in June 1906 J.T. Gilday³⁰ was appointed full-time state secretary. These developments, compounded by a decision to organise all classes of labour in both retail and export sections of the industry, had immediate repercussions: by the end of 1906 the union had 480 members in the Brisbane district and in February 1907 a conference with meatworks' managers won improved conditions for members. This success in Brisbane encouraged the union to appoint a full-time organiser, Jack Crampton,³¹ in 1908, and to

28 WWF Cairns branch minutes, 2 February 1912, 8 February 1912. For the 1911 sugar and 1912 general strikes, see below ch. VI.

29 *Worker*, 17 December 1910.

30 John Theophilus Gilday (1874-1937); born Ballarat, Vic.: arrived Queensland 1897; secretary Queensland branch AFBEU 1906-1912, president Queensland branch AMIEU 1913-1926. MLA Ithaca 1912-1926; inspector state butcheries 1926-1933.

31 Walter Russell ("Jack") Crampton (1879-1938); born Sydney; c. 1900 meatworker North Queensland. Organiser and secretary Queensland AFBEU/AMIEU 1908-1915 (seconded to the AWA during the 1911 sugar strike); state Director of Labour 1915-1917; 1917 general manager *Daily Standard*; CPE member 1910-1913. MLC 1917-1922; alderman Brisbane City Council 1935-1938.

organise butchers' employees and meatworkers in Central and North Queensland.³²

The growth of the AFBEU³³ closely followed a revival of prosperity in the cattle industry at the end of the drought in 1904. By late 1906 a succession of good seasons had enabled stock to multiply. Prices also rose, and meatworks which had been closed for some years not only resumed but expanded operations. New export contracts materialised - some of these very important, such as that with the British War Office for the supply of meat to soldiers overseas. Despite the tick pest, the meat industry flourished in succeeding years; good seasons in cattle districts and high prices for frozen and canned meat exports prevailed. The result was a substantial increase in the number of workers employed in the industry.³⁴

In North Queensland at this time there were five meatworks - two large ones at Townsville (Ross River and Alligator Creek), and three smaller ones at Torrens Creek, Sellheim (near Charters Towers) and Merinda (near Bowen). These works operated on a seasonal basis with a staff of mainly itinerant labour; killing operations usually lasted from March or April to about October. During the slack season the skilled slaughterers and boners went to Victoria and New Zealand for the fat lamb season; less skilled workers sought employment in the sugar industry or in building and railway construction.

Since meat was a highly perishable product, a stoppage during the operations of the works meant considerable loss to the company. Cattle were brought great distances to the meatworks and slaughtered without delay in order to minimise loss of condition and the danger

32 T.A. Cutler, *The History of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union: a Study of the Internal Dynamics of a Labour Organisation*, Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, 1976, pp.99-100.

33 From January 1913 the organisation was known by its present name, the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union [AMIEU].

34 'Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for 1906-1907', *QPP* 1907, II, p.641; *ibid.* 2nd session 1908, III, p.8.; 2nd session 1909, II, p.268, 1911-1912, II, pp.814-907.

of contracting disease; once they were killed, processing continued as quickly as possible. Consequently, companies dreaded mechanical failure of any interruption that would upset killing schedules. Recognising their vulnerability to strike action, meatworks managers strenuously resisted union organisation among their employees. Conversely, once unionism entered the works, this vulnerability placed a powerful weapon in the hands of the workers.³⁵ And the workers, some of them already members of the AWA or AWU, readily embraced unionism. Childe recounts the arrival in Townsville of the AFBEU organiser:

Unionism was then weak in that part of Queensland. In the meat works it was absolutely taboo. When the managers refused Crampton admission to the works, he splashed across the tidal flats and crawled in through the thick jungle. Conditions inside were indeed bad, but the men and boys followed the union organiser bare-footed across the mud to hear the gospel. Through such efforts a new state of affairs was established in the north.³⁶

Adopting an aggressive industrial policy, the AFBEU was successful in enrolling members, gaining employer recognition and improving wages until by 1910 only the Alligator Creek works resisted: its manager "would not, if he could possibly help it, recognise the union".³⁷ Other meatworks now worked a maximum of 48 hours a week; Alligator Creek still worked 60 hours. Discontent among workers was aggravated by grievances over food and low wages, and in May 1910 - at the very peak of the season - the skilled slaughtering gang at Alligator Creek went on strike. The union had planned the event carefully; other employees refused to take the place of the slaughterers. When the plant foreman began to kill, the meat was declared "black" and left untreated. The manager, faced with a

35 Cf. Cutler, *History of the AMIEU*, p.24; Walker, *Australian Industrial Relations Systems*, p.296.

36 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.117.

37 AFBEU Brisbane branch minutes, n.d. May 1910 [University of Wollongong Archives].

considerable loss and working to a tight shipping schedule, surrendered after only three days. Working hours were reduced to 48 per week; wages, too, were increased. It was a signal victory which greatly enhanced the union's prestige, and membership grew accordingly.³⁸

By this time there were union branches at all meatworks and among most retail employees in North Queensland. Moreover, the AFBEU was successful in its aim to cover not only the slaughtering gangs, freezing-room hands and general workers, but also the ancillary tradesmen employed at the works. At the trade union congress in Brisbane in August 1910, Crampton proudly reported that his union now organised 98% of all classes of labour in the industry. The chief exceptions were maintenance engineers and engine-drivers, but even some of these rejected their own unions in favour of the AFBEU.⁴⁰

The Queensland branch of the meatworkers' union was divided into three administrative areas based respectively on Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville. Problems of distance and communication meant that from the beginning the Northern district had considerable autonomy. A permanent Northern district secretary was appointed in 1910; he was assisted by a committee (the district council) drawn from each of the six sub-branches (one for each of the five meatworks and one for the retail section of the industry). The meatworks' sub-branches also had considerable independence and initiative in administering union policy. For example, a sub-branch committee known as the "board of

38 *Worker*, 21 May 1910, 28 May 1910; *Pioneer*, 28 May 1910. Accounts of this strike by participants are given by E.E. Mansfield, in *Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* [MIJQ] (official organ of the AMIEU, Queensland branch), March 1939, and William Davis, 'In Quest of the Millenium', *ibid.*, March-April, 1942. Mansfield was northern district secretary from 1910 to 1913; Davis worked in Townsville meatworks and on North Queensland rail construction from 1908 to 1918.

39 AFBEU Townsville branch minutes, 2 September 1909, 30 March 1910 [University of Wollongong Archives]; *Worker*, 20 February 1909; *North Queensland Herald*, 8 May 1909; *Pioneer*, 1 January 1910.

40 *First Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, p.10.

control", consisting of delegates from each section of the meatworks, handled on-site industrial relations. What co-ordination did exist between districts was limited mainly to irregular visits by the state organiser and periodic state conferences, the first of which was held in Rockhampton in December 1910.⁴¹ The autonomy of the northern district and the sometimes rebellious independence of the sub-branches exacerbated much of the later conflict in the meat industry.

In 1911 the union's strong bargaining position forced the meat export companies to accept a system of direct negotiation and regular agreements by round-table conferences. The 1911 agreement also granted preference of employment to union members. By 1914 this arrangement was gradually extended to provide that labour must be supplied exclusively from the union office. This provision not only denied the companies any effective say in the selection of labour, but gave the union considerable influence in the internal operation of the works.⁴²

The companies staunchly opposed this encroachment on their managerial functions, but they had little choice if they wished to maintain the uninterrupted operation of the works. Nevertheless, until the first world war, when social and economic tensions caused major disruption, the meat industry in North Queensland was relatively free from severe industrial upheaval. The employers conceded that the union preference cause ensured a ready labour supply at a time when labour might otherwise have been scarce, and that the union usually abided by the agreements despite persistent trouble with militant individuals.⁴³

41 *Worker*, 17 December 1910.

42 T.A. Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday: the Townsville Meatworkers' Strike of 1918-1919', in Iremonger *et al.*, *Strikes*, p.84.

43 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Meat Industry', *QPP* 1913, II, pp.1327-1328: evidence of A. Gilmour, manager of the Queensland Meat Export Company's Ross River works, and of H.H. Cordingley, manager of the Alligator Creek works (locally owned; in 1913 taken over by the American firm, Swift's, trading as the Australian Meat Export Company).

From the union's point of view, concessions from employers were gained regularly at conferences, and the preference system both made the task of organisation slightly easier and ensured some control over dissidents. On the other hand, social isolation and the arduous and unpleasant work shaped attitudes of defiance among the itinerant meatworkers.⁴⁴ The union accordingly maintained a militant posture of class confrontation which, opposed to the anti-union stance of the companies, meant that although major unrest was averted, industrial relations were in a state of constant tension.

The North rapidly assumed a leading role in the AFBEU and later in the AMIEU. As early as July 1910 the meatworkers' union held "pride of position [in] numbers and improvement of conditions" among Townsville trade unions.⁴⁵ By the end of 1913, Queensland was the largest branch in the federation;⁴⁶ the northern district with 1,854 members was the largest in the state. At the branch conference of the AMIEU in January 1914, Gilday, now state president and a Labor parliamentarian, praised the work of the northern district:

There was no branch [*sic*] that had so much to face at the initiation of the movement, and he did not think there was a branch of another organisation in Australia that had made such rapid

44 Studies investigating the characteristically high level of industrial militancy among meatworkers in both Australia and New Zealand emphasise their geographical and social isolation, seasonal employment, piece-work rates and the unpleasant nature of the work as prime factors. See J.M. Howells and R.P. Alexander, 'A Strike in the Meat Freezing Industry: Background to Industrial Discontent in New Zealand', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, XXI, 3 (April 1968), pp.418-425; A.J. Geare, 'The Problem of Industrial Unrest: Theories into the Causes of Local Strikes in a New Zealand Meat Freezing Works', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 14, 1 (March 1972), pp.13-22. Cutler, *History of the AMIEU*, pp.31-35, relates these and other theories to the Australian meatworker; in 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.85, he discusses "the conditioned recklessness of the seasonal worker", and argues that "these professional slaughterers were brutalised by their job".

45 *Worker*, 9 July 1910.

46 Cutler, *History of the AMIEU*, p.126.

progress. . . The organisation, through its efforts had succeeded in greatly improving the conditions of work in the North, and this had been responsible for a good deal of the increased membership.⁴⁷

Since it had organised nearly all workers in the meat industry regardless of trade or skill, the AMIEU was practically the ideal "industrial union". It readily aligned itself with the institutions of the labour movement in the state, affiliating with the ALF at its first state conference; its sub-branches often registered with the CPE of the Labor Party.⁴⁸ On his organising tours of North Queensland, Jack Crampton willingly helped other unions to recruit members, lending his considerable talent to foster the general growth of unionism.⁴⁹ The example of the AMIEU, like that of the AWA, encouraged the establishment of other trade unions.

The Railway Unions

An important aspect of the economic recovery in Queensland in this period was the substantial increase in government spending on railway construction. The Kidston governments (1906-1911) initiated a comprehensive scheme of railway expansion which involved private as well as public expenditure. Major developments in North Queensland were the extension of the Townsville-Hughenden line 275 miles further west to Selwyn (Mt Elliott); the construction of lines linking Cairns with Babinda and Herberton; the Chillagoe Company's extension of its private line from Almaden to Forsayth on the Etheridge mineral field. Work was thus provided for large numbers of casual construction labourers, most of whom joined the AWA or the WWA. The extensive railway construction was accompanied by an increasing volume of goods carried - also a product of the economic

47 *Official Report of the Third Annual State Conference of the AMIEU, Queensland Branch* (Brisbane, 1914), pp.17-18. The southern district had 1,782 members, the central district 638. Although Gilday here speaks of a "branch", it is clear that he is referring to the northern district.

48 CPE minutes, 30 August 1909; *Worker*, 17 December 1910.

49 *Worker*, 10 July 1909; *Pioneer*, 9 July 1910.

recovery. Both developments meant that there were many more permanent employees in the locomotive, traffic, maintenance and administrative branches of the railway department. Figures for the number of employees in the northern division of the service are not available, but the number of permanent state railway employees in the whole of Queensland rose from 4,943 in 1904 to 8,028 in 1911; in the latter year a further 5,500 construction workers were also employed by the railway department.⁵⁰

Railway employees were organised by a variety of trade unions ranging from the salaried officers' associations through the running-grades union (the Locomotive Engine-drivers, Firemen and Cleaners' Association [LEFCA]),⁵¹ the Stationmasters' Union, the Guards, Shunters and Conductors' Association, to the craft unions in the workshops and maintenance depots, which were not confined to the railway service. But the largest and most vigorous trade union in the railways was the "all-grades" union, so called because it purported to cover every railwayman no matter what his position or degree of skill. This was the Queensland Railway Employees' Association [QREA] which was formed in Brisbane in 1886; largely defunct during the 1890s it had recovered after 1905.⁵²

The closer organisation of railway unionism was hindered, however, by the decentralised structure of the Queensland railway system. Three main trunk lines ran inland from Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville; shorter railways served the hinterlands of the smaller ports. The coastal line north from Brisbane reached Rockhampton in 1903 but was not extended to Mackay until 1921. It reached Townsville in 1923 and Cairns finally in 1924. A basic priority in the

50 Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia* [CYB], 1, 1907, p.582; *ibid.*, 8, 1913, p.639; *QPP* 1911-1912, III, p.7.

51 The LEFCA was formed in Queensland in 1891. In mid-1920 it merged with kindred unions in other states to form the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen [AFULE].

52 Tim Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism: history of its early struggles', *Railway Advocate*, March 1966. (First published in the *Daily Standard* in 1922.)

construction of railways was the development and servicing of the western pastoral and mining areas, but all too often construction was governed by considerations of political expediency rather than economic viability or necessity. The railways map of North Queensland in 1912 reflected these rather disorderly priorities. No port was linked by rail with its nearest counterpart. The main trunk line extended west from Townsville to Selwyn, with branches to Ayr, Ravenswood and Winton. Lines from Cairns ran south to Babinda and west through Herberton to the Evelyn Tableland; various private railways linked Mareeba, Mungana, Mt Molloy, Mt Garnet and the Etheridge field. The Bowen railway reached north nearly to Home Hill and south almost to Proserpine; likewise the Mackay line ran south to Eton and west to Finch Hatton. An isolated track joined Normanton and Croydon in the north-west; another linked Cooktown with Laura.⁵³

The decentralised and physically disjointed structure of the Queensland railway system was reflected in an anomalous organisation of railway unions: there were initially three completely autonomous QREAs based respectively on Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville. In 1908 all-grades railway unions were formed in Cairns and Mackay but affiliated with the Brisbane organisation in preference to the Townsville union.⁵⁴ However, the anomalies did not persist; the central QREA amalgamated with the South in 1911 to form the Queensland United Railway Employees' Association [QUREA]; the Townsville QREA joined in November 1912. In 1913 the organisation became the Queensland Railway Union [QRU], a name at once simpler and more evocative of the industrial unionists' aim of an all-grades union.⁵⁵

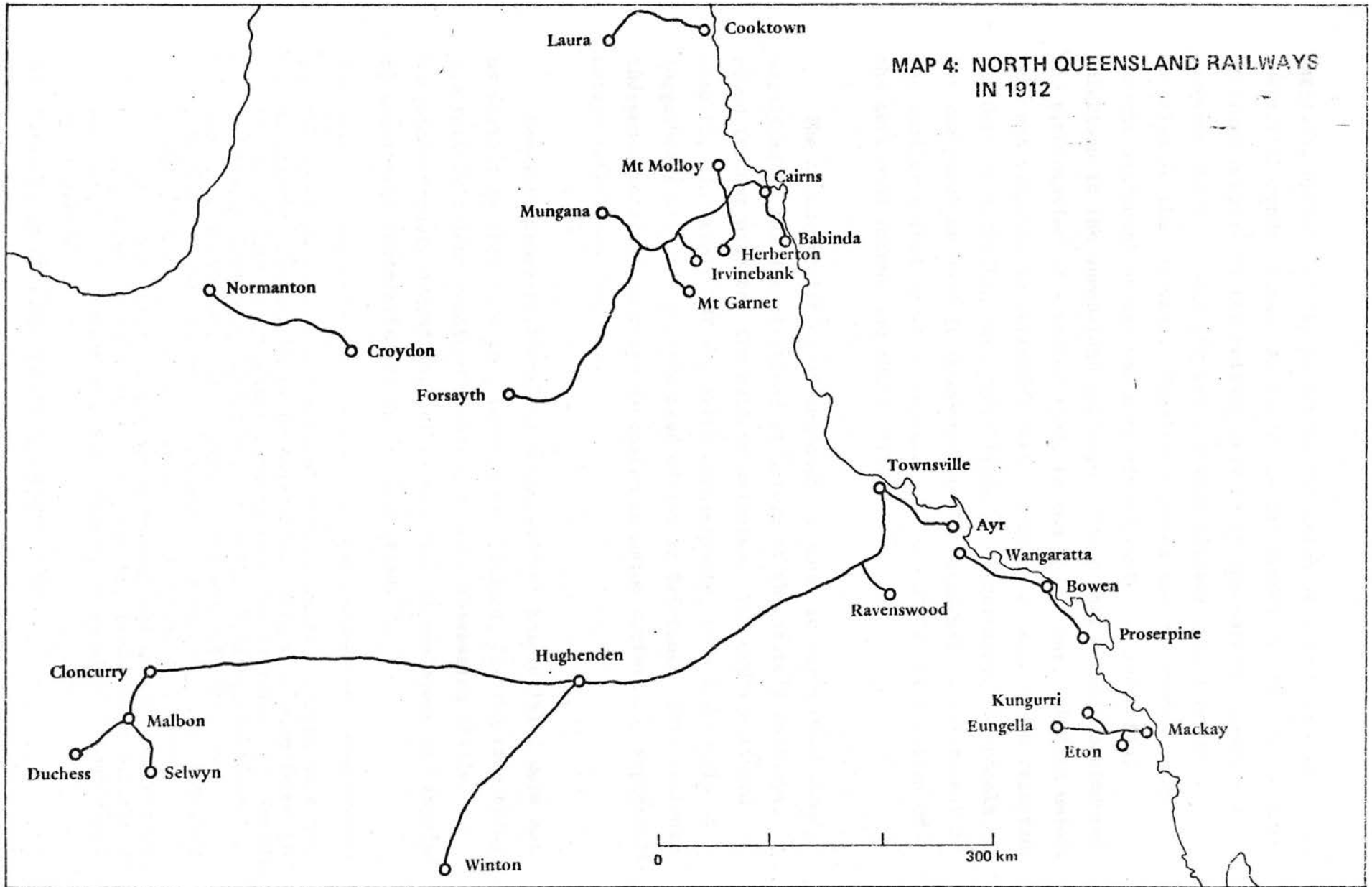
Although frequently described as an industrial union, the QRU was really a "common employment" union: its aim was to organise all workers of a single employer, in this case the Commissioner for Railways. Its more active members and officials were committed

53 See Map 4, overleaf.

54 Moroney, in *Railway Advocate*, March 1966.

55 *Ibid.*, April 1966; *Worker*, 21 November 1912.

MAP 4: NORTH QUEENSLAND RAILWAYS
IN 1912



Marxists, optimistically promoting the union as a prototype of industrial syndicalism. As such, the QRU tended to attract the more militant members of the railway service in the various grades - a tendency which exacerbated the tensions already caused by multi-unionism in the railways. Conflict between the all-grades union and the sectional unions was a continual factor in industrial relations in the Queensland railways. The number of unions hindered the presentation of a united front to the government; skilled unions were not prepared to surrender their autonomy or status and resented the QRU for intruding into their field of recruitment. Proposals for amalgamation usually foundered on the sectional self-interest of the smaller unions or were prejudiced by the QRU's vilification of the sectional unions and their officers.⁵⁶

The strong tradition of regional autonomy in North Queensland, magnified by the decentralised structure of the state's railways, posed further problems for railway unionism. The QRU's northern members, like their WWF and AFBEU counterparts, were frequently at loggerheads with the union's head office in Brisbane. This regional independence added an extra dimension to union activities, especially during industrial disputes.

However, these problems, although evident before 1914, were not as serious as they were to become later. Indeed, for the time being, the railway unions remained relatively weak, possessing little bargaining power, organising only a minority of employees and impeded by government restriction of their activities.⁵⁷

56 The problems caused by a multiplicity of railway unions were not peculiar to Queensland or to Australia. They were also found in the U.S.A. and, to a lesser extent, in Great Britain. Cf. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.13-14; Pelling, *American Labor*, pp.90-95, and H.A. Clegg, A. Fox and A.F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions since 1889*, vol. 1 : 1889-1910 (London, 1964), pp.339-340, 423-424. However, it has been suggested that sectionalism among railway unions was more extreme in Queensland than elsewhere: M.B. Cribb, *Trade Union Militancy: case studies in transport*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1972, p.243.

57 Moroney, in *Railway Advocate*, January 1966.

Union Proliferation and Limitations to Militancy

Thus the most significant group of workers involved in the trade union revival in North Queensland were unskilled workers employed in the key industries of sugar, mining, meat and transport - cane cutters, sugar-mill hands, miners, smelterers, meatworkers, wharf labourers and railway navvies, many of whom worked at various times in all these industries, as well as in the western pastoral industry. As the economy recovered, other groups of workers in the transport industry, as well as in the service and ancillary industries, also participated in the trade union renaissance. The recovery to relative prosperity in the meat and wool industries presaged a general economic recovery in the building, manufacturing, food and retail industries. By 1908 it was reported that all branches of the building industry in Townsville were "very brisk": foundries and engineering works were fully employed; plumbers, gasfitters, tinsmiths, wagon-builders, saddlers, bootmakers, tailors, drapers and cabinet makers were thriving; at times it was difficult to obtain skilled labour.⁵⁸ Similar conditions prevailed at other North Queensland towns. In 1911 the government chief inspector of factories and shops, perhaps overlooking the uncertain conditions of mining in many districts, stated that "all classes of industries throughout the State are in a prosperous condition".⁵⁹

In early 1906 there was no trade union of any sort operating in Townsville.⁶⁰ Three years later the situation was vastly different. On 1 May 1909 Townsville citizens saw "a magnificent display" of local unionism in the first "eight-hour day" parade since the 1880s. In addition to the WWU, the AFBEU and the QREA, the parade included unions of boilermakers, stationary engine-drivers, locomotive engine-drivers and the recently-formed Associated Workers' Union (the last a local organisation embracing tailors, hairdressers, wheelwrights,

58 *QPP* 2nd session 1908, II, p.321.

59 *Ibid.* 1911-1912, II, p.367.

60 'Report of the Royal Commission on Sugar Industry Labour', *ibid.* 1906, II, p.852.

tinsmiths, rockchoppers, carpenters, blacksmiths, printers and laundry workers).⁶¹

The burgeoning numbers and membership of trade unions was evident throughout the whole of North Queensland. They included engine-drivers at Mackay and waterworks' employees, sawmill workers and domestics in Cairns. Traditional craft unions, such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers [ASE] and the Queensland Typographical Association [QTA], also began recruiting on a limited scale.⁶² However, craft unionism remained relatively weak in the North because the predominantly primary-producing economy demanded largely unskilled labour.

Gold miners and labourers at Charters Towers and Ravenswood joined in the union revival in 1906, but their organisation was imperfect: of the nearly 3,000 miners in Charters Towers, only four to five hundred were members of the local Associated Workers' Union.⁶³ The scale of wages also remained at a level set in 1900, and in May 1908 even fell when employers actually reduced wages in response to the continued decline in the gold yield. The union was powerless to resist either these reductions or similar cuts in April 1909.⁶⁴ In fact the only success claimed by the Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union was in the political field: the union's energies were almost wholly consumed by campaigning in order to ensure Labor success in elections.⁶⁵

61 *North Queensland Herald*, 8 May 1909. Cf. *Worker*, 19 September 1908: "A progressive effort to revive the spirit of industrial organisation at Townsville has commenced. An Associated Workers' Union, including males and females has been formed".

62 *Pioneer*, 1 January 1910; *Worker*, 24 December 1910; Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.203; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, p.182.

63 *Worker*, 10 April 1909.

64 *Ibid.*, 16 May 1908, 10 April 1909.

65 The initial stimulus to the revival of the union was the defeat of the Labor candidate, John Mullan, in a by-election on 7 October 1905; *ibid.*, 13 January 1906. The secretary of the Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union later wrote, almost apologetically, "it is in the department of politics that the union has won its greatest triumphs". *Ibid.*, 4 July 1908.

The growth of unionism in Queensland between 1905 and 1914, is shown in the following table:

TABLE II⁶⁶

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Unions</u>	<u>Membership</u>	<u>ALF Affiliated Membership</u>
1905	17	6297	3320
1906	20	6398	4000
1907	26	11236	7000
1908	28	12256	10000
1909	30	16423	11000
1910	34	18522	13000
1911	29	20000 ^a	18284
1912	67 ^b	44768	21813
1913	94	51683	23668
1914	86	55580	c

The figures are an inexact estimate of total trade union membership in Queensland but they clearly indicate the rate of growth of unionism. In the case of the ALF figures, they also indicate the trend of trade unions toward closer co-operation and political involvement. However, over half of the registered membership in 1910 was composed of the two largest unions, the AWU and the AWA, which also comprised 80% of the total ALF membership.⁶⁷

In 1912 unionists comprised 27.5% of the male workforce in Queensland compared with nearly 60% in New South Wales and over 40% in Victoria, Western Australia and Australia as a whole.⁶⁸ The figures suggest that despite the fact that Queensland labour's

66 Compiled from the published reports of the registrar of trade unions, and Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, p.533. (a) In 1911 the AWU and the AWA had their registrations cancelled; the figure of 20,000 is a considerable under-estimate, being based on the membership of the registered unions plus the 4,910 membership of the de-registered unions. (b) From 1912, figures for unions and membership are from *Labour Reports*, and although still incomplete, are a far more accurate assessment than that of the state registrar. (c) The ALF was dissolved in January 1914.

67 *QPP* 1911-1912, II, p.45; Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, p.254.

68 *Labour Report*, 2, p.12.

bargaining power had increased since the period before 1905, the rate of "unionization"⁶⁹ - and hence the relative industrial strength of unionism - was not as marked as the dramatic growth in trade union membership. The proportion of unionists to employees in North Queensland was probably much higher than the Queensland total,⁷⁰ though there were also significant limitations on trade union strength in the North as there were in the South.

The economy was now fairly prosperous, but recovery was neither uniform throughout all industries nor complete within particular industries. Unemployment was still a problem for unskilled workers, though not to the devastating extent of the depression and drought years. Employment in North Queensland was largely geared to the labour requirements of the meat and sugar industries: seasonal unemployment was thus an annual difficulty.⁷¹ It was exacerbated by the displacement of labour from mining, initially in Charters Towers and Ravenswood, later in the Herberton and Chillagoe area. Accordingly, when the state government instituted an extensive immigration scheme, labour reacted:

In the Northern mining districts for the last couple of years there have been large numbers of men continually unemployed. Men have been wandering about from place to place seeking employment - men eager to work, and men who are able to do ordinary classes of work - and they have been unable to get it. Genuine hardship has prevailed among those men through their inability to obtain work, and yet the Government are in favour of a vigorous immigration policy.⁷²

69 R.M. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia* (Ringwood, 1975), p.47.

70 In 1911 a northern unionist claimed that only 30% of Brisbane workers were organised in unions compared with 70% in North Queensland: *Second Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, p.8.

71 See the labour bureau figures in *QPP* 2nd session 1908, II, p.311; 2nd session 1909, II, p.75; 1910, II, p.737; 1911-1912, II, p.364. Note also Macarthy's estimates of unemployment in Victoria, in 'Labor and the Living Wage', p.83.

72 Theodore, in *QPD CIV* (25 November 1909), pp.448-449. Cf. Lennon, *ibid.*, CI (20 March 1908); *Worker*, 27 February 1909: Cloncurry workers protested at "the policy of flooding the labour market with immigrants whilst a good number of citizens cannot secure employment". On 17 June 1911 the *Worker* condemned the state-aided immigration as a means of exploiting the workers "to the verge of bare existence despite all wages boards and arbitration courts".

The persistence of such conditions meant that despite their substantial and impressive growth in numbers, many unions found it difficult to improve labour standards. Railway unionism remained weak; any gains won by the WWF were partly due to the federal officials' skilful use of the arbitration system. The ASWU and the Charters Towers and Townsville Associated Workers' Unions could do little to improve conditions for their members or even to protect existing conditions against encroachment by employers. Even though the AWA, well organised and capably led, was able to do both, its main success - at least before the 1911 strike - was in maintaining rather than improving labour standards, that is, resisting mining companies' attempts to cut wages and increase hours. The struggle to increase wages proved more difficult. That the AFBEU achieved considerable success in improving conditions in this period was attributable to the high degree of unionisation in the meat industry and the workers' collective bargaining power when seasons were favourable and market prices high. Thus labour's relative bargaining strength in North Queensland was substantially increased only among some workers in particular industries.

By 1910-1911 labour leaders had become increasingly disturbed by what they saw as a mounting government and judicial attack on the legal status of trade unionism. In 1906 two Queensland Supreme Court judgments followed the British Taff Vale case in ruling that the funds of a trade union were liable for damages incurred by its officials. In both cases, *Heggie v Brisbane Shipwrights' Provident Union* and *Standley v QTA*, the court rejected the union's claim to the right to instruct its members not to work with non-unionists. Mr Justice Real determined that disaffected workers might sue trade unions whose rules placed them at a disadvantage. Ensuing heavy costs and damages in fact shattered the shipwrights' union and almost

bankrupted the QTA.⁷³

Despite the agitation by the labour movement, the Queensland government refused to enact legislation similar to the British *Trades Disputes Act* of 1906 to protect unions from legal actions. Labour grew more uneasy when the government questioned the right of trade unions to contribute to political parties. In January 1911 the state registrar of trade unions, invoking the principle of the House of Lords' Osborne judgment of 1909, objected to the revised constitution of the AWA and refused to register the union under the *Trade Union Act* (1886). Among the clauses repudiated by the registrar were those calling for the AWA to "secure direct representation of Labour in parliament" and to "establish and assist in the maintenance of Labour journals".⁷⁴ In July 1911 Theodore initiated a full-scale parliamentary debate on the matter, moving that the law relating to trade unions be amended "so that the unjust disabilities which now

73 *Worker*, 17 March 1906, 31 March 1906; *ALF Report for 1906*, p.29; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, pp.179-180; Proctor, 'Brisbane Unionism and the Plumbers' Union', pp.143-144. The Taff Vale case arose from a strike on the Taff Vale railway in Wales in August 1900. The railway company secured an injunction and damages against the railway union for the picketing activity of its leaders. The Court of Appeal reversed this decision, but in July 1901 the House of Lords restored it. The Law Lords' judgment established the tortious liability of trade unions; that is, it eroded the legal immunity of union funds supposedly granted by the *Trade Union Act* of 1871. As a result, union support for the Labour Party increased enormously, leading to the reversal of Taff Vale by the *Trades Disputes Act* of 1906. See R. Lewis, 'The Historical Development of Labour Law', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, XIV, 1 (March 1976), p.4; Pelling, *History of British Trade Unionism*, pp.123-127; J.H. Portus, *The Development of Australian Trade Union Law* (Melbourne 1958), pp.235-237.

74 *QPD CVIII* (20 July 1911), p.160. In the Osborne judgment the House of Lords restrained the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants from raising a political levy or from making a contribution to the funds of the Labour Party. Cf. Lewis, *loc. cit.*: "The technical reasoning was that the scope of lawful union expenditure was to be determined by reference only to the statutory definition of a 'trade union', which envisaged industrial relations rather than politics as the basic union function". The *Trade Union Act* of 1913 largely removed this disability.

operate against those bodies may be removed":

. . .trade unionists, performing perfectly legitimate functions and endeavouring to secure better conditions for themselves, have as much right to endeavour to secure legislative enactment to carry out those conditions as they have to secure improvement through industrial action. . . .A union should not be prevented from raising or using its funds for political purposes, nor from supporting or owning newspapers.

But the Premier, Digby Denham, maintained that:

Trade unions are right as an industrial organisation. But you are trying to prostitute them into a political organisation. . . .I am not prepared to confer any power upon unionists which will enable them to use their funds for the promotion or promulgation of socialistic unionism.⁷⁵

However, the attempt to restrict the political activities of trade unions had little practical effect beyond forcing the withdrawal from registration of both the AWA and AWU. The incident nevertheless strengthened the belief of many unionists and Labor men that a more direct attack on union rights was imminent.⁷⁶ In fact, the state government's hostility to unionism - further illustrated during the 1911 sugar strike and the 1912 Brisbane general strike - only served to increase the union movement's commitment to the Labor Party. Union activists were more than ever convinced of the need to elect a Labor government which would remove any legal or political constraint upon their activities. Accordingly, one of the first pieces of legislation introduced by Labor in 1915 was the *Trade Union Act*, which deliberately nullified the principles

75 QPD CVIII (20 July 1911), pp.160-165.

76 *Ibid.* See also Theodore's speech at the 1911 trade union congress: *Second Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, p.5.

of the Taff Vale and Osborne decisions.⁷⁷

Thus, in the period before 1915, the continued industrial vulnerability of many trade unions, the uncertain legal status of unionism, and the anti-union activities of the Queensland government all contributed to a trend towards greater political involvement by labour and the closer unity of unions. Labor's policies of statutory protection of trade unions, compulsory arbitration, no immigration and increased government intervention in social and economic affairs were aspects of this trend.

Notwithstanding the various limitations on the collective strength of trade unionism, the incidence of industrial disputes in North Queensland rose considerably after 1907. Simultaneously there was a resurgence of trade union militancy throughout Australia; the most severe strikes occurring in New South Wales among waterside workers, coalminers and metal miners. In Brisbane there were strikes in the ironbuilding, bootmaking, gas and coal industries, but industrial strife in the South of Queensland was overshadowed by conflict in North Queensland: disputes and strikes of varying gravity were reported frequently (see Table III). They were most conspicuous in the mining and sugar industries, but extended also to railway construction, the waterfront and the meat industry.

77 See below Ch. VII. In fact, Queensland was the only state which passed legislation to counter the Taff Vale case; Queensland and New South Wales were the only states to legislate against the principle of the Osborne judgment. Portus reasons that the two cases were of lesser importance generally in Australia because on the one hand the various arbitration acts already provided both strike penalties and legal protection for trade unions; and on the other hand the principle of financial support for the Labor Party was well established in Australia: *Australian Trade Union Law*, pp.235-242.

TABLE III⁷⁸REPORTED STRIKES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND, 1907-1910

April-May 1907	Vulcan tin mine, Irvinebank
March 1908	Cloncurry railway construction
March 1908	Mulgrave sugar mill
June 1908	Townsville waterside workers
July-September 1908	Etheridge railway construction
January-April 1909	Stannary Hills, Irvinebank and Wolfram mines
July 1909	Mungana mines
July 1909	Cloncurry domestic workers
August 1909	Mossman sugar mill
August 1909	Cloncurry miners
August 1909	Big Reef mine, Etheridge
September-October 1909	Goondi sugar millhands, cane- cutters, Innisfail
October 1909	OK mines and smelters
February 1910	Charleston mines
May 1910	Alligator Creek meatworks, Townsville
June 1910	Mossman, Mulgrave and Nelson cane- cutters and millhands
July 1910	Atherton railway construction
September 1910	Koorboora tin mine
October 1910	Charleston miners
November 1910	Plane creek (Sarina) millhands

This upsurge of militancy in North Queensland was a consequence of the organisation into trade unions of large numbers of hitherto unorganised, unskilled workers in labour-intensive industries. Employers resisted the new attempts by workers to protect and advance their interests. In the far northern mining industry, the pattern of industrial conflict was largely shaped by the vigorous policy of the AWA, which resolved to preserve and, if possible, improve existing labour standards against employers who sought to cut costs and even refused to recognise the union as the legitimate representative of their employees. Once the battle for recognition had been won and employers entered into negotiations, the path of industrial relations became more smooth.

78 No strikes were reported in newspapers between 1902 and 1907. Clearly, strikes are only one manifestation of industrial conflict, cf. J.E. Isaac and G.W. Ford (eds), *Australian Labour Relations: readings* (2nd edition, Melbourne, 1971), pp.3-18. But they are the most obvious and tangible indications of such conflict: D.W. Oxnam, 'The Incidence of Strikes in Australia', *ibid.*, pp.19-20.

The issue of union recognition was also a factor in sugar industry disputes. Employees sought constantly to secure the decent living conditions, working hours and wages which they considered basic. Employers resisted such demands as unreasonable and indeed refused to meet the unions in conference. Since the ASWU was much more poorly organised and led than the AWA, its efforts in either direction usually proved fruitless.

Writing of the coalminers of New South Wales, Gollan discusses labour's predilection to direct action after 1906 and argues that this militancy was both a response to disillusionment with arbitration and also "strongly influenced by the spread of a militant socialist ideology".⁷⁹ In North Queensland, most trade unions had no recourse to or even experience with arbitration; there was therefore little disillusionment with it. The voluntary wages boards system was shunned by employers and employees alike - by employers because they opposed any form of intervention in their affairs and discountenanced the decisions of such wages boards as did operate; by employees because they considered them to be employer-dominated bodies, maintaining low wages and according no recognition to trade unions.⁸⁰ In fact, the experience of strike action in North Queensland convinced many unionists of the necessity for a just system of compulsory arbitration which would recognise the full rights and privileges of unionism.⁸¹

So far as militant socialist ideology was concerned, it was of only minor importance in North Queensland before 1915. One of its manifestations - the anarcho-syndicalism of the IWW - was supported

79 Gollan, *Coalminers of NSW*, p.121.

80 e.g. *Pioneer*, 25 February 1911. Before 1912, the only wages boards operating in North Queensland were those covering the retail meat industry and printing, *QPP* 1911-1912, II, p.383; the Mackay labour agent reported that both these boards were causing much dissatisfaction amongst employers.

81 e.g. Theodore, in *QPD CIV* (4 November 1909), p.460, and *ibid.* CVIII (20 July 1911), p.161; *Fourth Annual Conference of the ASWU*, p.2.

by Alf Pain and his followers in Herberton.⁸² However, when a Chillagoe AWA member condemned Pain and "this IWW which a dozen or so misguided enthusiasts seek to introduce as the means of salvation",⁸³ he was in turn criticised for exaggerating the influence of the IWW: "Omitting Pain. . .there are no disciples of IWW-ism in Herberton".⁸⁴

In Mackay, the editor of the *Pioneer* approvingly published the IWW preamble to its stark proclamation of class war, suggesting the formation of a local IWW club.⁸⁵ But the editor himself seems to have misread the preamble. His expression of its ideology was, at best, equivocal:

The IWW - the Union of Unions - the Socialists' hope for the waging of something like equal battle until wrongs are righted, and the workers receive the full reward for their labours, is the organisation that will wield a powerful influence for *industrial peace*.⁸⁶

There was apparently insufficient response to the proposed IWW club, and no more of it was heard in the columns of the *Pioneer*. The newspaper's energies were rechannelled into ensuring the return of Labor candidates at the 1910 federal election and supporting the ASWU's decision to seek a federal arbitration court award:⁸⁷ both policies went directly against IWW preachings. It seems that the *Pioneer* editor, and other IWW advocates in North Queensland at this time, saw the IWW propaganda simply as another tool to be used in support of better organisation and unity among workers.

82 *Worker*, 8 January 1910.

83 *Ibid.*, 29 January 1910.

84 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1910.

85 *Pioneer*, 29 January 1910.

86 *Ibid.*, 8 January 1910. [my emphasis].

87 *Ibid.*, 19 February 1910, 12 March 1910.

All that can really be said of militant socialism as a formative influence on trade unionism in North Queensland is that it aided the articulation of felt grievances in the language of class war and held out hope for the inevitable triumph of the working class. In publicising the writings of such diverse socialists as Bellamy, Gronlund, Henry George, Marx, Kropotkin and Eugene Debs, the *Worker* had a powerful educative influence. Certainly, too, trade unions grew more assertive than they had been during the years of depression, drought, recession and unemployment. The increasing frequency of strikes in North Queensland bears testimony to their militancy. But the advocates of the more radical brands of socialism and syndicalism had only a small following and a nugatory influence on the conduct of trade union affairs. Socialist ideology in its many forms provided an aspiration, rationale and rhetoric for unionists but when immediate objectives were defined, they were practical and reformist. When specific political reforms were desired it was to the moderate, democratic socialism of the Labor Party that trade unions turned.



Plate 15. Workers at Alligator Creek Meatworks. [*North Queensland Register*, 28 October 1912.]

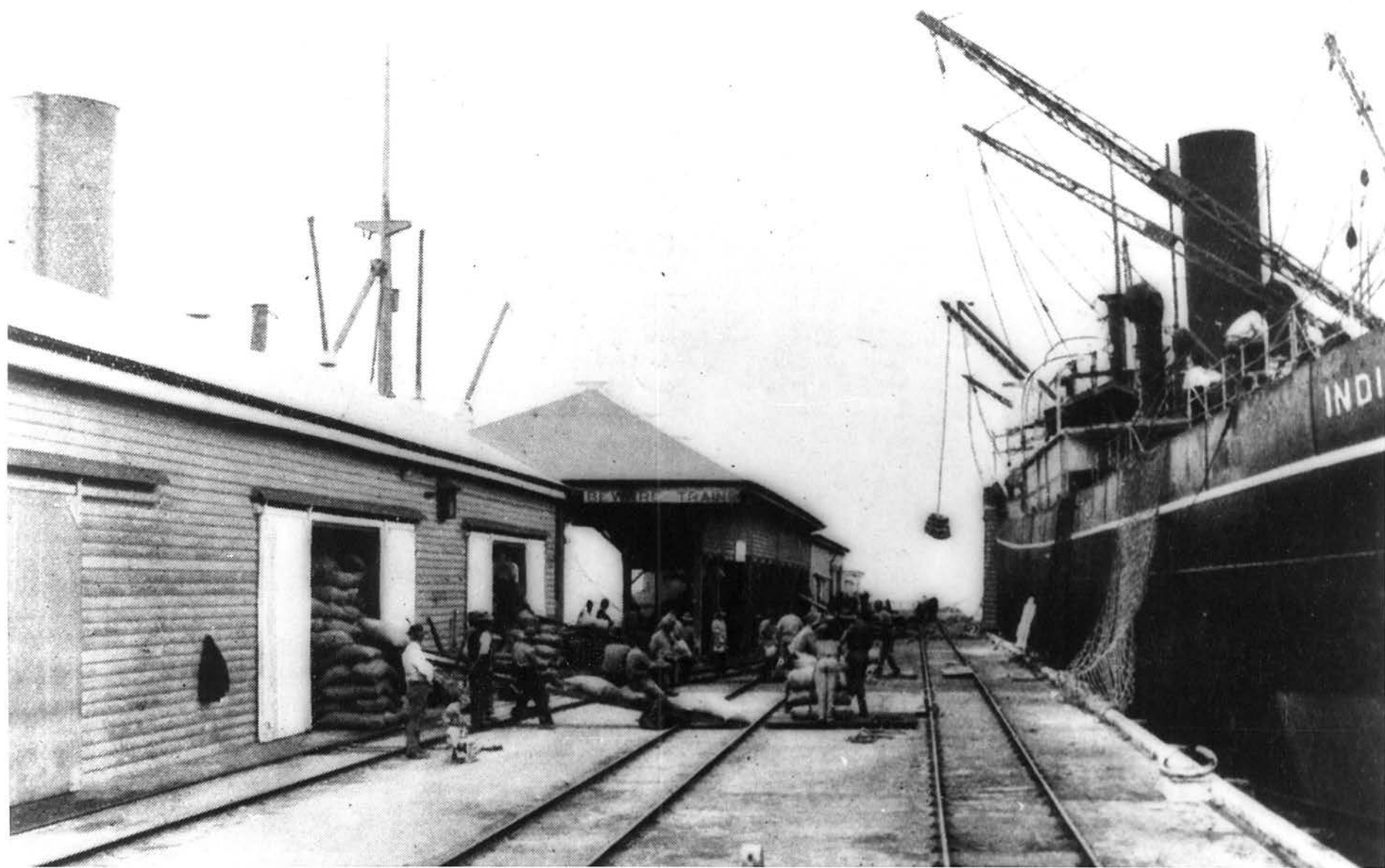


Plate 16. The Bowen Wharf, 1909. [Oxley Library]

CHAPTER V

POLITICS AND CLOSER UNITY, 1907-1912

The trend of the labour movement in North Queensland after 1907 was towards the growth and consolidation of trade unions and the involvement of these unions in Labor politics. This was a state-wide trend, but it was most dynamic in the North; in Brisbane many craft unions continued to abstain from politics. In North Queensland, where craft unionism was weak because of the peculiar economic structure of the region, industrial and mass unions such as the ASWU, the AFBEU, the WWF, the WWA and, above all, the AWA, exemplified the unity of industrial and political labour: a direct result of the expansion of unionism was increased enthusiasm for, and activity in, Labor politics. This accorded with the hopes of Labor leaders like Hinchcliffe who, in 1908, noted the union revival and predicted that it would also lay the basis for a revival in politics.¹

Closely linked both with the growth of trade unionism in North Queensland and the union commitment to politics was a movement towards closer unity in industrial organisation. A perennial ideal of the labour movement, closer unionism was influential throughout Queensland but again was most successful in the North of the state. There it took the form, in particular, of a scheme for amalgamation between the AWA and other general workers' unions.

Unionism and the Labor Party

The Labor Party and the ALF fostered the growing union movement in order to develop both a firmer organisational base and electoral support for a parliamentary party which itself, after the 1907 split, became more conscious of unionist aspirations. As ALF organiser, Charles Collins directed his efforts as much towards political as industrial gain: he simultaneously enrolled workers in their appropriate trade unions, in WPOs and on the state electoral lists.² Conversely, interest in politics and support for the Labor Party

1 *Worker*, 23 May 1908.

2 *Ibid.*, 20 June 1908.

inspired many workers to join trade unions. As Tim Moroney noted of the QREA:

As the period of 1907-1908 was interesting in political spheres culminating in the Kidston-Philp coalition (in October 1908) so was it in the railway service, and this interest reflected itself in increased membership and activity on the part of the association.³

Most unions espoused Labor politics as a logical, even necessary, adjunct to industrial objectives. Only a few still regarded politics as outside the legitimate sphere of labour activity; generally, these were the metropolitan craft unions which at this time were less assertive than the mass and industrial unions. The AWA, on the other hand, was the political trade union *par excellence*; in this respect it fulfilled in North Queensland the same function as the AWU in the pastoral districts of the state. The AWA executive council was the official Labor head centre in the Woothakata electorate; union branches also functioned as Labor Party branches. In 1909 the AWA saw its founder and general organiser, Ted Theodore, elected to parliament where he was later joined by a host of other ex-AWA officials. Other northern unions were also committed to political involvement,⁴ though none so zealously as the AWA which institutionalised politics as a fundamental aspect of trade union activity. In this way Labor electoral organisation, shattered by the split, was gradually restructured. In the financial year 1908-1909, 19 new unions and WPOs affiliated with the CPE.⁵ They included the AWA, Mackay ASWU, Townsville AFBEU and the Townsville and Mackay branches

3 *Railway Advocate*, March 1966.

4 The general attitude was expressed by the Mackay ASWU, which in 1910 rejected the invitation of the "non-political" eight-hour day committee to take part in a May-day parade, "recognising the foolishness of supporting anything that has not a political aim or sympathy". *Pioneer*, 30 April 1910.

5 D.J. Murphy, 'The Changing Structure of the Party', in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 102..

of the WWF.⁶

Trade union involvement in politics did not signify any rejection of industrial action - though in 1908 the despondent Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union felt that "organising for industrial purposes was useless".⁷ Indeed the union most closely involved in political action - the AWA - was also widely regarded as the most militant union in the state. The former northern district secretary of the AMIEU, Mansfield, later claimed that his union assumed political affiliation

as a subsidiary measure alone; just to be of some assistance - financial and otherwise - in the onward march towards labour's goal, but certainly not with any intention of renouncing one iota of its industrial policy and activity to the exigencies of problematical political achievement.⁸

However, Mansfield's comment - written in 1939 with the benefit perhaps of radical hindsight - slightly overstates the case. In 1910 few meatworker unionists looked upon politics with such a disparaging eye. The intimate involvement in the Labor Party of AMIEU officials reflected not only their personal beliefs, but also the attitude of the union in general.

There was as yet virtually no sign of a radical, working-class "reaction against politicalism"⁹ which was evident in southern states

6 CPE minutes, 16 March 1908 - 30 August 1909.

7 *Worker*, 4 July 1908.

8. Mansfield contrasted the meatworkers' policy with that of the AWA, which he described rather inaccurately as "the bolstering up and strengthening of the political wing, with a view of placing full responsibility for industrial stability solely in the hands of that body". *MIJQ*, October 1939. As Cutler notes, the Queensland branch of the AFBEU/AMIEU, even at this stage, asserted the supremacy of the industrial movement within the political party and the primacy of collective bargaining over arbitration: attitudes which were considerably more militant than those of other branches in the federation. Cutler, *History of the AMIEU*, pp.130-131.

9 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.104.

and which was to develop later in Queensland. To the contrary, government hostility to unionism and the insecure legal status of trade unions both served to bring industrial and political labour more closely together. Since Labor was in opposition and its organisation based firmly on the trade unions, any tension between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement was negligible. The aim of both was to win political power; yet industrial activity was no longer subsumed by politics as in the years before 1907. Trade unionists felt confident that by a combined process of improved industrial organisation and state intervention under a Labor government they could make the substantial advances necessary to ameliorate the conditions of the working class.

The 1907 election had left the PLP with only 18 seats in a house of 72; in North Queensland the number of Labor seats fell from 10 (out of 16) in 1904 to 3 in 1907. The Kidston ministerialist party, though holding fewer seats than Philp's conservatives (24 to 29), was then able to govern with the general support of the Labor Party which sat on the parliamentary cross-benches. As Kidston pressed on with his liberal reform programme, however, he came into increasing conflict with the nominee Legislative Council. When the state Governor, Lord Chelmsford, refused to accept the Premier's advice to appoint sufficient new council members to enable government legislation to pass, the Kidston ministry resigned. Philp then formed a government but was unable to obtain supply; he consequently asked the Governor for a dissolution of parliament which, to the consternation of Kidston and the Labor Party, was granted. Polling day was set for 5 February 1908.¹⁰

The ensuing election campaign was fought largely on the basis of the constitutional issues surrounding the dissolution of parliament. Labor promised general support to the Kidston party especially on the issue of modifying the power of the Legislative Council, and on other

10 Kidston's response was: "The Czar has spoken; the Duma is dissolved". His campaign slogan was "Home Rule for Queensland". C.A. Bernays, *Queensland Politics during Sixty Years (1859-1919)* (Brisbane, 1919), p.153. The constitutional issues are discussed by A.C.V. Melbourne, *Early Constitutional Development in Australia* (ed.) R.B. Joyce (Brisbane, 1963); pp.474-475, and H.V. Evatt, *The King and his Dominion Governors* (Melbourne, 1967), ch. 15.

sources of disagreement between the two houses - for example, the Wages Board and Election Act Amendment bills. Although reports of an electoral alliance between Kidston and Labor were denied, there were in fact few electoral clashes between the two groups.¹¹

The Labor vote in 1908 rose slightly from the 1907 figure of 25% of the votes cast to 28%, producing a net gain of 4 seats for the party. In North Queensland, Labor retained Carpentaria, Herbert and Flinders (unopposed) and picked up both seats in Charters Towers. But the election revealed the continued damage to Labor's electoral organisation and ambitions which the split had caused: no candidates were fielded in the Kidstonite-held seats of Bowen, Burke, Cairns, Cook or Croydon, while Labor was soundly defeated in the two seats where it opposed sitting Kidstonites - Kennedy and Woothakata. On the other hand, the overall Labor vote rose considerably in North Queensland: by almost 20% in Woothakata; nearly 12% in Townsville and Carpentaria; 3% to 5% in Charters Towers, Herbert and Mackay. Still, the most successful political party in North Queensland was the ex-Labor Kidston group which, unhampered by clashes with Labor candidates, won seven seats - Bowen, Burke, Cairns, Croydon, Cook, Kennedy and Woothakata. The Philp party was confined to the conservative strongholds of Townsville and Mackay (both double-member constituencies).¹² The lesson of the 1908 election for Labor was clear: the party would have to tackle the Kidstonites in their strongholds and rebuild its electoral organisation in order to win back traditional supporters and gain new ones.

Queensland-wide, the election did not alter the state of the parties very much: both the Kidstonites and the Philp conservatives had 25 seats, and Labor 22. Kidston again formed a government with general Labor support. This uneasy unofficial alliance soon ended, however, ostensibly over the issue of the private construction of railways (which Labor opposed), but basically because of the

11 The press habitually referred to the "Kidston-Socialist Alliance", *North Queensland Herald*, 18 January 1908. Cf. Murphy, 'Queensland', p.174.

12 See below Table I.

increasing conservatism of the Kidston government. Labor was also discontented with any role that even vaguely resembled coalition. In October 1908 the Kidston and Philp parties joined forces to form the People's Progressive League, known more generally as either the Liberal or Ministerialist Party. In the process of fusion, which was itself a manifestation of an Australia-wide tendency towards the convergence of non-Labor political groups, the Kidstonites split; a number of them, "refusing to stomach fraternization with their old enemies",¹³ formed an "independent opposition". These defections left the new Kidston government with an effective majority of only one, and another election was held on 2 October 1909.

With the non-Labor forces evidently strengthened by the alliance of Kidston and Philp, their supporters in North Queensland were confident of a sweeping majority in all but a few electorates:

Especially shall we be both surprised and disappointed if the North Queensland elections do not give evidence of returning good sense to its people, displayed in preference for practical politicians to Socialist chatterboxes.¹⁴

In the event, the government won 41 seats to Labor's 27 - a substantial majority which generally indicated popular Queensland-wide support for the non-Labor union. In the North, however, Labor won ten of the sixteen parliamentary berths - the western pastoral and mining electorates of Burke, Carpentaria, Charters Towers (both seats), Flinders, Kennedy and Woothakata; the coastal constituencies of Bowen, Herbert and one Townsville seat. In Bowen, Burke, Kennedy and Woothakata, sitting members who had followed Kidston out of the Labor Party were defeated;¹⁵ so too was the conservative junior

13 Crook, 'The Crucible - Labor in Coalition', pp.70-71.

14 *North Queensland Herald*, 2 October 1909.

15 The members for Burke and Kennedy had followed Kidston in the fusion; those for Bowen and Woothakata stood as independent opposition candidates. Throughout Queensland, Labor "tackled eight of the nine seats won by Kidston labour [*sic*] in 1907 and carried off six of them": Hughes, 'Labour in the Electorates', p.81.

member for Townsville. The electorates of Cairns, Cook and Croydon in the far North were retained by independent opposition members,¹⁶ while both Mackay seats and the senior Townsville seat remained with the government. By winning the same level of support that it had achieved in 1904, it was clear that Labor had recovered its former influential position in North Queensland politics (see Table I).

TABLE I

LABOR VOTE IN NORTH QUEENSLAND: STATE ELECTIONS, 1907-1909¹⁷

<u>Electorate</u>	<u>1907%</u>	<u>1908%</u>	<u>1909%</u>
Bowen	19.1	-	37.3(51.9) ^{a*}
Burke	35.1	-	64.8*
Cairns	15.9	-	6.3 ^b
Carpentaria	52.1*	63.6*	62.3*
Charters Towers (2 seats)	48.3	52.0 [‡]	50.7 [‡]
Cook	30.3	-	-
Croydon	-	-	-
Flinders	46.5(57.7) ^{a*}	*	*
Herbert	51.7*	56.6*	52.5*
Kennedy	29.6	23.4	54.7*
Mackay (2 seats)	19.6	24.5	42.3
Townsville (2 seats)	35.9	47.9	49.9*
Woothakata	19.8	39.7	43.0(51.4) ^{a*}

- No Labor candidate

* Labor victory

a Percentage after the distribution of contingent votes

b Independent Labor candidate

In 1909, Labor throughout Queensland increased its share of the vote from 28% to about 39%. To some extent this was due simply to the disappearance of the electorally fluid three-party system. Schism in the Labor Party had been immediately followed by a loss of votes as defectors took a section of Labor voters with them, and uncommitted voters turned away from weakness. This was followed, however, by a gradual drift back of traditional Labor voters. In

16 Official Labor did not stand in Cook or Croydon; in Cairns the local WWF secretary stood as an "Independent Labor" candidate.

17 Calculated from Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.59-87.

1909 the movement back to Labor was reinforced by the fusion of the Kidston group and the Philp party. Kidston was now closely identified as anti-Labor and voters in most electorates had a clear-cut choice between Labor and non-Labor.

Another significant factor in the recovery of Labor's political fortunes was the revival of unionism. The labour movement had reaffirmed its belief in trade union organisation as the basis of the Labor Party's electoral success. Unions such as the AWU and the AWA provided a ready-made electoral organisation and a fairly disciplined membership. Pastoral workers in the AWU assured a firm Labor grip on the western electorates; other rural workers, miners and town labourers also made a large proportion of North Queensland seats safe for Labor. Indeed, four of the five extra seats gained in 1909 were won by active trade unionists: Theodore, general organiser of the AWA; Collins, ALF general organiser; O'Sullivan,¹⁸ a Ravenswood miner; Foley,¹⁹ president of the Townsville WWF. Although unionists were still in a minority in several northern electorates, their enthusiasm for Labor was shared not only by most workers but also by increasing numbers of other electors who found Labor policies attractive - and often too, the particular choice of Labor candidates: the merchant William Lennon,²⁰ for instance, or Vernon Winstanley,²¹

18 James O'Sullivan (1867-1921); born England; arrived Sydney 1894, Queensland 1895; fitter Mt Morgan, union organiser Ravenswood; MLA Kennedy 1909-1920; contested Kennedy 1907.

19 Thomas Foley (1853-1920); born Wales; arrived Townsville 1883; bricklayer and wharf labourer; alderman Townsville. MLA Townsville 1909-1912, Mundingburra 1912-1920; contested Townsville 1899, Herbert 1902.

20 William Lennon (1849-1938); born Dublin, Ireland; 1855 arrived Melbourne; 1870-74 clerk Vic. Mines Dept; 1874 clerk Bank of Australasia, 1881 manager Townsville branch, 1855 bank sub-inspector Sydney. 1886 Townsville manager Burns Philp; 1896 own mercantile firm Townsville. MLA Herbert 1907-1920; Minister Agriculture and Stock 1915-1919; Speaker LA 1919-1920; President LC 1920-1922; Lieutenant Governor of Queensland 1920-1929.

21 Vernon Winstanley (1861-1938); born Yorkshire, England; c. 1872 coalminer; 1883 to Queensland; labourer Cairns and Townsville; 1886 miner and brickmaker, later Charters Towers brick and tile factory. MLA Charters Towers 1908-1912; Queensland 1912-1932.

a brick and tile manufacturer.

The 1909 state election confirmed Labor as a regionally-based party whose strength lay in the mining and pastoral areas of the west and north of Queensland. It was unlikely to win government unless it extended its power base to Brisbane and south-east Queensland. The prospects of doing this did not at first seem bright. As Murphy says, the Labor Party

did not seem to have any clear ideas about how this could be done. . . . Labor campaigning relied on the ideal that sincerity and the desire for reform of Labor politicians would eventually win the support of the primary producers as well as that of rural and urban workers.²²

On the other hand, the Labor Party had benefitted at recent elections by an infusion of new and capable men like Ryan, Theodore and Lennon who, while accepting and indeed promoting the integral role of trade unions in the party, saw the need for a more attractive policy of practical reforms which would appeal to a wider section of the community. The results of recent federal elections provided encouragement for the belief that the party was indeed capable of realising a much broader basis of support.

The 1903 federal election in Queensland gave Labor 56.69% of the vote and 7 of the 9 seats. This dropped to 42.95% and 4 seats in 1906, partly because of electoral dissatisfaction with a manifestly disunited state party. By 1910, however, the state Labor Party was again united and backed by a strengthened union movement, while the federal party, benefitting from the development of a clear two-party alignment in parliament, pursued a progressive, moderate, national policy. The federal general election held on 13 April 1910 resulted in a decisive victory for Labor which became the first party to win a clear majority in both federal houses. In Queensland, Labor won 47% of the House of Representatives vote and 6 of the 9 electorates; with 50% of the Senate vote, it won all three senate

²² D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: a political biography* (St Lucia, 1975), p.39.

seats. The North Queensland seats were by now firmly established as safe Labor bulwarks; Bamford won 61% of the vote in Herbert, McDonald 64.8% in Kennedy.²³

Shortly after this election, the state Labor-in-Politics convention opened in Townsville. The CPE report referred approvingly to the progress made in industrial organisation, attributing much of the party's recent success to the AWA, the AWU and the WWA. According to Hinchcliffe, these unions set an example for some of the older Brisbane unions which held aloof from politics.²⁴ The convention relaxed the rules governing trade union affiliation to provide for more direct rank and file unionist participation. It modified Labor policy, emphasising greater government intervention in economic affairs, especially in the fields of land reform, industrial arbitration, co-operative marketing schemes and state enterprises. It called for amendment of the law relating to trade unions and for state supervision of all labour conditions.²⁵ While Bowman in his presidential address still avowed Labor's "socialistic principles",²⁶ the policies adopted by the 1910 conference were essentially practical and reformist.

The convention also recognised that just as the union movement was partly responsible for political success so Labor politicians were important in the task of industrial organisation. Political and industrial leaders were often one and the same person: no-one

23 The Labor vote in Herbert and Kennedy, 1903-1910:

	<u>Herbert%</u>	<u>Kennedy%</u>	<u>Queensland%</u>	<u>Australia%</u>
1903	57.79	69.69	56.69	30.95
1906	52.91	57.83	42.95	36.64
1910	60.97	64.79	47.64	49.97

See C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890-1964* (Canberra, 1968), pp.291-304; Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the House of Representatives*, pp.19-41, and G. Sawyer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law 1901-1929* (Melbourne, 1956), pp.88-91.

24 *Sixth State Labour-in-Politics Convention 1910*, p.5.

25 *Ibid.*, *passim*.

26 *Ibid.*, p.3.

at the convention could avoid noticing Theodore, leader of the influential AWA and rising star in the PLP. Other convention delegates, all of them leading figures in Queensland Labor, addressed large meetings of Charters Towers miners and Townsville railway workers, watersiders and printers. Immediate increases in union membership followed these meetings. The official convention report commented: "considerable interest and enthusiasm were evoked, and the Labor movement is now a live thing in Townsville, consequent on the result of the Convention".²⁷

Northern workers were also inspired by the election of the first federal Labor government, which had promised to widen the powers of the Commonwealth to legislate on industrial and economic matters - in particular, to secure fair conditions of employment and preference to unionists in all Australian industries.²⁸ Thirty-two years later a Townsville meatworker recalled the "glorious news" of the election which "acted like a tonic" upon him:

[He] now had visions of the Co-operative Commonwealth being ushered in in the not far distant future, where poverty and riches would cease to exist and misery and degradation would be relegated to the limbo of the forgotten past.²⁹

Others were not so ecstatic, but as Crowley says, "most Labor supporters thought that the Labor leaders would be able to establish a wage earners' paradise by legislation".³⁰ It was wishful thinking, however: the federal Labor government pursued a moderate programme that was scarcely more radical than that of its Liberal predecessors. In the event, constitutional restraints prevented the achievement of

27 *Ibid.*, p.24.

28 One of Labor's election slogans was "8 hours' work, 8 hours' pay, 8 hours' rest and 8 bob a day". But its proposed industrial reforms would require amendment of the constitution.

29 Davis, in *MTJQ*, February 1942.

30 F.K. Crowley, '1901-1914', in Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne, 1974), p.303.

more far-reaching social and economic reforms, including the improvement of industrial conditions.³¹

Nevertheless, the election results - which Labor in North Queensland felt were at least partly attributable to the trade union revival - did encourage the already vigorous union involvement in politics. Another former Townsville meatworker noted that

Since Labour's smashing victory in the Federal election in April 1910, every effort had been made throughout Australia to weld the Industrial and Political wings of the movement into one concrete whole. A State-wide campaign - sponsored by the A.L. Federation - in an endeavour to co-ordinate and solidify Industrial and Political Labor activities in Queensland had met with striking success; so much so that at least 75% of Queensland's unions had affiliated with the political centre without delay.³²

The movement to "weld" the industrial and political labour in Queensland was accompanied by a movement towards closer unity among the unions themselves. To many labour leaders close co-operation and united purpose in the political field were sadly without parallels in the industrial field:

Politically we are one; industrially we are many. Politically we have a common platform, a common objective, a common organisation. Industrially we don't know where we are, we don't know where we want to go, we are split into sections and torn with internal jealousies and dissensions.³³

31 Cf. Sawyer, *Federal Politics and Law*, p.92.

32 Mansfield, in *MIJQ*, March 1939.

33 *Worker*, 9 July 1910.

Closer Unity

From the beginning of trade union organisation the need was recognised in every country for some form of central organisation to aid unions in dispute, facilitate consultation among unions and offer a united front to governments and employers. Thus, early trade unions formed trades and labour councils which at first were little more than forums for the inter-change of ideas and the formation of policies on matters of common concern. Nevertheless, the ideal remained: that in order to maximise the strength of the working class, it was necessary to have a central organising body rather than small, isolated, sectional units.

In the years immediately before, and for a decade after 1910, closer unity was a major aspiration of the labour movement in Queensland, indeed throughout the English-speaking world.³⁴ However, there was considerable debate about the type of organisation best suited to affirm the fundamental principle that "unity is strength". In fact, Queensland trade unions pursued four main courses of action towards this goal. First, they continued to form trades and labour councils³⁵ and to affiliate with the ALF, a body that aspired to be a strong central union organisation but remained a rather loose federation of autonomous unions.³⁶ Second, there was an expansion of inter-state federations of kindred unions, stemming in part from the establishment of the federal arbitration court but also aimed at augmenting industrial strength generally. The WWF and the AFBEU were prime examples of interstate federations which in the twentieth century aided the recovery of their members' unions. Third, the idea

34 Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, ch.1; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.65-66; Pelling, *History of British Trade Unionism*, pp.136-141; Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*, vol.III, pt.1, p.222; L.G. Churchward, 'The American Influence on the Australian Labour Movement', *Historical Studies*, 19 (November 1952), 266.

35 The Brisbane TLC was first formed in 1885. It was replaced by a district council of the ALF in 1889, but re-formed in 1904. In 1909 a full-time TLC organiser was appointed. The TLC was again replaced by the ALF district council in 1912. With the demise of the ALF in 1914, the metropolitan Trades Hall unions formed the Brisbane Industrial Council. The Queensland TLC was re-formed in 1922.

36 Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, p.viii.

of industrial unionism influenced trade unionists as a means of attaining closer unity. This involved the organisation of all workers employed in one industry regardless of skill as opposed to craft or occupational unions which united as workers followed the same trade regardless of industry. Indeed, industrial unionism had a further connotation - "not so much distinct as standing in the relationship of the part to the whole". As J.D.M. Bell says,

In the wider sense, 'industrial unionism' has meant a near-syndicalist theory of social revolution; in the narrower, it is a theory of trade union organisation only, the advocacy of that 'organisation by industry' which, by those who held to the more extreme definition, was regarded as an essential preliminary to the syndicalist seizure of power.³⁷

To its syndicalist proponents industrial unionism pointed to "one big union" - OBU - a super federation of all workers organised primarily in a series of industrial unions. This was the kind of organisation espoused by the IWW.³⁸ The syndicalist concept of industrial unionism had a peripheral rather than formative influence on the Queensland labour movement: elements of its thought - workers' control, anti-arbitration and anti-political sentiment, the advocacy of "organisation by industry" - left a permanent mark on trade union attitudes and behaviour though in diluted forms. Before the first world war, it was the narrower sense of industrial unionism which prevailed - "a theory of trade union organisation only" - and which motivated such unions as the QRU and the AMIEU. Bell writes of the situation in Great Britain:

37 J.D.M. Bell, 'Industrial Unionism: a critical analysis', in McCarthy, *Trade Unions*, p.109.

38 P.J. Rushton, 'The Revolutionary Ideology of the Industrial Workers of the World in Australia', *Historical Studies*, 59 (October 1972), pp.424-446.

In its mildest form, 'industrial unionism' became only one element in a universal wage of 'amalgamationist' sentiment from which the general unions were also to reap considerable profit.³⁹

Fourth - as Bell suggests - closer unity was pursued by the general or mass unions which theoretically enrolled all classes of labour irrespective of skill, industry or occupation, but which in practice recruited mainly labourers or semi-skilled workers. The form of closer unity favoured by the general union - again in theory - was that of a centralised, united association of workers organised ultimately in one vast union - the OBU - but without industrial unionism's revolutionary overtones or its rigid structure by industries.⁴⁰ In practice, general unions tended towards the amalgamation of existing unions of predominantly manual workers. This sort of amalgamation was encouraged by the AWA which absorbed the smaller general unions in North Queensland in 1910 and merged with the Australia-wide AWU in 1913. Both amalgamations were inspired not by theoretical considerations but by practical ideas of efficiency in trade union organisation.

The various avenues towards the closer unity of trade unions were by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, a particular union might follow several simultaneously. The AMIEU in Queensland was thus an industrial union affiliated with the ALF and also part of an interstate federation. The AWA staunchly supported a scheme promoting union affiliation with the ALF while at the same time pursuing its own amalgamation plans. Both industrial and general unions campaigned against the sectionalism of craft unionism. In this respect it was the goal of better organisation and closer co-operation that mattered, not the method.

Most schemes of closer unionism had only limited success in Queensland before the war. Even later, the scheme most trade unions preferred was that of loose affiliation with kindred unions - usually

39 Bell, *op.cit.*, p.115.

40 Cf. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, pp.179-182.

for the purpose of making the most effective approach to the arbitration court. The more centralised ideas of closer union characteristically foundered on the sectional claims of the various unions; it was thought that the proposed organisational structure would cut across well established aims and policies. In North Queensland, sectionalism was compounded by parochialism; that is, centralised organisation and closer unity *within* a trade union were hampered by a sense of regional identification, zeal for local autonomy and reaction against southern control.

Still, the ideal of closer unionism remained an important and widely accepted belief of labour leaders and unionists, especially in the period before 1914. More than that, it became a partial reality. There was common participation by unions in Labor politics; the formation of trades and labour councils; a trend towards affiliation with the ALF; interstate federation; the growth of some industrial unions. Most significantly, there was the AWA amalgamation movement in the North.

The Amalgamation Movement

In October 1909, clearly recognising the complementary role of political and industrial activity as a means of achieving closer unity within the labour movement, the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council circularised proposals for a state-wide union congress:

For the purpose of discussing (i) the question of better industrial organisation and (ii) the necessity of taking a more active part in the political life of the state.⁴¹

Thirty-seven trade unions together with the TLC and the ALF sent delegates to the Congress in August 1910. Most were from the south and the south-east, but North Queensland representation included the AWA, the Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union and the Mackay and Townsville WWFs. Jack Crampton, who had much experience in the

41 *Worker*, 30 October 1909.

North, also represented the AFBEU. The Congress readily affirmed industrial labour's commitment to the Labor Party, praising the PLP's efforts in seeking reforms.

The main discussion, however, centred on "the question of better industrial organisation". The Boot Trade Employees' Union moved:

That this Congress is of the opinion that the time has arrived for the complete federation of the workers of Australia, and as a means to that end, steps be at once taken to obtain the affiliation of all industrial organisations in Queensland, either by affiliation with the ALF, with such modifications which may be found necessary to meet present requirements, or by such scheme as may be devised by capital Congress.⁴²

The motion was obviously designed to encompass as wide a range of opinion as possible and, as such, was carried unanimously. However, the latter part of the resolution was indefinite and indeed provoked lively debate: most unions agreed in principle on the desired end but differed over the means of obtaining it. A committee was appointed to devise a satisfactory scheme of federation and recommended that all unions should affiliate with the ALF,

As the best means of consolidating the unions and avoiding the dangers which invariably arise from isolated action on the part of any union or groups of closely connected unions without reference to those on whom they depend for support.⁴³

The Congress acclaimed the recommendation - but subsequently few southern Queensland unions acted upon it: craft and industrial unions regarded each other with mutual distrust; many unions were wary of the ALF's political activities; others were simply unwilling to pay the required affiliation fees.⁴⁴

42 *First Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, p.6.

43 *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

44 *Second Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, pp.6-7.

The AWA was a strong supporter of ALF affiliation at the 1910 Congress. Theodore praised the ALF as "equal to every emergency" in the North; he deplored with equal force the sectionalism of the "lesser" unions.⁴⁵ But, since most of the important northern unions were already ALF affiliates, the impetus towards closer unity in North Queensland took the form of proposals to amalgamate the existing unions rather than affiliate with a Brisbane-based and loosely structured federation of unions. In May 1910, the AWA, WWA, Townsville Associated Workers' Union and northern branches of the ASWU held preliminary talks to consider "the advisability of amalgamating their forces in one big Union, which will operate in the Northern districts of Queensland, and embrace every class of labour".⁴⁶ On 23 July 1910 McCormack dispatched a circular to these trade unions and to the Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union:

Proposal to Amalgamate all Unions in North Queensland.

Benefits - It will enable us to keep in touch with the nomadic workers of the North who are continually moving from one industry to another which makes it uninteresting for unattached unions to cater for the necessities or gain the full advantage of their continuous membership. The large expense of management of so many different unions would be considerably curtailed by having one effective control. We would employ permanent organisers who would be able to concentrate their efforts at the various centres at the appropriate time.⁴⁷

The AWA's amalgamation proposals were a logical result both of the pragmatism and ambition of its leaders and the nature of the developing mass unionism in North Queensland. Existing unions embraced mainly the unskilled, itinerant labour which was so characteristic of the region; amalgamation therefore seemed a sensible and efficient solution. Both the AWA and the WWA recruited miners, railway navvies, building workers, domestic employees and

45 *First Queensland Trades and Labour Union Congress*, p.6.

46 *Worker*, 14 May 1910.

47 Cited in Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.114.

general labourers. Many worked as cane cutters and mill hands during the harvest, taking their AWA or WWA experience with them into the sugar industry. Thus, from its beginnings the AWA had been interested in organising the northern sugar workers whose unstable, poorly organised and penurious union contrasted greatly with the strong AWA. Similarly, the Townsville and Charters Towers Associated Workers' Unions, organisations of miners and general workers respectively, were small and industrially weak. Like the sugar workers, they too would benefit from a merger with the AWA in terms of the increased strength to be gained from collective bargaining.

On the level of personal and political ambition, Theodore and McCormack had much to gain from expanding AWA membership, thereby augmenting the AWA's - and their own - growing prestige and influence in the Queensland labour movement. It was no mean accomplishment to unite most unskilled workers in the North in a single composite body - an organisation that pursued an active industrial policy and engaged in Labor politics - even though that amalgamation took place within the affiliate structure of the ALF. Theodore and McCormack were obviously mindful of wider possibilities, though as yet there was no move to displace the ALF as the acknowledged leader of the Queensland labour movement.

A further incentive to the merger of northern unions was that mining employment in the Cairns hinterland had declined significantly since the birth of the AWA in 1907.⁴⁸ By 1910 there was little room left for any expansion of AWA activities in the union's traditional territory. Many miners and labourers from the Chillagoe and Herberton districts had left the area for the sugar districts, the larger northern towns and the mining settlements of Cloncurry. In seeking amalgamation the AWA was to some extent merely following its own membership.

Enthusiasm for the amalgamation mounted as Theodore, McCormack and the new ALF organiser, A.J. Fraser, toured Queensland to put the case for closer unity to meetings of miners, labourers, navvies and

48 See Chapter III, Table I.

sugar workers.⁴⁹ The amalgamation campaign was also part of a general union membership drive. Throughout the state, AWA and ALF officials simultaneously enrolled workers in their appropriate unions or directly into the AWA.⁵⁰ Officials of unions which were not involved in the proposed scheme lent their support. One of the most effective organisers was Jack Crampton of the AFBEU, who reported after one northern visit that:

progressive unionism of a broad spirit is going to make great headway in North Queensland, the tendency being to the breaking down of sectionalism and the adoption of a form of organisation which will include all branches of labour in one field, on lines akin to the AWU and AWA.⁵¹

In fact, the idea of amalgamation was received so favourably that the scheme was soon expanded to provide for a state-wide organisation rather than one confined to North Queensland. The southern sugar workers' unions, the Mt Morgan Miners' Union and railway construction workers in Central and South Queensland all indicated their eagerness to join the AWA.

The campaign to promote the merger made little reference to socialist principles and none whatsoever - despite Childe's claim⁵² - to the syndicalist tenets of the IWW. In other words, the ALF and AWA leaders were influenced by theoretical considerations only in the sense that the concept of closer working-class unity was itself broadly socialistic. Their arguments rested overwhelmingly on practical issues of economy and efficiency embellished by allusion to the combination of employer groups in trusts and combines which were opposed to the workers' interests. On 21 September 1910 McCormack and Fraser wrote:

49 Fraser was appointed in July 1910 and immediately sent north to foster the amalgamation. ALF executive committee minutes, 5 July 1910.

50 *Worker*, 10 September 1910, 8 October 1910.

51 *Ibid.*, 16 July 1910; *Pioneer*, 9 July 1910.

52 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.115.

Recognising the difficulty of effectively handling large bodies of men who are divided into a number of small unions, each acting independently of the other and recognising also that the large majority of these unions are engaged in mining, railway construction, sugar industries and as general labourers, it is proposed to amalgamate the whole of the small unions at present operating in different parts of Queensland into one composite body, whose power through the amalgamation to enforce better conditions for all will be increased a hundredfold. Besides being able to deal more effectively, if amalgamated, with the question of wages and conditions of industry, we will be able to save an enormous amount of money which is at present being frittered away in management expenses of the various unions, and this saving could be passed on to the members by means of a reduction in membership fees, or else it could be placed into a fund to be used in times of industrial trouble or in such way as the members would consider best in order to gain better conditions.

The formation of trusts to control markets shows clearly that our opponents are organising their forces into one composite body, and if we wish to have a chance of success in resisting their attacks and conserving our rights, we must have our forces organised in like manner.⁵³

The inclusion of sugar workers - whose union in 1910 had 2,000 members and a potential of four times as many - was crucial to the success of the movement for amalgamation. Nevertheless, it was the sugar unions that were most cool to the AWA overtures. The branches in the Cairns district, which had the closer contact with the AWA, favoured amalgamation from the beginning,⁵⁴ but southern branches at

53 *Worker*, 8 October 1910. It has been alleged that reference to "trusts" and "combines" indicates direct American influence on the AWA: cf. Childe, *loc.cit.* But anti-trust ideas, linked with the belief that monopolies should be nationalised, were a common indigenous element of Australian labour ideology at the time (albeit partly because of developments in the USA). See *Official Record of the Seventh State Labor-in-Politics Convention* (Brisbane, 1913), pp.10-12. W.M. Hughes devoted a number of his *Daily Telegraph* "Case for Labor" articles to attacks on combines: W.M. Hughes, *The Case for Labor* (Sydney, 1970, first published 1910), appendix.

54 *Worker*, 11 December 1909.

first equivocated. For example, the Bundaberg and Mackay-Proserpine sugar workers' unions feared that merger with the AWA might prejudice an award from the federal arbitration court; some workers thought that such an award would bring more benefits than amalgamation. At the general meeting of the Mackay-Proserpine ASWU on 10 September 1910 several members argued that:

by adhering to our decision to obtain an award from the Arbitration Court, we would bring about desirable and far-reaching reforms in the working conditions of all men employed in the sugar industry. While members are desirous of assisting any movement which has for its object the bringing about of closer unity in the workers' ranks, they consider that nothing should be done which may delay our obtaining an award from the Arbitration Court, as this is to the sugar workers generally of the utmost importance. It was therefore decided to oppose merging with other unions until an award is in force.⁵⁵

Theodore and McCormack were eventually able to convince them that, if they really wanted an award, the recently elected federal Labor government's planned amendment of the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act* would still permit it even though they belonged to a general union.

By the end of 1910 most sugar workers were prepared to welcome amalgamation. Their own union had failed to secure improvements in working conditions during the 1909 and 1910 seasons, demonstrating to many the inability of the loosely-organised ASWU to protect its members. Certainly, the ALF considered the ASWU a failure: when Mossman unionists asked for help in a dispute, the ALF not only warned them not to precipitate trouble but suggested "the wisdom of giving earnest consideration to a proposal for amalgamation with the AWA of NQ". Rather pointedly, at the same meeting, the ALF voted £25 to the Herberton railway construction strike fund.⁵⁶ Later in the year

55 *Ibid.*, 24 September 1910; For Bundaberg, *ibid.*, 29 October 1910.

56 ALF executive committee minutes, 5 July 1910.

the Nelson ASWU branch secretary admitted that the union had been through trying times, but claimed that there was hope for the future: the ballot for amalgamation would soon be taken and he was "confident of this branch being members of the 'Fighting AWA' before many weeks are past".⁵⁷

The AWA leaders argued that sugar workers would secure decent living and working conditions only with the backing of a well-organised composite union. Indeed, in their eagerness to speed the consummation of the merger, McCormack and Fraser virtually promised the sugar workers an eight-hour day. At Mackay, they announced:

that if the amalgamation scheme is adopted they were going to wake up the question of fighting for a 8-hour day for sugar workers before next season and pointed out that once the amalgamation was in operation they would be sure to succeed.⁵⁸

In the event, members of the different sugar unions voted overwhelmingly in favour of amalgamation. When the final votes were counted - those of the Bundaberg ASWU, which endorsed the scheme unanimously - the *Worker* greeted the announcement:

The vote fully demonstrates that the sugar workers are heartily sick of long hours, poor wages and bad living conditions, and they trust by the amalgamation to secure decent living conditions, a better wage and an 8-hour day before next crushing season starts.⁵⁹

There is little doubt that the huge vote in favour of amalgamation was due in large part to the pledge of an eight-hour day in the sugar industry. In making the promise, McCormack virtually committed the

57 *Worker*, 24 October 1910.

58 *Pioneer*, 8 October 1910. Fraser wrote of his trip with McCormack: "We saw enough to satisfy us that it is time something was done for the sugar workers. The eight-hour day must be fought for before the next crushing season opens, and if the amalgamation is successful this question can be fought - and won." *Worker*, 8 October 1910.

59 *Worker*, 26 November 1910.

AWA to militant action in the following year, for if the AWA failed to get it, widespread desertions from the union might ensue and the amalgamation collapse. McCormack was undoubtedly astute enough to realise this. Thus the strength and influence of the AWA in the labour movement were both a help and something of a hindrance: new members seemed convinced of the AWA's virtually unlimited power to extract concessions from employers, and indeed amalgamation was the signal for a major and lengthy sugar industry strike and a spate of other industrial disputes. To be successful as an industrial organisation, the union had to match its members' expectations.

The conference to inaugurate the new amalgamated union opened at Trades Hall in Townsville on 5 December 1910. Fraser, as Chairman, delivered the keynote address. He expressed the hope that "the days of sectional unionism were gone for ever" and that other unions would soon see the wisdom of joining the AWA:

Capitalism was organising its forces the world over. Labour then had to organise on like lines if it wished to be able to fight successfully, and before very long he hoped that the operations of the Amalgamation would extend into other States. We were not North Queenslanders or Victorians; We were Australians. We were not miners, butchers, labourers or carpenters; we were Australian workmen, and the sooner everyone recognised that fact and acted in accordance with the spirit of it, the better for all concerned.⁶⁰

Despite Fraser's rather high-flown sentiments, the conference concerned itself with much more mundane matters - in particular, with perpetuating the AWA's highly centralised structure and tight executive control. Fraser endorsed this, saying that he favoured

60 *Official Report of the Amalgamated Workers' Association of Queensland Inaugural Conference, Townsville December 5 to 12, 1910* (Brisbane, 1911), p.1. Delegates were: ALF - A.J. Fraser; AWA - W. McCormack, G. Singer; Mt Morgan Workers' Association - E. Theodore MLA; Southern Railway Branches AWA - T. Emmerson; Charters Towers Associated Workers' Union - J. Orme; Townsville Associated Workers' Union - P.P. Barton; WWA - J. Dash; ASWU: Bundaberg - H. Hall; Childers - J. Monaghan; Nelson - J. Mulrone; Mossman - R. Mathias; Mackay - H. Morelande; Burdekin - E. Carling.

wide executive powers: "The union should not be crippled by having divided authority, with one section pulling against another." Hall, from Bundaberg, remarked that the experiences of the sugar workers' union "had demonstrated to him the evil of attempting to control a union from different centres".⁶¹ Accordingly, although the annual conference was to be the highest authority of the AWA, its executive council was given wide-ranging powers: it could suspend policy between annual conferences, call strikes and impose levies; it could approve and vary industrial agreements; it controlled practically all finances consisting of 80% of the revenue from the issue of tickets, all receipts from levies, and all monies raised by the executive.⁶²

The AWA was divided into five administrative areas, each under the jurisdiction of a full-time salaried district secretary (aided in the far northern, northern and south-central districts, by district organisers) and instructed by a district committee with power to issue membership tickets and to control local disputes subject to executive ratification.⁶³ Branches, consisting of at least 30 members, supervised local conditions of work and appointed delegates to the district committee. The AWA thus functioned as a centralised bureaucracy; salaried officials - the general secretary, district secretaries and district organisers - held most of the internal power.

Significantly, the convention firmly rejected a suggestion to locate the head office of the union in Brisbane. Delegates declared that the AWA was the first trade union to begin outside the capital, and that it should continue to be governed from North Queensland. Accordingly, the AWA's head office remained in Chillagoe until 1912, when it was moved to Townsville.⁶⁴

61 *Ibid.*, p.2.

62 The executive council consisted of the president, two vice-presidents, the general secretary and each district secretary, *ibid.*, p.3.

63 Districts were described as "Far Northern, Northern, Central, South-Central and Southern", centred on Chillagoe, Townsville, Mt Morgan, Bundaberg and Brisbane respectively: *ibid.*, pp.6-7.

64 *Ibid.*, p.4.

Membership was open to "all bona-fide workers, not being coloured aliens", the latter defined in terms of AWA precedent as "all coloured persons not being American negroes, Maoris, or the issue of mixed parentage born in Australia".⁶⁵

The objects of the AWA remained essentially practical, emphasising the dual industrial and political role of the union. There was, however, a new acknowledgement of socialism as defined by the Queensland Labor Party:

- (a) to protect the interest of workers in the regulation and the conditions of labour.
- (b) to assist its members in the event of a lock-out strike.
- (c) to provide legal assistance in defence of members when deemed necessary.
- (d) to assist in the movement for the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.
- (e) to secure direct representation of Labour in Parliament.
- (f) to establish and assist in the maintenance of Labour journals.
- (g) by federation or otherwise to assist kindred organisations.⁶⁶

AWA industrial policy was formulated in terms of the four main areas of membership interest - general; mining; sugar industry; railway construction. General provisions advocated state supervision of employment conditions in all industries; the amendment of the law relating to trade unions "with a view to safeguarding union funds and preserving to unionists the full privileges of citizenship"; exclusion of Asians from all forms of employment. Sections relating to specific industries called for an eight-hour day, the abolition of contract work and the establishment of a guaranteed minimum wage.⁶⁷

65 *Ibid.*, p.3.

66 *Ibid.*

67 *Ibid.*, p.8.

The AWA affiliated directly with the ALF and the Labor CPE. As well, branches could form electoral political committees which might apply to the CPE for registration as the Labor "head centre" in their electorates. The union also issued political tickets to those not earning wages: for example, farmers and housewives.⁶⁸

The new AWA, like its predecessor, bore the practical imprint of Theodore and McCormack who dominated the conference. Appropriately, existing AWA officials secured the top executive berths in the new union: president, George Singer, of Chillagoe; vice-presidents, Theodore and J. Munro of Chillagoe; the general secretary was, naturally, McCormack.⁶⁹

The amalgamation gave a substantial impetus to unionism in the North and throughout Queensland. Vigorously, the AWA pursued its expansionist policy of recruiting members and absorbing smaller unions.⁷⁰ By October 1911 it had grown to 6,500 members;⁷¹ in June 1912, membership stood at 11,419, most of which was in North Queensland,⁷² making it not only the fastest growing but also the largest trade union in the state. The response in Charters Towers was typical of North Queensland generally: there it was reported

68 *Ibid.*, p.5. AWA political tickets gave their holders the right to vote in plebiscites for the selection of parliamentary candidates and delegates to Labor-in-Politics conventions, and to determine purely political questions.

69 McCormack was to act also as far northern district secretary "until other arrangements are necessary". Other officials included: northern district secretary - P.P. Barton; south-central district secretary - H. Hall; far northern district organiser - F. Martyn; northern district organisers - J. Dash and H. Morelande. District secretaries and organisers for other districts were appointed later by the executive council, *ibid.*, p.7.

70 *Worker*, 7 January 1911, 21 January 1911, 22 July 1911.

71 *Ibid.*, 26 October 1911.

72 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.5. Membership was distributed as follows: northern district - 4,109; far northern district - 3,200; south-central district - 2,472; central district - 1,100; southern district - 410; Darwin - 128.

that amalgamation had brought "a better feeling towards unionism throughout the district than there has been for a long time".⁷³

Labour spokesmen regarded the AWA's absorption of the smaller northern unions as a significant step towards closer trade union unity and a practical move to advance the material conditions of wage earners. As Hinchcliffe said:

The spasmodic and unsuccessful efforts of the smaller branches of the Sugar Workers' Union to right the grievous wrongs resulted in the consummation last December at Townsville of the proposals of the Amalgamated Workers' Association of North Queensland to extend its operations to all classes of workers outside the pastoral industry, and there is every probability of the AWA becoming one of the most successful and powerful labour organisations in this state. Modelled, as it is on the broad lines of the Australian Workers' Union with an annual ticket system, it should aid very materially in breaking down that sectionalism which is doing so much to weaken many of the smaller Unions.⁷⁴

In 1913 another decisive step towards closer unity was taken when the AWA merged with the AWU, thus becoming part of an Australia-wide organisation of largely unskilled, mainly rural workers. In its progressive character and centralised structure the new organisation bore the stamp of the AWA rather than the AWU, at least in Queensland. For a time it appeared that the AWU might become the one big union of all workers, but this movement was halted in 1914 when the AMIEU, despite a ballot favouring amalgamation, did not join.⁷⁵

The AWA came into frequent conflict with employers and the state government, usually coping satisfactorily and in ways which served only to enhance its prestige in the labour movement and attract more workers into its ranks. In each case involving strike action,

73 *Worker*, 7 January 1911.

74 *ALF Report for 1910* (Brisbane, 1911), p.16.

75 See below, chapter VII.

boasted Theodore in 1913, "the union has contrived to uphold its character as a determined fighting force".⁷⁶ The two AWA principals, Theodore and McCormack, accordingly gained positions of paramount influence in both the trade union movement and the Labor Party. Their successful conduct of the 1911 sugar strike contrasted greatly with the ignominious defeat of the ALF and the Brisbane unions in the 1912 general strike, establishing the AWA-AWU as the foremost force in the Queensland labour movement in the years before 1915.

76 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.4.

CHAPTER VI

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES AND *INDUSTRIAL PEACE*, 1911-1912

The sugar industry strike of 1911 can perhaps be seen as symbolic of the substantial revival in strength and militancy of the North Queensland labour movement in the early twentieth century. In the largest and most successful direct action in Queensland up to that time the sugar harvest was disrupted in every district between Childers and Mossman. The dispute was transformed into a complex conflict with far-reaching political and industrial implications by various incidents of violence and incendiarism, the intercession of federal Labor cabinet ministers on the side of the strikers, and the apparent involvement of the non-Labor state government in recruiting strike breakers. The strike was supported by the labour movement throughout Australia; it was in fact largely resolved by the refusal of transport unions to handle sugar produced by non-union labour. By gaining union recognition and an eight hour day from possibly the most anti-union employers in the state, the strike infused a spirit of solidarity and confidence into Queensland labour.

This mood of solidarity was, however, severely shaken by the abject defeat of Brisbane unionists in the general strike of February 1912. The ALF's conduct of the strike was subsequently contrasted with the AWA's victory in the sugar industry during the previous year, hastening the demise of the former body but giving impetus to the AWA and its concept of mass unionism. Throughout Queensland, the advance of political and industrial labour was temporarily set back by the 1912 strike debacle, the defeat of the Labor Party in state elections that year and subsequent anti-union legislation; in the long term, however, and in North Queensland immediately and especially, these events were further incentive to the labour movement's determination to win industrial justice and parliamentary power.

The 1911 Sugar Strike

The AWA amalgamation conference in December 1910 presaged the sugar strike. Union policy for the sugar industry, as laid down by the conference, comprised immediate and pressing demands rather than general aspirations. The AWA called for an eight-hour day in

mill and field, a living minimum wage, overtime at the rate of time-and-a-half with double-time on Sundays, abolition of the contract system and the more effective policing of the regulations of the *Shearers' and Sugar Workers' Accommodation Act*. The AWA executive council was instructed to seek conferences with the various employers to discuss these issues.¹ Accordingly, on 1 February 1911 McCormack wrote to the CSR, the ASPA, the Cane Growers' Union, the general manager of the state government sugar mills and the other mill managements, asking them to meet the AWA to negotiate rates of pay, hours of labour and employment conditions in the sugar industry.² The employers had in previous years adamantly refused to meet the ASWU, and the AWA had no reason to expect any change in their attitude. Indeed, the secretary of the ASPA replied that no good purpose would be served by a conference and that industrial conditions would be settled, as in the past, by direct negotiation between the district associations and the employees. The general manager of the CSR was even more obdurate:

. . .we have never discussed with anyone not in our service the terms and conditions under which the men employed by us are engaged, and we are, therefore, unable to entertain the proposal you have made for a conference on the subject with the officers of your association. Moreover we have no reason for believing that any of our permanent employees, or even those who work for us season by season, are members of your organisation.³

On 1 April 1911 the AWA executive council met in Chillagoe to discuss the employers' refusal to confer with the union. It took the view that any further overtures for a peaceful settlement would

1 *Official Report of the Inaugural Conference of the AWA*, p.8.

2 Correspondence tabled by W. Lennon, QPD CVIII (13 July 1911), pp.34-35.

3 *Ibid.*

be useless, and submitted to all district and branch secretaries a confidential list of the demands that were to be served on the employers - "such demands to be enforced by a cessation of all work in the sugar districts".⁴ The die was cast. The AWA now concentrated on preparing its recently-amalgamated organisation for the likely industrial conflict. There was some truth in the CSR's assertion that most sugar employees at this stage were not members of the AWA; even those who had habitually joined ASWU branches generally let their membership lapse until the next season. Union organisers and district secretaries were therefore urged to attend to membership dues, and to concentrate particularly on recruiting sugar workers.⁵

The AWA demands closely followed the policy laid down by the 1910 conference: an eight-hour day, thirty shillings a week minimum wage in mills; modification of the contract agreement; substantially increased rates for cane cutting, carting and field work. Although moderate, such demands contrasted greatly with existing conditions. In fact, low labour standards were the underlying cause of the 1911 sugar strike. Workers in the industry had been forced to accept them ever since the transformation to white labour. They resented the long hours, relatively low wages, poor food and accommodation, one-sided indenture contracts and the employers' repudiation of their union. McCormack described these conditions in soliciting the support of other labour organisations for the sugar workers cause:

4 This circular was later leaked to the press and published in the *Bowen Independent*, 20 May 1911, and the *North Queensland Herald*, 27 May 1911.

5 McCormack to H. Morelande, 31 March 1911, AWA letterbook: ". . .it would be advisable if you could give all your attention to the sugar workers now and try and get them into line for the season". Earlier, McCormack rebuked the south-central district secretary for not enrolling sufficient members to cover expenses: McCormack to H. Hall, 24 March 1911, *ibid.*

Men take cane cutting at a price which necessitates a 14 to 16 hour day to enable them to make about 11/- and consequently this fact has kept the cutting price very low.

Mills work their employees for 12 hours per day for a miserable wage of 1 2s 6d per week and a bonus of 2/6 per week if they stay the season (some skilled labour is higher).

. . .It must appear strange to you to hear that a 12 hour day was in existence in an industry which has been pampered to such an extent by the community, but it is true, and no attempt has been made to alter it. We have merely changed the colour of the Kanaka, he is now white instead of black.

. . .The sugar workers had a Union of their own and made several abortive attempts to better the price for cutting and also to get better food, etc. The want of proper organisation has always defeated them and things have remained the same.⁶

AWA preparation in the sugar districts was hindered by developments in other areas. In Townsville a number of minor strikes occurred as builders' labourers and council employees took advantage of their newly-acquired union strength to improve wages. It seemed almost as if the new AWA members, confident of their union's power, expected to win concessions at will from employers. To McCormack, faced with the overall management of the union and mindful of the likely struggle in the sugar districts, these small strikes were both ill-timed and ill-advised. While conceding that such disputes, if successful, both aided the AWA membership drive and enhanced its status in Townsville, he admonished the northern district secretary:

⁶ McCormack to J. Mooney, AWU secretary, Launceston, 5 May 1911, *ibid.*

I would impress it upon these men that if they do not conform to the rules of the Association, they cannot expect you to fight their battle. . .they should consult the proper authorities before they enter into a dispute. . .I would advise that you try and get hold of these disputes before the men concerned cease work. You then have a better chance of successfully handling the matter.⁷

A further set-back to the union's plans came early in April when a cyclone closed the railway and telegraph from Cairns to Chillagoe. Several mines were forced to close, and communication between AWA headquarters and the sugar districts was disrupted. Many mine employees, upon whom the AWA would rely for financial aid in the event of a sugar strike, were retrenched. Later that month the AWA became involved in a dispute at the Mt Morgan copper mines.⁸ Yet another problem was the limited success so far achieved by the union in enrolling potential sugar workers; it had been hampered in this respect by the other difficulties. A somewhat pessimistic McCormack wrote to Harry Hall on 25 April:

Of course the chief drawback is the want of capital and the short space of time that we have had to get the amalgamation into working order and to also prepare for such a trouble. It should be a matter of years, but we must make an effort and will appeal to all Unions to help us fight the battle.⁹

Nevertheless, planning proceeded. McCormack urged AWA members at Cloncurry, who were showing signs of militant discontent, not to precipitate trouble until the sugar issue was settled. He also

7 McCormack to P.B. Barton, 24 March 1911, *ibid.*

8 McCormack to J. Dash, 6 April 1911; to Morelande, 14 April 1911, *ibid.*

9 McCormack to Hall, 25 April 1911, *ibid.*

10 McCormack to Dash, 8 May 1911, *ibid.*

encouraged the more resolute union activists from the Chillagoe and Herberton district to seek work in the sugar industry:

. . .we are trying to get weak men away from the mills and strong men pushed in so that they can command the situation. Some of our Reps on the range are going down to the Nelson and being single men they do not care about the consequences. This is how we will win. . . .¹¹

The employers, meanwhile, still determined to ignore the AWA, made their own preparations to avoid industrial disruption. The ASPA conference in Townsville in February 1911 called for closer co-operation among sugar producers and sought the introduction of more indentured immigrants to work in the mills and fields;¹² they thereby hoped to avoid employing union labour.

In a further attempt to circumvent the possibility of having to bargain with the AWA, a sugar manufacturing wages board for the Mackay district was established at the instigation of the mill managers.¹³ Since the employers themselves had in the past rejected workers' requests for a wages board, it was evident that in setting up such a board in 1911 they were provoked by AWA demands for better conditions.

The union, however, ignored the Mackay wages board. It argued that conditions in the industry should be settled on an industry-wide basis rather than by districts; that the board - and especially its local chairman - would be subservient to the employers' interests; that in any case wages boards did not recognise trade unions and that "more will be accomplished through

11 McCormack to Barton, 8 May 1911, *ibid.*

12 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 9 February 1911; An Ingham grower, Frank Fraser, subsequently proposed to bring out Scottish labourers to work in the cane fields: F. Fraser to D. Denham, 15 March 1911, item O6700/1911, Pre/A376, Queensland State Archives [QSA].

13 *Pioneer*, 25 February 1911.

the fighting AWA than can ever be hoped for through a Wages Board".¹⁴
 The decision to ignore the board seemed justified when its determination was announced:

The Wages Board made provision for 60 hours per week in sugar mills. Not bad is it when all other industries are on a 48 hours basis. Moral - leave wages Boards alone.¹⁵

Minimum working conditions in the sugar fields were prescribed by the Commonwealth government under its bounty and excise regulations. Consequently, labour conditions in the sugar mills were more grievous than in the fields. The sugar mills, whether owned by private companies, the state government or co-operatively by growers, were also the most intransigent employers in the industry. The AWA realised that the most important - as well as the most difficult - battle would be in the mills: "These are the people whom we will have the most trouble with", McCormack predicted. Accordingly, the central issue on which the union stood was the eight-hour day for mill hands.¹⁶

The CSR itself had extensive milling interests as well as virtually monopoly of the refining of sugar and the purchase of raw sugar from the mills. The company arbitrarily fixed both the price paid by consumers for the refined product and the price paid to the mills for raw sugar. The millers, in turn, dictated the price paid to growers for their cane. The practical result of these

14 *Pioneer*, 15 April 1911. Cf. McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 5 May 1911, AWA letterbook; Theodore, in *QPD* CVIII (13 July 1911), p.43.

15 McCormack to Hall, 16 June 1911, AWA letterbook.

16 McCormack to Hall, 13 May 1911, *ibid.* Cf. McCormack to Moreland, 31 March 1911, *ibid.*: "We will ask for an 8 hour day in the mills as a fighting issue and other matters such as wages etc. will be left with each particular District to deal with. We should be able to force them to agree on the hours and we can then introduce the other matters of lesser importance."

arrangements was that millers and refiners made handsome profits, but most growers gained comparatively modest returns.¹⁷ There was therefore a great deal of antagonism between farmers and millers over the price of cane. The AWA did its best to exploit this conflict of interests, insisting that the union's struggle was against the manufacturers, not the farmers, who should indeed combine with the workers against the CSR and other millers.

A related aspect of the sugar strike concerned the widely-publicised government subsidy of the industry in the form of a protective tariff of £6 per ton of sugar imported into Australia. It was an article of faith among both Labor and radical liberals that protected industries should provide fair working conditions. Public sympathy for sugar workers on these grounds was stimulated by the knowledge that the dominant interest in the industry was the CSR. To Labor, the company epitomised *par excellence* the exploiting, profiteering monopoly of socialist literature. In fact, the CSR's substantial profits were due more to the economic efficiency of its large-scale organisation than to malpractice,¹⁸ but, through its control of the price structure in the sugar industry, the company also controlled the level of wages and working conditions generally. It seemed anomalous that such a profitable enterprise should exist unchecked in a highly protected industry while working conditions remained so poor. The AWA recognised the inherent propaganda value of the issue:

17 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', CPP 1912, III, p.1079: "The grower, who incurs the greatest risks, and represents for national purposes the most important element in the Sugar Industry, is the person who makes least profit out of the industry. . .the profits of the growers, as a class, are quite inadequate".

18 *Ibid.*, pp.1080, 1082.

The big issue will be the 8 hour day and we should be successful in gaining it in such a spoonfed industry. The public are paying dearly enough for their sugar and it is with the object that the industry may pay better wages.¹⁹

. . .we are now prepared to fight them on this large principle and we shall get unilateral support from the public of Australia in this fight which is justified if ever a thing was.²⁰

As the crushing season drew near, McCormack was briefly hopeful of settlement with cane growers in some districts without recourse to a strike.²¹ However, when a series of conferences between farmers and workers failed, the sugar districts of Queensland were disrupted one by one as cane cutters, field hands, carters and mill hands refused to start work. They were soon joined by skilled members of the enginedrivers' union. The strike began on the Lower Burdekin on 1 June; within a few weeks it had spread to the Mossman, Cairns, Mackay, Johnstone River and Wide Bay areas.²² It was not finally settled until 16 August 1911.

A number of historians have treated the 1911 sugar strike in some detail. There is, however, disagreement among them regarding the role of the AWA leadership. In his history of the ALF, Sullivan implies that the AWA deliberately provoked the strike to increase its membership and influence at the expense of the ALF:

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- 19 McCormack to J.A. Moir, southern district AWA secretary, 22 May 1911, AWA letterbook.
- 20 McCormack to J. Browning, Mossman branch AWA secretary, [n.d.] June 1911, *ibid.*
- 21 McCormack to Barton, 3 May 1911, *ibid.*
- 22 *Bowen Independent*, 3 June 1911; *Pioneer*, 17 June 1911; *North Queensland Herald*, 10 June 1911, 24 June 1911.

One aspect of the 1911 sugar strike is that it was a further attempt by the AWA to increase membership through a campaign for better conditions. As in previous instances the campaign was planned with the strike as the first, rather than the last, weapon to be used should employers refuse an offer for direct negotiations.²³

Kennedy acknowledges both the factor of widespread dissatisfaction among sugar workers and the probability of AWA involvement in future disputes after its 1910 amalgamation. But he also infers that McCormack largely engineered - or at least welcomed - the sugar strike:

McCormack reasoned that an industrial confrontation was inevitable, and that 'to justify ourselves' the new union should force one of its own design. . . . Disrupting the sugar industry from Bundaberg to Mossman would require sustained coordination, but the stakes were correspondingly high; the leadership of the union movement outside the metropolitan area.²⁴

On the other hand, Armstrong maintains that the AWA was influenced in its strike action by pressure from rank and file sugar workers, and that the AWA leadership was far from confident of success. He particularly attacks Sullivan's interpretation:

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- 23 Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, p.393. Cf. *loc.cit.*, p.395: "The sugar strike clearly illustrated the incompatibility of the ALF and the AWA and the extent to which Theodore and McCormack regarded the ALF as outmoded in an age when unionists increasingly turned to the ideal of the OBU".
- 24 Kennedy, 'William McCormack', p.345. See also Kennedy, McCormack, p.34 and 'The Rise of the Amalgamated Workers' Association', pp.195-196. X

On the contrary, the 1911 strike was forced upon an AWA Executive unsure of its ability to win but committed to embark on a course that it knew must involve it in a life or death struggle for the newly formed amalgamated union.²⁵

There is some truth in all three interpretations. McCormack was undeniably ambitious and aware of the increased strength and prestige which successful strike action would bring the AWA. This was an ever-present consideration in his handling of the dispute:

It will make us if we can get the 8-hour day introduced as there are 20,000 men engaged in the sugar and we would get the majority of them when they can be made to see the benefit.²⁶

Yet the AWA was in a sense already committed to militant action by its policy of an eight hour day, which had been instrumental in sealing the successful merger with the ASWU in December 1910. Many sugar workers accordingly expected improved conditions in the next harvest season as a matter of course. The expectation was voiced by the Mackay branch secretary in April 1911:

Men are enrolling themselves as members on the promise of the AWA to bring about an eight-hour day and a living wage in the sugar districts, and that promise must be kept.²⁷

"The men in the various centres expect something from us this season", McCormack acknowledged.²⁸

25 Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, p.139.

26 McCormack to H.A. Brownbill, district secretary AWA, Mt Morgan, 3 May 1911, AWA letterbook. Cf. McCormack to Hinchcliffe, *ibid.*: "I think we will get the eight hour day and a few minor concessions. If we can do this and show the sugar workers that we can and will improve their conditions it will mean an increase of membership by 80% during the coming year".

27 *Worker*, 15 April 1911.

28 McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 14 April 1911, AWA letterbook.

In arguing that the AWA could succeed where the ASWU had failed, McCormack, Fraser and other propagandists knowingly undertook a confrontation with sugar industry employers, if need be, in the near future. This is not quite the same thing as saying, however, that they provoked the strike. Certainly the AWA leaders understood the implications of the union's policy enunciated at the amalgamation conference, and planned accordingly. The amalgamated AWA was launched in an atmosphere of optimism and of anticipated struggle. Following the conference, Fraser toured Australian cities. He stated in Melbourne that:

. . .the AWA was determined to get better conditions for the sugar workers; if they were unable to get conditions which the workers could honestly be asked to accept, a big industrial battle would be fought in the near future.²⁹

There was a distinct possibility, indeed, that if an attempt to improve the poor labour conditions was not made, the AWA would lose the fealty of the sugar workers. The union leadership thus believed that such an attempt was necessary to the continued expansion and consolidation of the AWA. It was in this sense - one of firm determination rather than deliberate provocation on the part of the leadership and of expectation rather than the articulation of direct pressure on the part of the rank and file - that the AWA was committed to direct action. McCormack was aware of the implications:

Generally speaking, the AWA has more than come up to our expectations since the Conference but everything depends on the success or otherwise of this sugar trouble.³⁰

29 *Worker*, 4 February 1911. Fraser's speeches were reported widely in the southern press. Cf. *Argus* (Melbourne), 28 January 1911.

30 McCormack to E.E. Mansfield, district secretary AFBEU, Townsville, 5 June 1911, AWA letterbook.

However, McCormack did have some doubts about the union's readiness to engage in a major and widespread strike. Whether the sugar workers would maintain solidarity was a source of concern.

Each district will have to put up a scrap on their own and I think we will be able to give some places a bad time although others will be terribly hard to do anything with. In fact I am quite satisfied that we will need a clear year among the sugar workers to do much good with them. It is not the employer we will have to fight, it will be our own men.³¹

On occasion, McCormack complained that although the rank and file sugar workers expected the AWA to win them better conditions as a matter of course, they were not very willing to suffer the hardship of a lengthy strike to secure those gains.³² He admitted privately to Hinchcliffe:

Personally the situation has worried me a good deal as I am quite conversant with the impossibility of the do or die methods in this instance, but on the other hand all our members expect something will be done and will be disappointed if we stand by and let things slide. The rank and file are not aware of the almost impossible things that they expect of their Officers and to try and explain is useless because they think we could only be dodging the issue.³³

31 McCormack to Barton, 25 April 1911, *ibid.* Cf. McCormack to Brownbill, 25 April 1911, *ibid.* "If we only had the employer to fight we would be able to give a good account of ourselves but we have to fight the working man, contractor and a good many of the low paid slaves as well".

32 McCormack wrote of the Mackay workers (to Hall, 5 June 1911, *ibid.*): "I think they are a middling lot and not too much in favour of a strike. However they are expecting 8 hours and cannot get it without a bit of a fight".

33 McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 5 May 1911, *ibid.* Cf. *loc.cit.*: "Some of them are inclined to think that the AWA can fight anything. . .".

Armstrong relies heavily on the evidence of this letter in arguing that the AWA was not at all confident of success. Certainly it does seem to refute Kennedy's and Sullivan's imputations that the union leadership deliberately provoked the strike. But Armstrong's interpretation should be seen in the context of the purpose for which the letter was written: this was to allay the fears of the cautious Hinchcliffe who had warned McCormack not to precipitate trouble. McCormack, aware that the AWA would have to rely on ALF support in the event of a strike, accordingly sought to placate the ALF secretary. In concluding the letter, however, McCormack left little doubt that the AWA would enter the struggle wholeheartedly, if a strike became inevitable:

. . .I hope with yourself that the matter is arranged without strife but if all comes to all we will have to do our best under the circumstances.³⁴

All things considered, the evidence suggests that McCormack and the AWA were committed to claim improved conditions in the sugar industry from the time of amalgamation in December 1910. They were committed to strike action from the moment the employers, as expected, refused to acknowledge the union. But again, this does not mean, as Sullivan and Kennedy imply, that the AWA deliberately provoked the strike. The AWA continually sought conferences and settlement of the dispute by negotiation. McCormack was hopeful that the farmers at least would meet the union and arrange a settlement. "Let us hope for the best", he advised Hall on 3 May, "and by all means try and negotiate in preference to a strike. If all comes to all we will have to fight". In the same vein he encouraged Barton in his negotiations with Ayr growers: "I hope you are successful in getting a conference and a favourable settlement by peaceful means as we are not too well organised in the sugar districts and small concessions at first will be sufficient

34 *Ibid.*

until we get strong enough to fight".³⁵

McCormack was occasionally sceptical of the prospects of an AWA victory; he felt that ideally, the union should be better organised before conducting a strike. But it would also be misleading to over-emphasise, as Armstrong does, McCormack's doubts, which were rather the practical reservations and scepticism of an able leader who was unsure of the resolution of his subordinates and followers,³⁶ and who accordingly planned for all contingencies. McCormack's consistently pragmatic approach is exemplified by his initial consideration, then rejection, of the possibilities of the stage wages boards and the federal arbitration court as means of solving the dispute.³⁷ During the strike, McCormack again considered settlement via these institutions, explaining that "It does not matter how we get the concessions as long as we do get them and we will not put anything in the road of a settlement under any circumstances", and that ". . .it is just as well to have as many chances as possible in case of emergency".³⁸

Thus the tactics of the AWA executive in the sugar dispute were similar to those which the AWA had followed since its inception: a

35 McCormack to Hall, 3 May 1911, and to Barton, 3 May, *ibid.* A recent article by K. Saunders accepts and closely follows Armstrong's argument about the role of the AWA leadership in the strike: K. Saunders, 'Masters and Servants: the Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike of 1911', in Curthoys and Markus, *Who Are Our Enemies?* pp.101-102.

36 McCormack described the Bundaberg district secretary, Hall, as "weak-kneed" (to Barton, 21 April 1911, *ibid.*); and the Mackay organiser Morelande, as "not too amendable [*sic*] to discipline" (to Barton, 8 May 1911). He later rebuked the Mackay branch secretary for allowing copies of union correspondence to be published in the local press (to Howland, 27 May 1911) and complained of Barton's competence (to H. Barsby, 8 August 1911). Shortly afterwards Barton was forced to resign; he was replaced by Jack Dash.

37 McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 5 May 1911, *ibid.*

38 McCormack to J. Christie, secretary Townsville WWF, 7 August 1911, and to H. Barsby, Ayr branch AWA secretary, 8 August 1911, *ibid.*

strike was not provoked, but neither was it avoided; it was a legitimate measure to adopt when others had failed to protect and improve working conditions. Since the employers refused to meet the union, direct action was necessary if the AWA were to secure its objectives and consolidate its new membership; it was necessary despite any doubts about the union's readiness.

The strategy, timing and tactics of the strike were the province of the AWA executive, but the basic causes of the strike were twofold: the experience and felt grievances of the rank and file sugar workers; the intolerance of employers towards the articulation of these grievances and their refusal to remedy them. It is in not placing enough - or indeed any - emphasis on the importance of industrial relations and in placing too much emphasis on the motives of the AWA leadership that all previous discussions of the origins of the 1911 sugar strike have been inadequate.

Most sugar workers responded vigorously to the union call-out, indicating their support for strike action. McCormack's pessimistic predictions about the determination of the rank and file were confounded; he admitted his surprise at the solidarity and discipline of the men.³⁹

As workers in each district refused to start work, they were organised into union strike camps maintained by levies on AWA members in other industries and by donations from other trade unions. They were orderly - almost martial - with rosters for various duties and penalties (such as water-carting or wood-chopping) for misconduct. Pickets were posted and exeats required before strikers could leave camp. According to the union there were four thousand men in the various camps at the height of the strike, although the *Australian Sugar Journal* preferred the low estimate of fifteen hundred.⁴⁰

39 McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 31 July 1911, *ibid.*

40 McCormack to Joe Morris, general secretary WWF, 5 July 1911, *ibid.*; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 7 September 1911; *Bowen Independent*, 29 July 1911.

The first weeks of the strike were fairly quiet. The main visible evidence of the large number of striking workers was their regular, orderly processions through the streets of the sugar towns; the men wore red armbands and carried large banners inscribed with the figure '8'.⁴¹ However, as it became more apparent that neither workers nor employers would surrender easily, the press - and conservative opinion generally - sided completely with the CSR and the ASPA. The *North Queensland Herald*, which had earlier acknowledged the justice of the men's claims, on 17 June criticised the ". . . attempt by a few agitators to force conditions on the industry which are unwarranted from the farmer's viewpoint, and not being asked for by the worker"; on 24 June the newspaper stated that "those who are responsible for this can take their choice between the stigmas of criminals and fools".⁴² Elsewhere, the "rapacious unionism" promoted by "loud-mouthed agitators" was roundly condemned.⁴³

Yet it was evident from less partisan press coverage, even in the same newspapers, that the strikers were generally determined to hold firm, and also that there was a certain amount of public support for the men's demands. Some business houses supplied the strike camps on discount terms. When non-union labourers became more common, they were refused drinks and accommodation by many publicans and hostel proprietors.⁴⁴ It was to cultivate this public support that the union organisers urged their followers to remain sober and orderly; they represented the struggle as being one between workers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the grasping CSR

41 The strikers were even commended initially by the conservative press for their moderate language and actions. E.g. *North Queensland Herald*, 10 June 1911.

42 *Ibid.*, 17 June 1911, 24 June 1911.

43 *Bowen Independent*, 10 June 1911; *Mackay Mercury*, 1 July 1911.

44 *Bowen Independent*, 10 July 1911; Inspector Quilter to W.J. Cahill, Commissioner of Police, 9 August 1911, Pol 11/62, QSA.

monopoly and the predatory combine of millers. McCormack even argued that farmers as well as labourers could be successfully organised by the AWA; as the strike continued, some farmers were actually recognising "that they should be shoulder to shoulder with the workers in the fight against the monopoly".⁴⁵

A number of growers were prepared to admit that the workers' claims were fair and reasonable, but it was doubtful whether the growers would ever have joined the striking unionists in a united stand against the manufacturing interests. At the very outset of the strike, a meeting of Cairns farmers decided to form a union of their own expressly to oppose the AWA demands: ". . .the meeting would not allow the industry to be dictated to by a few miners at Chillagoe, who knew nothing about sugar work".⁴⁶ Those farmers who had at first advocated the concession of union demands were generally persuaded to change their policy by ASPA and CSR promises to provide both direct financial assistance and sufficient free labour to harvest the crop. An extra element of coercion was added when the mills made it known that they would not accept cane from those growers who bowed to the workers' demands.⁴⁷ McCormack later complained justifiably that the farmers

. . .are willing to give way but are being coerced by the big millers and the CSR.
 . . .Almost everywhere the growers and Millers who are not under the CSR would gladly settle the trouble and give in on the minimum and hours but they do not care to scab on the others who are determined to hang out.⁴⁸

45 McCormack to W. Bertram, 5 July 1911, AWA letterbook. Cf. Ferricks, in *QPD* CVIII, p.50: "The members of the Amalgamated Workers' Association are fighting at the present time, not against the growers as a class, but against the manufacturers and the refining monopoly".

46 *North Queensland Herald*, 10 June 1911.

47 *Ibid.*, 29 July 1911; *Worker*, 15 July 1911; *QPD* CVIII, pp.43-44.

48 McCormack to Bertram, 5 July 1911; to Hinchcliffe, 7 August 1911, AWA letterbook.

As the strike dragged on, farmers and their families began to cut their own cane, enabling most mills to crush limited amounts of cane with the aid of farmer labour. The ASPA and the CSR recruited and transported (at their own cost, but with the aid of the Queensland government) hundreds of strike breakers to the sugar areas from Sydney and Tasmania; these were required to sign indenture agreements with severe penalties for failure to complete their work. Although on arrival in the sugar districts a large number was persuaded to join the strikers, many remained at the mills.⁴⁹

One aspect of the sugar dispute was the apparent ubiquity and anonymity of strikebreakers.⁵⁰ The partisan accounts of the strike make it practically impossible to estimate the number of men involved, let alone their social composition. But in Mackay the strikebreakers were unusually well organised. A prominent Melbourne anti-unionist, J.T. Packer, with the backing of the sugar millers, formed a Society of Free Workers which soon claimed over four hundred members. Its aims were said to be "non-political" and "anti-strike"⁵¹ unionism, though the AWA was sure that most of its members were farmers' sons.⁵² The credibility of Packer's society was not enhanced when the ASPA opined that "with skilful manipulation" it would "soon become a power for good in the district".⁵³

The presence of numbers of strikebreakers, who were guarded by large contingents of armed police, introduced a new dimension of

49 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 August 1911; *Bowen Independent*, 1 July 1911.

50 Cf. Iremonger *et al.*, *Strikes*, p.xviii.

51 *Mackay Mercury*, 8 July 1911; *Bowen Independent*, 18 July 1911.

52 *North Queensland Herald*, 5 August 1911.

53 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 August 1911, R. Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin* (Sydney, 1964), p.130, states that the Society of Free Workers was organised by the sugar millers.

violence into a hitherto relatively peaceful dispute. Crowds of strikers picketed the wharves, railways and sugar mills in an attempt to induce the hated "scabs" not to work. Soon, riots, brawls, assaults and incendiarism of sugar cane were a common occurrence. At Childers on 29 July police fixed bayonets to disperse several hundred strikers who were attempting to enter the local sugar mill; eight strikers, including AWA organiser (and later federal parliamentarian) George Martens, were subsequently arrested.⁵⁴ On 5 August at Kalamia near Ayr, there was a mass demonstration aimed at ejecting a group of strikebreakers who were manning the mill. The police prevented the attempt and later raided the strike camp, arresting several men on charges of riotous behaviour.⁵⁵

The incidents of violence, magnified by inflammatory press reports, soon caused a discernible split in the community at large. The extent of the rift was indicated when a "free fight" broke out among pupils of the Bowen state school: children supporting the cause of the strike clashed with those opposing.⁵⁶ Conservative opinion, meanwhile, upbraided the Denham government to take stronger action to end the strike. To the *Courier*:

Deliberate lawlessness should be treated as one treats a reptile, whose head should be crushed under heel. It makes the offence all the greater that riotous strikers should in other respects be respectable citizens, because they ought to have known better than to place themselves under the control⁵⁷ of ignorant and unprincipled agitators.

Those potential strikebreakers who upon arrival had joined the strikers, were summonsed by the millers, especially the CSR, under

54 *North Queensland Herald*, 5 August 1911; Under-Secretary, Justice Department, to Crown Solicitor, 27 September, 1911, CRS/282, QSA.

55 Quilter to Cahill, 9 August 1911, Pol 11/52, QSA.

56 *Bowen Independent*, 15 August 1911.

57 *Courier* (Brisbane), 20 July 1911.

the *Masters and Servants Act*, and duly charged with breaking their contracts. The employers hoped thus to discourage any others from defaulting. The results of such legal proceedings seemed to vary with the individual magistrates presiding, but increasing doubt was thrown on the legal status of the agreements; moreover, evidence of poor living conditions at the mills served to publicise union grievances of the discomfiture of the employers. At Childers the magistrate criticised the CSR mill management for the filthy state of the bathroom and the poor standard of food provided; at Cairns, in a case nevertheless found in favour of the plaintiff, the defence provided evidence of grubs and maggots in porridge, rancid corn beef and rotten sweet potatoes.⁵⁸

By this time the strike had become something of a *cause célèbre* to the Australian labour movement as an epitome of the struggle for fundamental union principles, in particular, for employer recognition and an eight-hour day. Donations poured into the AWA strike camps from organisations as diverse as the Melbourne cigarmaking employees and the New Zealand Seamen's Union.⁵⁹ In publicising the strike, labour newspapers contrasted what they saw as the workers' very reasonable goals with existing conditions. All of them deprecated the CSR monopoly:

This is a picture of things from the sugar workers' side of the fence, that the Press organs of Capitalism keep silent about, and the shame of the oppression can only be fully realised when one considers that the CSR monopoly showed a profit of £400,000 for the past twelve months, and during the past four and a half years it has capitalised £575,000 of profit.⁶⁰

58 *North Queensland Herald*, 8 July 1911.

59 Financial statement, AWA letterbook [n.d.], c. July 1911.

60 *Socialist* (organ of the Victorian Socialist Party) (Melbourne), 4 August 1911.

Early in August the second state trade union congress opened in Brisbane. The delegates demonstrated the feelings of labour generally about the strike, resolving unanimously:

. . .that the demands of the AWA on behalf of the sugar workers are eminently reasonable and just, and that the delegates pledge themselves to exercise their influence with their respective organisations to give them continued financial support while the dispute lasts.⁶¹

Before the trade union congress met, the extension of the strike to workers outside the sugar industry had already ensured the involvement of the wider labour movement. As sugar mills crushed limited amounts of cane, raw sugar was transported to the wharves for shipment south. At first the federal executive of the WWF instructed its North Queensland branches to continue work and handle the sugar. The Cairns branch, however, in defiance of the executive, resolved not to handle sugar produced by non-union labour.⁶² The Mackay wharfies were also considering similar action and, at McCormack's prodding, the federal executive gave in: it instructed its branches not to handle any sugar brought to the wharves after 6 p.m. on 18 July 1911.⁶³ When the Federated Seamen's Union joined the WWF in its black ban on sugar, the end of the dispute on the AWA's terms seemed imminent. The employers, however, refused to concede defeat: the mills continued to operate with farmer and free labour; sugar was stored at the mills and wharves; a small amount was shipped with the aid of non-union labour. The strike dragged on.⁶⁴

61 *Official Report of the Second Trades and Labour Union Congress*, pp.5-6.

62 Cairns branch WWF minutes, 29 June 1911, 2 July 1911.

63 Mackay branch WWF minutes, 12 July 1911; WWF Federal Council minutes, 21 July 1911; McCormack to Morris, 5 July 1911, AWA letterbook.

64 *The Bowen Independent*, 29 July 1911 counselled the employers to give in, as the involvement of waterside workers and seamen had reversed their position *vis-à-vis* the strikers.

The political wing of the labour movement also enthusiastically supported the strikers' demands. E.G. Theodore, though no longer an official of the AWA, was an active and vocal propagandist, travelling to southern states to canvass support for his union.⁶⁵ On 13 July the PLP moved the adjournment of parliament to call attention to the sugar trouble. Labor accused the Denham ministry of being partly responsible for the strike by not granting an eight-hour day in the government mills; of attempting to break the strike by aiding the recruitment of scabs at its Brisbane labour exchange and at the Queensland tourist bureau, then providing special trains to transport the scabs; and of intimidating unionists by sending extra police to the North. According to the acting leader of the PLP, William Lennon,

By their indifference and supineness the Government have shown that their sympathies are entirely with the employer, with the capitalist, and entirely against the men.⁶⁶

Actually, Lennon was charging the government with indifference rather than overt intervention, and Denham claimed that he had acted impartially. But the government suffered some embarrassment over an advertisement in the Sydney press asking free labourers to report to the Queensland tourist bureau, and there was no doubt from the speeches made by government members that their sympathy lay naturally with the employers and that they regarded the strike as having been provoked by irresponsible agitators "from behind the feather-bed range".⁶⁷

The political ramifications of the strike extended to outspoken involvement by federal Labor government ministers. Before the strike, the Minister for External Affairs, Senator Findley, had refused the Queensland government's request for authority to import contract

65 McCormack to Moir, 16 June 1911, AWA letterbook.

66 QPD CVII (13 July 1911), p.38.

67 *Ibid.*

labour for the sugar fields; he also stated his belief that the workers were entitled to better working conditions in what was, after all, a highly-protected industry.⁶⁸ During the strike, the Minister for Customs, Frank Tudor, attempted unsuccessfully to mediate between the growers and workers at Bundaberg. He was not unsympathetic towards the farmers: they could not afford to pay higher wages unless the millers paid a higher price for cane.⁶⁹

A far less conciliatory approach was adopted by W.M. Hughes, then Attorney-General and Acting-Prime Minister. Hughes first entered the dispute as federal president of the WWF when that union declared sugar black. He was roundly condemned at the time for the ambiguity of his position.

As Federal Attorney-General he is expected to uphold the law, but as President of the WWF its members require him to wink at the law and order a strike.⁷⁰

Hughes nevertheless directed the full force of his authority as Acting-Prime Minister against the CSR. He suggested that as a means of settling the dispute and forcing the employers to make concessions, the federal government might repeal the protective tariff on sugar. In a statement issued on 28 July, Hughes said:

68 *Bowen Independent*, 3 June 1911.

69 *North Queensland Herald*, 15 July 1911.

70 *Ibid.*, 22 July 1911.

The dispute now seems to have reached a point when it was necessary to call the attention of the people of Australia to one or two phrases in which they are vitally interested. This is not a dispute between the farmers and their employees; as a matter of fact, their interests are almost identical. Both have to work very hard and get very little in return. The real struggle is between the CSR Company and the growers on one hand, and the growers and the workers on the other. . . .

A little while ago it was said that it is the hardest work to which white men can be put; and yet they say eight-hour's day is insufficient. They want the men to work longer hours and they will not even pay decent wages. To repeal the duty may be a rude method of cutting the Gordian knot, but it will be effective.⁷¹

It is doubtful whether the removal of tariff protection was ever seriously contemplated, but Hughes' statement certainly alarmed the employers and indicated the serious political ramifications of the dispute.

By the beginning of August, most sugar districts had been affected by the strike for two months. Some sugar was still being slowly and arduously manufactured and transported. Both sides still avowed their determination to win; matters seemed to be at a stalemate. However, cracks in the solidarity both of workers and employers were beginning to appear.

The conflict of interest between farmers and manufacturers, latent since the beginning of the strike, now surfaced again. Indeed the AWA believed for some time that the millers, particularly the CSR, were the major stumbling block to a strike settlement. Cane

71 *Ibid.*, 29 July 1911. To this threat was added a suggestion of Bamford's that the Commonwealth should build a refinery in Papua New Guinea to provide competition for the CSR. Connolly, *Drysdale and the Burdekin*, pp.129-130, says of this suggestion, "Of all the weird utterances of responsible Federal politicians during the strike, this must be accorded top place".

growers felt that it was they, rather than the manufacturers, who were bearing the brunt of the strike. In manning the mills, farmers had been forced to neglect their own farm work, especially planting for the next season's sugar crop; many now believed that the mills should concede the eight-hour day and allow the industry to return to normal. This rift between growers and millers became obvious when a meeting of Sarina farmers demanded that Plane Creek mill give in to the union claims. The secretary of the Sarina sugar growers' union complained that the farmers had ". . .no say in the present strike troubles, except through the mouth of the manufacturers, and that was not as it ought to be".⁷²

The morale of the striking workers, however, was also low; strike camps had been depleted as men either left North Queensland for the south or drifted back to work.⁷³ The union accordingly modified its demands, focussing on the issue of the eight-hour day in mills. McCormack again seriously considered extending the dispute to the northern rivers district of New South Wales, specifically in order to invite the intervention of the federal arbitration court; an AWA organiser was sent south to report on the possibilities.⁷⁴

At this stage, the first real steps were taken to resolve the dispute. The ALF convened an interstate conference in Brisbane of all trade unions directly or indirectly involved in the dispute; it was attended by representatives of the AWA, WWF, Federated Seamen's Union, Australian Institute of Marine Engineers, Merchant Service Guild, Federated Lorrymen and Carriers' Union, Brisbane Coal Lumpers' Union, United Storemen and Packers' Union, Brisbane Carters, Draymen and Trolleydrivers' Union and the QREA. Other transport unions pledged their support for any decisions made by the conference, which

72 *Mackay Mercury*, 19 August 1911.

73 *Bowen Independent*, 15 August 1911; McCormack to Hinchcliffe, 7 August 1911, AWA letterbook; Quilter to Cahill, 13 August 1911, Pol 11/62, QSA.

74 McCormack to Barton, 8 August 1911, AWA letterbook.

"threatened extension of the trouble throughout the Commonwealth".⁷⁵ Sydney waterside workers were already giving practical effect to this threat by refusing to handle Queensland sugar. With a national confrontation looming, the employers agreed to confer with the striking unionists.

The resulting conference, chaired by the state Treasurer, was attended by representatives of most of the unions at the Brisbane conference, and the ASPA. It finally decided that the strike should be called off on 16 August on the basis of four agreed points: an eight-hour day; payment of a minimum wage of thirty shillings per week in mills; no victimisation of erstwhile strikers; payment of overtime at a rate of time and a quarter. But the settlement applied chiefly to the mill hands. The AWA agreed to forego its claims on behalf of cane cutters and field hands on the understanding that the federal government would issue new regulations meeting those claims before the next harvest.⁷⁶

Although the terms of the settlement were by no means the full measure of the original union demands, at least the principal claims were conceded. As McCormack stated, it was "a splendid victory. . . we practically won all along the line".⁷⁷ Many sugar workers, however, expressed disappointment at the settlement, particularly as field hands still had to wait for new regulations. The editor of the *Federal*, a Townsville socialist weekly, accused the union leaders of capitulating at the height of the struggle:

Moral: neither politician, nor official of labor organisation should ever be permitted to discuss with capitalists terms of settlement of any dispute.⁷⁸

75 *Worker*, 19 August 1911.

76 *Bowen Independent*, 22 August 1911.

77 McCormack to Secretary, Tasmanian Typographical Society, 18 August 1911 and to A. Brown, secretary Cairns, WWF, 18 August 1911, AWA letterbook.

78 *Cit. Pioneer*, 26 August 1911.

Although most workers agreed with Hinchcliffe that the terms were "eminently reasonable and beyond the cavil of every sensible unionist",⁷⁹ the very length and acrimony of the strike left some, not surprisingly, disappointed. The immediate sequel was indeed "a strong undercurrent of bitterness" between employer and employee which manifested itself in victimisation of union activists, continued conflict between scabs and strikers, and a short stoppage at the CSR mills near Ingham.⁸⁰ Late in 1911 a federal Royal Commission claimed that the wages paid to most field labourers were still inadequate, and that despite the recent strike, conditions generally in the industry were "not such as to encourage sufficiently the permanent settlement of a reliable class of workers".⁸¹

The AWA's main triumph was in the sphere of industrial relations: it was at last recognised by the ASPA and the CSR. "The employers' recognition of the AWA" opined the *Pioneer*, "is alone worth ten times the fighting power and cash expended in its consummation. . .".⁸² In this context the most important clause of the strike settlement was the recommendation that employers and employees negotiate a mutually satisfactory agreement for the next season to apply uniformly throughout all the sugar districts.

The nature of the industry, which was characterised by a large itinerant seasonal workforce and considerable local variation in conditions, meant that disputes and local strikes would be a perennial feature of industrial relations. In general, however, the union executive subsequently preferred to settle differences peacefully by negotiation or through industrial tribunals. In January 1913 Theodore referred approvingly to the improved relations

79 *Worker*, 19 August 1911.

80 *Australian Sugar Journal*, November 1911; McCormack to Hall, 8 September 1911, Martyn to Hall, 28 September 1911, AWA letterbook.

81 *CPP* 1912, III, p.1095.

82 *Pioneer*, 19 August 1911.

between the AWA and the sugar growers.⁸³

The successful conclusion of the sugar strike was hailed by the Australian labour movement as a vindication of the power of united labour. The *Worker* greeted the settlement with a leader headed "Unity Wins":

In the whole history of Labour's struggle for a decent life, no men ever had a juster cause than the sugar workers of Queensland. . . .Whatever had been the outcome of this strike, the spectacle of Labour solidarity which it presented to us is the guarantee of many glorious victories for justice yet to come. The cause of the sugar workers was that of Justice linked with moderation. Yet only by the might of Unity could the justest and the most moderate cause be won. Without the AWA they could have raised but a feeble hand. Without the ALF they could have spoken with but a feeble voice. Without the transport workers of the whole Commonwealth not only could they have done nothing themselves, but the strongest efforts put forth on their behalf would have been in vain.⁸⁴

Although suffering from acute financial embarrassment as a result of the strike, the AWA lost no time in promoting its influence and consolidating its prestige. It urged the merger of many small unions in Queensland with the all-embracing AWA. McCormack wrote to the enginedrivers' union on 18 August 1911:

You will see by the recent fight that what we really want is one Union and not a dozen sectional affairs which will only study local interests.⁸⁵

The meatworkers' union was also encouraged to consider an amalgamation.

83 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.4.

84 *Worker*, 19 August 1911.

85 McCormack to J. Fanning, Mackay, 18 August 1911, AWA letterbook.

McCormack wrote to the AFBEU conference delegates, arguing that

. . .it is generally acknowledged that the ideal of one great union for all workers is the most vital and important question in connection with modern unionism.⁸⁶

The AWA had some success in recruiting the members of the smaller Queensland trade unions. Indeed it became the largest union in the state within a year. In 1913 the concept of broader unionism promoted by the AWA led to its merger with the nationwide AWU. The meatworkers also seriously considered amalgamation. However, hopes for a "Council of Labour to deal effectively with all classes of disputes over the whole Commonwealth"⁸⁷ faded: Australian trade unions generally showed little interest in closer unity schemes transcending state borders other than the limited interstate federations of craft unions. Any chance that the ALF would become a vital trade union federation even within Queensland was also dissipated by the defeat of metropolitan unions in the Brisbane general strike in early 1912.

The General Strike

The immediate cause of the strike was the refusal of the Brisbane Tramway Company to allow its employees to become members of the Australian Federated Tramway Employees' Association [AFTEA]. The matter was already before the federal arbitration court, but the American-born tramway manager, J.S. Badger, seemed determined to force the issue by dismissing known unionists in his employ. On 18 January 1912 tramwaymen took a stand and publicly proclaimed their unionism by wearing their union badges to work. They were immediately

86 McCormack to president and delegates, AFBEU state conference, 6 January 1912, *ibid.*

87 McCormack to Brown, 18 August 1911, *ibid.*

dismissed, bringing the city's tram service to a halt.⁸⁸

Encouraged by the recent demonstrations of unity in the sugar strike and believing that a fundamental trade union principle - the right to combine - was under attack, Queensland unionists rallied to the aid of the tramwaymen. A meeting of forty-three organisations, convened by the ALF, decided on "a general cessation of work" from 6 p.m. Tuesday 29 January unless a settlement was reached and the tramwaymen reinstated. Badger, with the tacit support of the state government, was intransigent and the strike began.

By Wednesday, Brisbane was almost at a standstill. The waterfront, shops, hotels and factories were closed. A large procession of workers in the city centre proclaimed their solidarity. The dispute had widened from a lockout involving only a few hundred tramwaymen into a major industrial confrontation implicating over twenty thousand unionists. Yet there had been little preparation for the strike and no clear statement of objectives. As Murphy says:

It erupted from the fear that unionism was about to be attacked by both employers and the government and from the enthusiasm for industrial action born out of the success of the growing strength of Labor [*sic*] organisations throughout the State.⁸⁹

Despite the class-conscious propaganda of the *Official Strike*

88 This account of the strike in Brisbane is largely based on the detailed studies by G. Strachan, *The Brisbane General Strike of 1912*, B.A. Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1973, and A.A. Morrison, 'The Brisbane General Strike of 1912', *Historical Studies*, IV, 14 (May 1950), pp.125-144.

89 Murphy, 'Queensland', p.181; cf. Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, p.134: "It is probable that the 1912 general strike would not have occurred if it had not been for the success of the 1911 sugar strike and the way it was finally resolved". Armstrong notes, *ibid.*, p.143, that Theodore himself had urged the tramway men "to emulate the sugar workers" if they wanted industrial justice.

Bulletin and the utopian optimism of a radical minority, the so-called general strike had little resemblance to the general strike of syndicalist theory. The strike committee urged its followers to stay within the law; they also permitted many services, including the manufacturing and distribution of food, to continue.

On 30 January railway workers in the QUREA voted to join the strike, providing the government with an excuse to intervene openly on the side of the employers and crush the strike. To many conservatives, the 1911 sugar strike had been alarming evidence of the growing militancy of "political" or "socialistic" unionism;⁹⁰ the 1912 general strike, to such conservatives, was a direct challenge to government and society in the capital itself.

Denham saw that the stoppage of rail services would rally public opinion to his side and announced his government's intention to preserve law and order. The government accordingly recruited free labour to replace striking unionists and provided police to protect the free labourers. Arguing that Brisbane ". . . may at any moment be the scene of riot and bloodshed", Denham requested military assistance from the Commonwealth government.⁹¹ However, the Labor prime minister, Andrew Fisher, refused.

Now incensed at what he saw as Commonwealth neglect of its constitutional obligations, Denham brought in police from country areas, recruited three thousand special constables and banned union demonstrations. On 2 February a procession of strikers was dispersed by armed foot and mounted police with the assistance of over-enthusiastic specials. Angry unionists immediately labelled the incident "Black Friday".

On the same day the Brisbane strike committee requested trade unions in the country areas to strike in sympathy with the metropolitan

90 *QPD* CVIII (20 July 1911), p.165 *et seq.*

91 Denham to Sir William MacGregor, Governor of Queensland, 1 February 1912, *QPP* 1912, I, p.27.

unionists. When news of "Black Friday" reached North Queensland, the extension of the general strike throughout the state appeared imminent. In direct defiance to WWF executive instructions, waterside workers in all northern ports voted to "take a holiday until further notice".⁹² The AWA, holding its annual conference in Townsville, immediately suspended proceedings and called out all its members. Theodore, again president of the AWA, was elected president of the Townsville strike committee, and McCormack secretary. Soon railway workers, wharf labourers, bakers, printers, timber workers, carpenters, shop assistants, sugar workers, miners and all classes of labourers in North Queensland were on strike. It was a spectacle which fired the imagination of Ernie Lane, who wrote in the *Worker*:

It was a magnificent instance of the fighting qualities, of discipline and class consciousness of the AWA, and a foretaste of its irresistible power in the near future when its membership is increased and its organisation perfected.⁹³

But union solidarity was already crumbling in Brisbane. Many striking railway workers, faced with dismissal, returned to work. The trams were also running again with non-union labour. In other strike-affected industries, more "free" labourers were working under police protection. Extra pressure was applied to the strikers when the government indefinitely suspended all railway construction.

In Townsville, the strike had achieved its purpose in demonstrating both union solidarity and defiance of the Liberal government. The Brisbane strike committee therefore saw no point

92 Mackay branch WWF minutes, 5 February 1912; Cairns branch WWF minutes, 4, 5 February 1912; Traffic manager, Cairns, telegram to general superintendent, Brisbane, 5 February 1912, 2133/1912, HB100, Railways, QSA.

93 *Worker*, 24 February 1912; *Official Report of the First Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.3, [E154/50, RSSS-ANUA]; cf. *Cairns Post*, 6 February 1912; *Official Strike Bulletin*, 6 February 1912; *Bowen Independent*, 10 February 1912; Davis, in *MIJQ*, November and December 1942.

in continuing the hold-up in the North and on 9 February called off the strike outside Brisbane.⁹⁴ Various militant unionists were disappointed, but a return to work appeared the more realistic move: Theodore and McCormack argued that the strike would probably end in defeat and that the object of the North Queensland stoppage had in any case been achieved.⁹⁵

The strike dragged on in Brisbane but increasing numbers returned to work each day. Union finances were also running low, especially since the strike committee had had little success in securing inter-state donations. On 16 February the ALF requested a conference with the Employers' Federation to resolve the dispute. The employers refused, recognising in the request a practical admission of defeat. Indeed the dispute was now only a sectional strike, supported chiefly by coalminers and waterside workers. On 4 March 1912 Judge Higgins of the federal arbitration court ruled that the tramwaymen were entitled to wear their badges; he also enjoined the Brisbane Tramway Company not to dismiss its employees for this reason. On the very next day the strike was formally declared off. The arbitration court's decision was a moral vindication of the strikers' cause, but it had no practical effect: the company had recruited sufficient non-union workers to maintain a full tram service; it ignored the claims of its striking erstwhile employees; the court itself had no power to order their re-employment.

The general strike failed to secure not only the reinstatement of tramwaymen but also guarantees against the victimisation of striking workers in other unions. Railwaymen in particular suffered since the government refused to re-employ most strikers and also

94 J. McDermott, Commissioner's agent, Chillagoe, to Commissioner, 9 February 1912, 2133/1912, HB100, Railways, QSA. Cairns branch WWF minutes, 9 February 1912; *Courier*, 10 February 1912; *Bowen Independent*, 13 February 1912.

95 Cf. Kennedy, McCormack, p.54; Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p.104; Davis, *loc.cit.*

continued its suspension of construction work.⁹⁶ Not only did the AFTEA in Brisbane become completely defunct but many trade unions were left depleted of members and finances. The QTA, for example, "lost about 200 of its 500 members, and all of its own funds".⁹⁷ Most unions were disillusioned with the ALF's conduct of the strike: in the following year all but the largest unions disaffiliated from the ALF, seeking strength in inter-state federations instead.

In North Queensland, however, the judicious calling-off of the strike after only a few days had left an impression of solidarity and strength under AWA direction. Unionists subsequently contrasted the AWA performance in both the general strike and the 1911 sugar strike with the abject defeat of the ALF in Brisbane. The AWA was increasingly seen as the cynosure of the labour movement in Queensland. Whereas the reputation of the metropolitan unions and the ALF had been severely damaged in the recent industrial conflict, that of the AWA actually grew. AWA membership accordingly increased, as McCormack proudly reported:

The whole of the Branches of the AWA responded splendidly and not one solitary place continued work until the order was given to resume. The matter had done us a considerable amount of good in the north and has gone a long way towards consolidating unionism and has also demonstrated the effectiveness of the AWA. In Townsville and Charters Towers we must have increased our membership by three or four hundred and the same applies over the whole area.⁹⁸

The political ramifications of the 1912 strike were no less significant than the industrial. Prior to the strike, the Denham government's political future looked decidedly uncertain. There were many disaffected critics within its own ranks; a section of

96 McCormack to Hall, 4 March 1912, AWA letterbook; District Engineer, Cairns, to Chief Engineer, Brisbane, 5 March 1912, *loc.cit.*, Railways, QSA.

97 J. Hagan, 'The Queensland Typographical Association', in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p.162.

98 McCormack to Hall, 14 February 1912, AWA letterbook.

the press and the community was hostile to government policy in the sugar and liquor industries. "The strike revived Denham's political fortunes", says Murphy, "as he emerged and was praised as the custodian of law and order". In order to take advantage of anti-union and anti-Labor feeling, Denham announced that a state election would be held on 27 April 1912.⁹⁹

Despite Labor's attempt to introduce other issues, the main issue in the election was the general strike. The Liberals stood on a platform of "constitutional government versus anarchy"; Labor appealed to the electorate to answer "the bullets of the police with the ballots of the people", stressing its own moderate and evolutionary reformism.¹⁰⁰

In North Queensland, the thrust of the non-Labor campaign was to the effect that both the recent general strike and the 1911 sugar strike represented malign Labor influences:

The Labour party, and that party only, can claim all the honour and glory of the great sugar strike in the middle of last year; and that is the party which must be held responsible for the deliberate attempt to prevent the cane growers of Queensland from reaping their harvest.¹⁰¹

Labor stressed its view of the shortcomings of the Liberal government, affirming its belief in a just system of industrial conciliation and arbitration. The endorsed candidate for Cairns was William McCormack who, like his colleague Theodore, now sought to make the transition from trade union official to Labor parliamentarian. According to McCormack, the Labor Party "had for some time been endeavouring to settle disputes without recourse to strikes. They knew that the

99 Murphy, 'Queensland', p.181.

100 Labor election manifesto, in CPE minutes, 31 May 1912; cf. 'Australia - strikes and legislation', *Round Table* III, 1 (December 1912), p.159.

101 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 4 April 1912.

strike weapon was a brutal method of dealing with affairs".¹⁰² The *Cairns Post*, branding McCormack "an avowed syndicalist", was not impressed:

At the forthcoming election the people are faced with a grave responsibility. They are given the choice of supporting men who recently assisted in raising the red flag of revolution in Queensland, or other men who helped to resist that revolutionary spirit and to uphold the freedom and independence of the people and the rights and liberties of every man, woman and child under constitutional government.¹⁰³

The election resulted in a sweeping win for the Denham government (Liberals 47 seats, Labor 25). Labor's overall loss of two seats compared with the 1909 election was due partly to an electoral redistribution in 1910, but its greatest reversals were suffered in rural and provincial electorates; coming so soon after the strike defeat, it was a great disappointment to Labor supporters. But it was not an unmitigated defeat: for the first time the party made substantial inroads in working-class constituencies in Brisbane, winning six metropolitan seats and narrowly missing out on a further three. Moreover, Labor polled 46.7 per cent of the vote - only ten thousand ballots fewer than the Liberals. Thus although the election represented an immediate setback to Labor political hopes, there was some comfort to be gained: "Labor was endorsed in the camp of the enemy", declared the *Worker*.¹⁰⁴

In North Queensland electorates, the degree of anti-Labor feeling

102 *Cairns Post*, 5 April 1912.

103 *Ibid.*, 6 April 1912, 23 April 1912.

104 *Worker*, 11 May 1912; cf. Hughes, in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p.82: ". . .the general strike of 1912 had done for Labour in Brisbane what the pastoral strikes of the early 1890s had done in the west: made it a popular cause". Voting results are from Hughes and Graham, *Australian Government and Politics*, p.515.

provoked by the recent strikes led to losses in Bowen (Ferricks), Charters Towers (Mullan) and Burke (Collins). Off-setting these defeats, however, were wins by McCormack in Cairns, and Gillies¹⁰⁵ in Eacham. Labor also held Chillagoe, Flinders, Herbert, Kennedy, Mundingburra, and Queenton; Liberals won in Bowen, Burke, Charters Towers, Cook, Mackay, Mirani and Townsville.¹⁰⁶

Giving vent to public opinion, as expressed in the election results, the Denham government introduced an *Industrial Peace Act* for the express purpose of preventing strikes. Wages boards were replaced by industrial boards under the overall jurisdiction of an industrial court; severe penalties were provided for breaches of awards, strikes and lockouts; strikes were practically prohibited in, or in connection with, public utilities; other clauses were designed to restrict the political activities of trade unions and deny them legal recognition.¹⁰⁷ To the labour movement, the Act was anathema: "the worst, the most tyrannical and most coercive Bill that has ever existed in any state in any part of Australia". The suppression of organised unionism was predicted.¹⁰⁸

Thus the euphoria of the sugar strike victory was dissipated by the 1912 general strike, the defeat of Labor in the election, and

105 William Neal Gillies (1868-1928), born Hunter River, NSW; sugar grower northern NSW; 1911 farmer Atherton Tablelands; MLA Eacham 1912-1925. Minister without portfolio 1918-1919; secretary agriculture 1919-1925; Premier February-October 1925; member Board of Trade and Arbitration, 1925-1928.

106 The *Electoral Districts Act of 1910* (I Geo.V No.3) redistributed the state into seventy-two single member constituencies. Brisbane seats were increased at the expense of the thinly populated pastoral areas and depopulating mining districts. North Queensland accordingly lost one electorate: districts post-1910 were Burke, Charters Towers, Chillagoe (formerly Woothakata), Cook, Flinders, and Queenton (part of the former Charters Towers) in the west; Bowen, Cairns, Eacham, Herbert, Mackay, Mirani (near Mackay), Mundingburra and Townsville on the coast.

107 3 Geo.V 19, *Queensland Government Gazette* [QGG], XCIX, 162 (9 December 1912), p.1607ff.

108 D. Bowman, *QPD CXI* (12 August 1912), p.612.

the subsequent anti-union legislation. But in the crisis of defeat lay the seeds of recovery, for the events of 1912 in fact imbued the Queensland labour movement with a new resolve.

The Aftermath of 1912

One way of circumventing the stringencies of the *Industrial Peace Act*, at least partially, was to seek the jurisdiction of the federal arbitration court. Many Queensland unions thus joined interstate federations or amalgamations of kindred craft unions, as organisations of this kind offered the strength and protection now deemed lacking in the ALF.¹⁰⁹ In fact, the industrial defeats of 1912 soon assumed the aspect of temporary setbacks only. Labour emerged in a more cautious and less militant mood, but more determined than ever to build up union strength. The ALF had become moribund and some unions practically defunct; nevertheless both the number of unions and union membership increased steadily, rising from 67 unions with 44,768 members in December 1912 to 86 unions with 55,580 members in 1914.¹¹⁰

It was in the aftermath of the general strike that the northern railway workers, awakened to the futility of divided organisation, joined the southern and central all-grades union in the QRU. Ten years later Moroney commented:

There are many who think that the strike was a failure, but, though the specific object was not won, it can be safely said that, like all other battles fought by Labor, it did good. It created an interest in unionism that reflected itself in the movement at a later date.¹¹¹

In North Queensland, the strike had actually increased the prestige

109 Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, pp.148-150; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, p.184.

110 *Labour Report*, 4 (1913), p.9; *ibid.*, 6 (1915), p.8.

111 *Railway Advocate*, June 1966.

of the AWA. It, too, naturally wished to evade the restrictions of state legislation. Accordingly, in June 1912 Theodore and McCormack went to a conference in Sydney to discuss the merger of the AWA with the nation-wide AWU and with other southern unions comprising rural workers, carriers and rabbit trappers.

Some delegates disagreed with the AWA concept of a broad union designed to include diverse classes of workers; they feared difficulty in registering with the arbitration court if the AWU included workers (such as miners) theoretically covered by other trade unions. They also did not take kindly to McCormack's and Theodore's plan for a highly centralised organisation; it was in fact rejected in favour of the AWU's existing structure of administration by self-governing districts.¹¹² Nevertheless, all delegates agreed on the desirability of a merger. It appeared to be on the point of consummation when the membership of the various unions also voted overwhelmingly in its favour.¹¹³

The new, amalgamated Australian Workers' Union was consequently launched at a second conference in January 1913. A victory for the AWA concept of unionism came when the conference granted the new union in Queensland the status of a branch. Thus the AWU in other states kept its regional structure under a national executive but the Queensland AWU adopted the AWA's much more autonomous and centralised executive power over policy and finance. Indeed, the AWA constitution and rules were simply incorporated in the by-laws of the new state AWU branch.¹¹⁴

112 *Official Report of the Amalgamation Conference 1912*, pp.6-7 and *passim*.

113 The result of the ballot was (from *Worker*, 16 January 1913):

	AWU	AWA - Rural Workers'	Union	Australian Carriers'
			Union	Union
For	18417	3349	551	684
Against	7060	24	6	24

114 *Official Report of the Amalgamation Conference 1913* (Sydney, 1914), p.21 [E145/15/3, RSSS-ANUA].

Itinerant workers now had the advantage of needing only one annual union ticket throughout the year in whatever state, occupation or industry they were employed. This uniform ticket system was the AWU's greatest appeal. Membership in Queensland therefore rose considerably: the union had 22,231 members in May 1914, compared with an AWA and AWU combined total of about 18,000 at the time of amalgamation in January 1913.¹¹⁵

After 1913 the AWU followed the path of the AWA in fostering the idea of one big union of all workers. It was successful to the extent that shop assistants, foodstuff manufacturing employees and timber workers joined its ranks. There was also considerable support for amalgamation among workers in the seasonal meat export industry, particularly in North Queensland, where regional ties and inter-industry migration reinforced the appeal of a merger. The meatworkers' support for one big union culminated at the AMIEU annual state conference in January 1914 when it was resolved that the federal council conduct a ballot among union members on the question of amalgamation.¹¹⁶ Despite the result in favour of amalgamation, the AMIEU did not institute negotiations with the AWU. The Queensland executive were perhaps concerned that they would lose the full measure of their autonomy if absorbed by the AWU. Perhaps too, as Childe and others suggest,¹¹⁷ they rejected the bureaucratisation of the AWU and its alleged subservience to the parliamentary Labor Party. Most probably, however, the AMIEU's own success as an industrial union and in collective bargaining, made

115 AWU, Queensland branch, *Annual Report and Balance Sheet*, 31 May 1914 (Brisbane, 1914). [E154/48, RSSS-ANUA].

116 *Official Report of the Third Annual State Conference of the AMIEU*, p.36. Motions urging amalgamation at this conference and the previous one were introduced by the Ross River and Alligator Creek branches respectively, *ibid.*, p.34.

117 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.129, explains that the AMIEU officials ". . . discovered that the AWU was merely a machine for getting officials into Parliament". Cf. Kennedy, 'The Rise of the Amalgamated Workers' Association', p.203; Mansfield, in *MJQ*, October 1939.

the benefits of amalgamation seem unclear. In fact, AMIEU support for amalgamation in 1914 was a reaction to two specific threats - the restrictive *Industrial Peace Act*, and the anti-union reputation of the American Meat Trust which was then extending its operations to Queensland.¹¹⁸ By mid-1915, when negotiations with the AWU were scheduled to begin, these threats no longer existed: a Labor government, pledged to repeal restrictions on unionism, was in power in Queensland; and the AMIEU, through its strong bargaining position in the meat export industry, had secured favourable conditions from the American company, bypassing the industrial court.

Although the failure of the proposed AMIEU-AWU merger practically ended the AWU amalgamation drive, the idea of one big union remained. It was enshrined in the AWU constitution; it revived during and immediately after the first world war. Meantime, too, the amalgamation movement and the creation of more interstate federations had ensured the final demise of the ALF. Ever since the debacle of the general strike the ALF had had only a tenuous existence: in its moribund condition it failed even to incite enough interest among labour in a proposed third trade union congress in 1913.¹¹⁹ The ALF had ceased to be the representative body of Queensland unionism. Its inefficacy was particularly recognised in North Queensland. Theodore expressed a widely-held opinion when he declared early in 1913 that the ALF:

118 At the 1914 conference, Crampton urged amalgamation specifically because of the union-smashing activities of the Meat Trust in Chicago. Other delegates concurred with the need to escape "the capacious maw of the Yankee meat monopoly"; a Townsville meatworker declared: "Realising the danger from the Meat Trust, there was nothing else for it but amalgamation", *Official Report of the Third Annual State Conference of the AMIEU*, pp.34-36, 42.

119 ALF executive committee minutes, 21 July 1913.

. . . had outlived its usefulness so far as the country unions were concerned. For some time it had been nothing but a body controlling the *Worker* and working only with one organiser. There would of course, still be a necessity for some such body in order that metropolitan Unions might have some relationship, but that necessity no longer applied to country organisations.¹²⁰

When the ALF raised its affiliation fees, all unions except the AMIEU and the AWU withdrew from membership; and when the AWU proposed a scheme to take over the *Worker*, the ALF had neither function nor future. It was disbanded on 16 January 1914:

This marked the absorption of a diminished ALF by the AWU and the end of a long struggle to create a trade union federation with a structure loose enough to permit craft union autonomy, and at the same time sufficiently tight to make effective co-ordinated action possible.¹²¹

Thereafter, efforts towards the closer unity of North Queensland trade unions centred on the mass unionism of the AWU or on industrial unionism as promoted by the QRU and AMIEU.

The events of 1912 also encouraged the trend of Queensland unionism towards the support of Labor in politics. Some craft unions - mainly in Brisbane - withdrew into their traditional apolitical insularity; there was also a certain amount of radical dissent with Labor reformism - again mainly centred in Brisbane.¹²² But the general feeling among unionists was that the direct

120 *Official Report of the Second Annual Conference of the AWA*, p.44.

121 Sullivan, *The A.L.F.*, p.269.

122 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p.113, writes scathingly of the "slavish adulation of Labour politicians, that was such a pitiable feature in 1912". Cf. V. Daddow, *The Puffing Pioneers and Queensland's Railway Builders* (St Lucia, 1975), p.115; and G. Brown, *My Descent from Soapbox to Senate* (Brisbane, 1954), p.129.

representation of labour in parliament was now more important than ever before. The *Worker* expressed this feeling thus:

Whatever may be the future basis of society, the law of Parliament so completely permeates the present basis and modifies the present basis, that if the working class would bring about fundamental changes it is not easy to conceive how they are going to do it without getting control of Parliamentary Law.¹²³

Consequently, many of those unions which had not yet affiliated with the CPE did so in the aftermath of the strike and the introduction of the *Industrial Peace Act*.¹²⁴ Labor supporters were disappointed by the April 1912 election results, but they were consoled by the significant gains in Brisbane. In September 1912 Ryan took over the leadership of the PLP and, with Theodore as deputy leader, the party acquired a more positive and electorally-appealing image.

The AWU continued the AWA tradition of zealous political involvement, influenced and aided by AWU officials like McCormack and Theodore who also held respected positions in the PLP. The AWU influence on the political wing of the movement was confirmed at the Labor-in-Politics convention in February 1915: union representation on the CPE, previously two delegates from the ALF and three from the AWU was changed to five delegates elected by the Queensland branch of the new AWU. In North Queensland, AWU domination of local Labor organisation was evident: the convention noted that in six northern electorates the registered party head centres were AWU branches.¹²⁵

¹²³ *Worker*, 6 February 1913.

¹²⁴ North Queensland union branches included the Cairns and Mackay WWF, and the Townsville QRU. Cairns branch WWF minutes, 14 July 1912; Mackay branch WWF minutes, 11 August 1912; CPE minutes, 17 July 1914.

¹²⁵ *Official Record of the Seventh State Labour-in-Politics Convention*, Brisbane, February 1913 (Brisbane 1913), pp. 7, 18.

However, as in the period before 1912, emphasis on political involvement did not signify any attenuation of industrial activity on the part of North Queensland labour. The importance attached to the amalgamation movement and the promotion of industrial unionism shows that the general strike did not turn trade unions from industrial action. Between 1912 and 1914 there were no strikes as widespread as those of 1911 and 1912, but, in North Queensland, notwithstanding the *Industrial Peace Act*, a number of major and serious strikes occurred in the mining, sugar, railway construction and building industries.¹²⁶ The general strike was not followed by a decline in North Queensland industrial militancy.

The strikes of 1911 and 1912 made North Queensland unionists more determined than ever to secure what they saw as the complementary aims of industrial strength and political power. Some sections of the labour movement regarded the creation of strong unions, whether by the means of amalgamation or industrial unionism, as the paramount concern; others agreed with the *Worker* that "the final issues will have to be decided by political action".¹²⁷ But the great majority of unionists were as united in their commitment to Labor politics as they were to the development of a vigorous and powerful trade union movement. The means of attaining labour goals were equally inseparable: industrial action in itself, and the political success of a party which was committed to legislate both for the removal of restrictions on unions and for the improvement of working conditions.

126 Northern strikes involved Townsville and Cairns carpenters in January 1913; Cloncurry railway navvies in February 1913; miners and general workers at Hampden and Mt Elliott in June-July 1913 and at Ravenswood in July-August 1913; Mulgrave sugar mill workers in October 1913; Charters Towers railway navvies in March 1914; railway workers throughout North Queensland in July-August 1914 (see Ch. VII).

127 *Worker*, 29 January 1914.

CHAPTER VII

THE IMPACT OF WAR, 1914-1916

Labour in 1914

In the decade 1904-1914 the North Queensland labour movement had progressed from a position of disintegration and industrial impotence to one of consolidation and relative industrial vigour. Politically, labour was united in a close commitment to a rejuvenated and increasingly popular Labor Party. Industrially, the movement was strengthened by trade union growth and intelligent leadership. Of course, serious grievances and disabilities persisted: inadequate wages and working conditions; seasonal unemployment; imperfect unionisation; restrictive legislation and an unsympathetic state government. Unionist dissatisfaction with these conditions was reflected in various local strikes in the North - direct action taken in spite of anti-strike laws and, on one occasion at least, contrary even to union executive instructions. Nevertheless, the prevailing mood was a kind of resolute optimism, for it was felt that the advent of a Labor government in Queensland, in conjunction with improved union organisation, would substantially redress social and economic grievances.

The state of the economy during at least the first six months of 1914 provided some grounds for labour hopes of improved working and living conditions. Although still restricted in many respects, the economy of North Queensland was expanding, even prospering. Regional population grew steadily after a period of relative stagnation in the inter-censal decade 1901-1911.¹ The sugar industry flourished, despite the strike-disrupted 1911 harvest, drought in 1912, and loud complaints about cane prices and labour costs. 1913 saw a record sugar harvest, especially in the more recently cultivated districts north of Townsville which had the

1 'Ninth Census of Queensland', *QPP* 1902, II, pp.953-954; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911*, I, p.430; *Vital Statistics for the State of Queensland, 1916 to 1918* (Brisbane, 1919), p.v. See Appendix I, Regional Population, 1901-1921.

largest increase in both cane harvested and sugar yielded. These conditions also applied in 1914 when, notwithstanding a light harvest in Proserpine, Mackay, Bundaberg and Childers, the season further north was "remarkably good".² The pastoral industry and the related meat export industry were thriving, leading to the considerable expansion of both Townsville meatworks in 1913 and 1914.³ The building industry, which usually provided a fair indication of the overall state of the economy, was buoyant, the demand for skilled craftsmen greatly exceeding supply.⁴ The mining industry, however, was in decline, thus casting a faint shadow of gloom over northern prosperity generally. The gold supply dwindled steadily, while industrial disputes and low metal prices forced the closure of mines and smelters at Cloncurry and Chillagoe early in 1914. Ironically, the good conditions in other industries contributed to the mining recession, for as the Under-Secretary for Mines reasoned:

A succession of good reasons has created opportunities in other directions that appear to be especially attractive to capital, and whilst these conditions subsist any general and pronounced revival of interest in mining can hardly be expected.⁵

The level of unemployment reflected the generally improved economic conditions. Estimated unemployment among Queensland trade unionists in the second quarter of 1914 was 4.3%, the lowest figure so far recorded. These admittedly imperfect estimates⁶ masked the

2 *QPP* 1915-1916, II, p.681; *ibid.*, 1914, II, p.657.

3 *Ibid.*, 1914, III, p.43; *Worker*, 19 March 1914.

4 *Labour Bulletin*, 1 (January-March 1913), 6 (April-June 1914).

5 *QPP* 1914, III, p.671. Cf. the Chillagoe mining warden's comment that the fall in production in 1914 "was not due to the want of metal and mineral but the money to produce it". *Ibid.*, 1915-1916, III, p.1415.

6 *Labour Report*, 5 (1914), p.15. Unemployment figures in these Reports were compiled merely from the estimates supplied by trade unions. Since not all workers were unionists and not all trade unions bothered to reply to the Bureau of Census and Statistics, the figures can indicate only a general trend.

full extent of unemployment in the North, which was exacerbated in 1914 by the mining recession in the west and the far north; hundreds of workers were thus forced to move on to the coastal areas.⁷

Notwithstanding seasonal unemployment, however, the situation had improved greatly since the early years of the century - to such an extent that trade union leaders no longer considered unemployment to be the problem it had previously been. Certainly it was still a matter of agitation; the state government's assisted immigration scheme was particularly condemned. But labour was now most concerned with the perennial issues of wages and working conditions, as well as with the goals of improved unity, increased membership, the election of a Labor government and the removal of restrictive industrial legislation.

One probable indication of augmented union strength in 1914 was that the *Industrial Peace Act* of 1912 had not proved in practice as suppressive as originally feared. It certainly tended to discourage union organisation and to curb industrial militancy, but the stronger, established unions remained uncowed. At the annual state AWU conference in January 1914, Theodore, as president, reported that despite the unsatisfactory legal situation, the union had been unsubdued - in fact, it had been fairly successful - in coping with the *Industrial Peace Act*.⁸ The AWU's first contact with the legislation occurred six months previously at Cloncurry, when miners and labourers employed by the Hampden and Mt Elliott companies refused to accept contract work. On 5 June 1913 the companies claimed a breach of agreement and suspended operations, putting over 1200 men out of work. This action was technically a lockout, supposedly forbidden by the Act, but the government and the industrial court were reluctant to invoke the penal provisions against the employers. Labor politicians swiftly labelled the Act a failure,⁹ and to the extent that it was intended to prevent both

7 *Worker*, 19 March 1914; *Labour Bulletin*, 5 (January-March 1914).

8 *Official Report of the First Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU Queensland Branch, Brisbane, January 1914* (Brisbane, 1914), pp.4-5.

9 McCormack, in *QPD CXIV* (1 July 1913), p.225, declared that the legislation had "...broken down in the first important industrial trouble that had occurred in Queensland since it was passed- absolutely broken down".

strikes and lockouts, the Act had indeed failed. The dispute was finally settled on the basis of compromise by Mr Justice Macnaughton of the industrial court.¹⁰ Another strike in 1913 by AWU members at Ravenswood was also settled by a compulsory conference under Macnaughton who conceded most of the employees' claims - "a complete victory for the AWU", boasted the *Worker*.¹¹ Many unionists consequently saw that some benefits could be gained even from the restrictive industrial legislation of their political opponents. With these experiences in mind Theodore noted that despite the intention of the *Industrial Peace Act* to deny legal recognition and protection to trade unions,

. . .the Queensland branch of the A.W.U. had been recognised by the officials administering the Act. In fact, the Act would have been absolutely unworkable if they had not abandoned the principle [of non-recognition].

. . .it was evident that the Government did not wish to enforce the penal clauses.¹²

The AWU's increasing - if still reluctant and even unadmitted - acceptance of the state industrial court was further apparent in June 1914 when Macnaughton delivered judgment in the sugar field workers' case. By substantially raising the wages of sugar workers, the award in effect aided the union's membership drive. One northern AWU organiser reported that:

10 The dispute was settled on 16 July 1913, the judge ordering that contract work not be made a condition of employment; that is, the union was not to forbid contract work, and the companies were not to victimise employees who refused it. *QGMJ*, 15 July 1913, 15 August 1913.

11 *Worker*, 17 July 1913; *QGG, CI*, 40 (9 August 1913).

12 *First Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q*, 1914, p.4.

. . . matters were never brighter in the Mulgrave and Hambleton areas. The recent award of J. Macnaughton has acted as a stimulus to those whom it was hitherto impossible to get into the ranks of the union.¹³

In concert with the Labor Party in Queensland, the AWU had always advocated an extensive and fair system of state conciliation and arbitration; in other states, AWU involvement with the federal arbitration court amounted to what Turner calls trade union "domestication" to the arbitration process.¹⁴ After 1913, the Queensland AWU's guarded acceptance of the limited and inadequate state arbitration machinery stemmed from practical experience of the state industrial court and a realistic appraisal of its possibilities. As Theodore said, "they could not carry out their work as an up-to-date union without coming into contact with the Industrial Peace Act".¹⁵ The legislation was still criticised and indeed roundly condemned as anti-unionist; the AWU deplored the limitation of the court's jurisdiction and the unnecessary procedural delays.¹⁶ But political rhetoric aside, such criticisms were aimed

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- 13 *Worker*, 6 August 1914. Sugar growers, on the other hand, condemned the award and threatened to plant only as much cane as they could harvest themselves. *Ibid.*, 25 June 1914; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 6 August 1914. For the award, see QGG, CII, 149 (18 June 1914).
- 14 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.40. Cf. Spence, *History of the AWU*, p.94: "The Australian Workers' Union. . . had been most active and persistent in fighting for compulsory arbitration".
- 15 *First Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1914*, p.6.
- 16 Under the *Industrial Peace Act*, Full-time trade union officials were unable to represent employees on the industrial boards or before the court: only workers actually employed in the appropriate occupation and locality were eligible. Although as Theodore remarked, this provision was modified by the court's *de facto* recognition of trade unions, it nevertheless remained a frustrating restriction. Further, the court covered only some occupations, and in these it usually had appellate jurisdiction only: it could act solely on appeal from an award of an industrial board. This caused much delay; the sugar field workers' award, delivered in June 1914, resulted from union and employer appeals against board awards delivered in November 1913 to January 1914.

at improving the system rather than abolishing it. The attitude of the AWU to the state industrial court at this time was consistent with that union's practical approach to all industrial questions: if some advantage, however small, could be gained for AWU members, then the court should be used. This did not exclude other forms of industrial action, but it could be expected that when a Labor government repealed the *Industrial Peace Act* and reformed the arbitration system in accordance largely with AWU wishes, the union would become more "domesticated".

On the other hand - again as a result of practical experience - some important trade unions remained at best wary of arbitration. The AMIEU, for example, was able to evade the *Industrial Peace Act* because of its exceptional organisation and strong bargaining position in the meat export industry. The meatworkers adhered instead to their established process of round-table conferences, which regularly resulted in improved wages and conditions. A portent of trouble in the future, however, was that the AMIEU's success in collective bargaining firmly committed a large section of the union - especially the northern district, which was better organised and in a very strong position in the meatworks - against any form of compulsory state arbitration whatsoever. The antipathy to arbitration was evident at the annual state conference of the AMIEU in January 1914 and contrasted markedly with the attitudes expressed at the AWU conference that same month; North Queensland meatworkers were among those most vehemently opposed to a Brisbane delegate's motion that the union seek a federal arbitration award for the whole industry in Australia. The northern district secretary stated that his region was definitely against such a move: "Smaller branches had rejected arbitration, Ross River almost unanimously. . . .He was convinced that the Export Trade would get nothing from the Arbitration Court". Other delegates feared that an approach to the arbitration court would lead to the loss of union preference and other privileges already won through direct bargaining. The

motion was swiftly rejected.¹⁷

The AMIEU's rejection of arbitration stemmed more from pragmatic than ideological grounds. Meatworkers simply believed that their existing hard-won collective bargaining system would give them better wages and working conditions than they could get from arbitration. This sense of practical expediency underlying AMIEU anti-arbitration sentiment, was to some extent reinforced by theoretical syndicalism (which saw arbitration as a fetter on industrial strength and as a weapon of state coercion), thereby strengthening the union's commitment to direct action. But it remained as true of the AMIEU as it did of the AWU that the one's rejection of arbitration and the other's acquiescence in it were related most of all to a practical appraisal of the likely material benefits that would accrue to unionists.

The same could equally be said of other North Queensland unions and indeed of trade unionism generally. Thus for northern waterside workers, arbitration brought some welcome advantages but it also threatened to circumscribe local branch autonomy. In October 1913 a WWF national delegate conference resolved to seek a federal award. The award, delivered the following year, provided substantial wage rises and an eight hour day, but the customs of many individual ports were sacrificed in the interests of uniformity. As well, Mr Justice Higgins stipulated that the union amend its constitution to give the federal council more authority over member branches; the WWF council accordingly instructed its branches that in any dispute relating to interpretation of the award, "no cessation of work must in any event take place". In common with much larger branches such as Sydney, the North Queensland branches resented

17 *Third Annual State Conference of the AMIEU, 1914*, p.4. Replying to praise of the union's progress in the North, the northern district secretary said: "As long as they kept to the present policy [i.e. direct bargaining] they were safe, but as soon as they broke with that they could expect retrogression". *Ibid.*, p.17. At this stage the retail branch of the meat industry was already covered by state industrial boards.

this interference with their independence, the Mackay wharfies asking indignantly: "Are the Council selling us?"¹⁸ It took a visit by the federal secretary, Joe Morris, to mollify some branches, but the required constitutional amendments were eventually ratified.¹⁹ What the incident illustrated once again was the often ambivalent attitude of northern unionists to southern authority: the local WWF branches sought and appreciated the security of national federation, but were unwilling to cede the power necessary for a national policy to the union's head office. They wanted the benefits of a federal arbitration award but chafed under the award's tampering with local customs and branch autonomy.

The Townsville Rail Strike of 1914

Until 1917 one section of North Queensland labour was unable to seek the jurisdiction of arbitration courts even had it so wished. Railway workers (and all other state government employees) were specifically excluded not only from the federal arbitration court but also from the state industrial court. In the two years preceding the election of a Labor state government in May 1915 northern railwaymen were very dissatisfied. They especially resented the fact that while wages and working conditions had generally improved in recent years, those in the railway service lagged behind. Trade unionism among railway workers thus grew stronger and more militant. AWU navvies conducted an intermittent battle with the government, seeking wage increases;²⁰ the all-grades QRU steadily increased its membership;²¹ skilled craft unions

18 WWF Federal Council minutes, 4 May 1914, 26 June 1914. This incident is related also by Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.40. Cf. Healy, *Brief History*, pp.25-26.

19 WWF Mackay branch minutes, 14 July 1914; WWF Cairns branch minutes, 22 July 1914, 20 September 1914.

20 AWU Queensland branch executive minutes, 2 July 1913 [M50/3(b), RSSS-ANUA]. *Labour Bulletin*, 2, (April-June 1913); 5, (January-March 1914).

21 Moroney, in *Railway Advocate*, June 1966.

also improved their organisation. Industrial dissatisfaction intensified. By July 1914 the railway department was, according to Tom Foley, Labor MLA for Mundingburra, "a seething mass of discontent".²²

In Townsville, this discontent was channelled into direct action chiefly through the efforts of R.J. Carroll, who in 1913 was appointed first as a temporary ASE organiser in North Queensland, then as permanent organiser for the whole state. The union's historian writes that Carroll was "a first-class organiser and was militant in spirit; the radical atmosphere of trade unionism in northern Queensland suited him ideally".²³ Under his guidance the ASE recruited members widely in the foundries, engineering works, sugar mills, meatworks and the railways. Abandoning the traditional political and industrial isolation of the ASE, Carroll urged the union to seek closer links with the Labor Party and, more essentially, with other trade unions. He advocated:

a policy of reciprocity and friendship towards other industrial bodies, from whom we have, in my opinion, too long held aloof, occupying a position of splendid isolation, which is likely to operate to our society's detriment.²⁴

Carroll's organising ability and militant attitude presaged a change in the character of engineering unionism in the North. Since August 1912 the skilled employees of the Townsville railway workshops had requested wages equal to those paid by private firms in the district; their methods were the time-honoured and respectable ones of petition and deputation. This was to no avail, however: the

22 QPD CXVII (29 July 1914), p.1230.

23 Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.204. Robert Joseph Carroll (1876-1940), born Dublin, arrived Brisbane 1882; marine and railway engineer; Townsville railway workshops 1912; Queensland organiser ASE/AEU 1913-1934; ALP state organiser 1934-1936; secretary QCE 1936-1940. See also T. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants: the Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972* (Cambridge, 1975), pp.56-57, 204.

24 Buckley, *op.cit.*, p.204.

department simply refused, stating that the lower wages were more than offset by the benefits of secure employment, free rail passes and other privileges enjoyed by railway workers. Frustrated by railway department intransigence, and encouraged by Carroll and a few other militants, in July 1914 ASE railwaymen throughout North Queensland voted overwhelmingly to strike if their case was not immediately heard sympathetically.²⁵ Upon receiving yet another unsatisfactory reply from the department, on 27 July over one hundred fitters, turners, boilermakers and blacksmiths went on strike in Townsville. On 1 August they were joined by other skilled and unskilled workers in the traffic and locomotive branches of the northern railways. The entire railway system north of Mackay swiftly ground to a halt.²⁶

The Townsville rail strike of 1914 involved about five hundred employees, mostly members of the ASE and the QRU but also including members of other unions such as the guards', engine-drivers', boilermakers' and ironworkers' assistants. The main complaint of all was the disparity between their own rates of pay and those in outside industry. Railway rates for engineering mechanics were 11/9 per day, for carpenters 11/3, and for unskilled workers 8/6; local authorities and private firms paid 14/-, 15/- and 11/- per day respectively.²⁷ Perhaps a more fundamental reason for the strike was the railway

25 R.J. Carroll to J. McCallum, secretary ASE Australasian Council, Melbourne, 23 July 1914. [E220/16, RSSS-ANUA].

26 Carroll to J. Rickart, ASE delegate, Rockhampton, 3 August 1914, *ibid.*; *Daily Standard*, 27 July 1914; item 7736/1914, Pre/A468, QSA.

27 Leaflet to "the general public", issued by the combined strike committee, Townsville, 6 August 1914. [E220/16, RSSS-ANUA].
Pay disparity is a source of endemic conflict in railway departments. See J. Rickard and L. Benham, 'Masters and Servants: the Victorian Railway Strike of 1903', and M. Cribb, 'State in Emergency: the Queensland Railway Strike of 1948', in Iremonger *et al.* (eds), *Strikes*; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.13; J.C. Docherty, *The Rise of Railway Unionism: a study of New South Wales and Victoria 1880-1905*, M.A. thesis, ANU, 1973.

workers' resentment of the cavalier fashion in which their claims had been treated.

The strike was confined to the North of the state, in particular to Townsville itself, because of three closely related factors. First, although industrial discontent was shared by railway workers throughout the state, once the strike began those in the Centre and South adopted a policy of "wait-and-see" - a course of action which seemed both easier and more expedient because of the physical separation of Queensland's railway systems. Second, geographical isolation and a sense of regional identification exacerbated a feeling in the North that negligence and ignorance on the part of the authorities in the capital city were more pronounced and that railway workers were in fact worse off than their southern colleagues. Third, railway union officials in the North were at this time more prone to direct action than their southern counterparts. In North Queensland, trade unionism generally was more widespread and more united than in the South. Largely through the activities of the AWA it had already acquired some public notoriety for militancy. Railway unionists in the North seemed more conscious of their relatively static wages and working conditions while militant trade unions such as the AWA and AMIEU appeared to be winning concessions steadily from employers.²⁸

The divergent attitude of northern and southern railway unionists was evident in the two main unions involved in the Townsville rail strike - the QRU and the ASE. Carroll had a difficult task gaining support for the strike from his more cautious and conservative ASE colleagues elsewhere in Queensland and in Melbourne. He succeeded only by a mixture of patient argument, apparent deference to the views of the ASE Australasian Council, and rhetorical righteousness (surely no unionist worthy of the name could fail to support such a just cause!).²⁹ On the other hand, the QRU was unable to restrain

28 Cf. Carroll to J.A. Fihelly, secretary PLP, 23 July 1914.

29 Carroll to Peter Watson, ASE, Brisbane, 23 July 1914, to Rickart, 3 August 1914, and to McCallum, 10 August 1914.

the sectional action of its Townsville branch. A special meeting of the QRU executive took the technically correct, but in this case unrealistic, view that the Townsville stoppage was unconstitutional: it called on the branch not to take any part in the strike, and warned that "in the event of this resolution not being complied with, the council will take drastic action with the Townsville branch".³⁰

Considering both the nature of regional unionism in Townsville and the tense strike situation, the QRU order was unreasonable. The local QRU and ASE leaders had co-operated extensively in the preparation and negotiations before the strike; QRU men were pledged to support the ASE struggle. In response to the state council's threat of "drastic action", most Townsville members of the union reacted by disowning the QRU: they formed a new all-grades union, the Amalgamated Railway Union. But the Cairns, Charters Towers and Mackay branches remained loyal to the QRU council. Until the Townsville secessionists returned to the fold two years later, much of the energy that could have been channelled into promoting industrial unionism among railway workers was devoted to "slang-wanging"³¹ between the two organisations.

The strike was broken, but not solely by internal union conflict nor indeed by the state government, the latter stating only that the issue of wage rises would be considered in the usual way when the estimates for the budget were prepared. The strikebreaker was the outbreak of the first world war on 4 August 1914. Patriotic appeals to the railwaymen to keep the wheels of industry turning in a time of supposed national and imperial peril had the desired effect. Public

30 *Daily Standard*, 30 July 1914. The state council had not given approval for the Townsville strike; they argued also that rule 49 of the QRU forbade participation in "any industrial disturbance" unless such action was endorsed by a special conference or by a two-thirds majority of total union membership.

31 Moroney, *Railway Advocate*, July 1966. Cf. Daddow, *Puffing Pioneers*, p.123: "Indicative of the flimsy union ties stretching across the considerable distance from the north to the south, the QRU members in Townsville, peeved at being reproved by their State Council, . . . broke away in a huff and sulkily set up a second all-grade union".

opinion swung more decisively against strikers and many returned to work. After an unsuccessful attempt by the strike committee and Labor parliamentarians Theodore, Fihelly and Foley to persuade the government to submit the dispute to arbitration,³² all remaining strikers, except the ASE workshop employees, voted on 9 August to resume work. An implacable railway department, however, refused to re-employ the more active unionists. The ASE accordingly held out for guarantees against victimisation and the loss of accrued privileges - despite their national council's recommendation that they settle the dispute in view of "the Empire Crisis". A month later, they were still on strike. Carroll complained that they had "made every sacrifice possible short of absolute surrender and complete humiliation, which will surely mean victimisation".³³ Effective guarantees were secured within another month, but the strike had long since fizzled out - a clear failure.³⁴ It left a legacy of unresolved bitterness in the northern section of the railways, which was the scene of another serious industrial conflagration in 1917.

The Outbreak of War

The war in Europe had broken the Townsville rail strike, and indeed in the next twelve to eighteen months patriotic fervour subdued union militancy in North Queensland as it did throughout Australia. The Australian people entered the war in an almost unanimous spirit of enthusiasm and sympathy towards Britain. In the midst of an election campaign following a double dissolution, the federal Labor and Liberal parties vied to surpass each other in

32 PLP minutes, 4 August 1914.

33 Carroll to McCallum, 11 August 1914, and to Fihelly, 14 September 1914; PLP minutes, 15 September 1914.

34 Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.224, records that Carroll's only consolation was that the ASE had "for a long time past . . . been regarded by both employers and employees as a non-militant trade union and treated accordingly".

protestations of commitment to the war and to the "old country". Australian labour leaders, like those in the belligerent European countries, were overwhelmed by the war: nationalism took precedence over socialism.³⁵ Some dissented from the more extreme jingoism but these were more apprehensive about the effects of the war than opposed to the war itself; they agreed that Australia should participate in the war now that it had begun, and that it must be won. There were fears in the labour movement, however, that workers would be the chief sufferers; that the economic burdens of war would fall most heavily on the working class. However much they supported the war, many unionists were determined that this should not happen.

Direct opposition to the war itself came from the radical and pacifist left, which urged workers not to fight in a capitalist war. But these insubstantial socialist sects "were pretty much insulated by their dogmas from the mass labour organisations";³⁶ they had no formal following at all in North Queensland. Nevertheless, a few were influenced by similar socialistic sentiments. The editor of the *Townsville Federal* stated, a little wearily, that:

After William May kills his brother Wilhelm in the war, he will get no better food and shelter than he did before. He will return to the old system of wage-slavery with the prospect of a future war for his master's amusement and profit. As long as the wage system lasts William will be a slave.³⁷

And a striking *Townsville* railway worker asked plaintively:

35 Federal Labor leader Andrew Fisher made his memorable "last man and last shilling" pledge even before the actual declaration of war. Sawyer, *Federal Politics and Law*, p.129. Cf. G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, *The Common People 1746-1946* (London, 1946), pp.504-508; H. Grebing, *The History of the German Labour Movement* (London, 1969), pp.92-93.

36 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.69.

37 *Federal*, 24 October 1914.

What excuse has this government got for refusing these men's requests? . . . It's not our fault that there is a war. There was never a war in this world unless the capitalist required it. . . . Never was there such a thing as a battalion of capitalists on a battlefield. It's the poor man who has to defend your hearths and homes; he has none, nay, you begrudge him food enough to live on; yet would ask him to be patriotic?³⁸

These sentiments - for the moment signifying apprehension and suspicion of the war rather than active opposition to it - nevertheless developed by late 1916 into an increasingly bitter and vocal anti-war feeling. The unanimity of the national response was then replaced by division and dissension. But in August 1914 few thought that the war would last longer than a few months; in any case, recruitment was voluntary, and trade unionists flocked to the colours. The few voices raised in warning or dissent went unheeded in the popular chauvinistic clamour. In the name of patriotism and anti-Germanism Townsville waterside workers and city council quarrymen, Ross River meatworkers and Cairns waterside workers refused to work with "enemies of the Empire"³⁹ - a term which included people of German or Austrian antecedence whether naturalised or not. Many workers condemned these actions, but there is little doubt that many also shared the views of the prominent Townsville Labor and union spokesmen, Anthony Ogden, who declared that "the interests of the trade unionists were wrapped up in the interests of the Empire".⁴⁰ Ogden played a leading role

38 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 August 1914.

39 *Ibid.*, 21 October 1914, 15 May 1915, 12 June 1916. The Cairns WWF initially rejected a move to forbid union membership to "the King's enemies", stating that it was a contemptible personal grievance against a particular union member. But this decision was later modified by a resolution not to admit any *new* members of the "enemy" nationality. WWF Cairns branch minutes, 23 December 1914, 11 July 1915. Trade unionists throughout Australia took similar chauvinist action. I. Turner, '1914-1919' in Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, pp.314-315.

40 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 24 August 1915. Anthony Ogden (1886-1943), born England; arrived Queensland 1884, worked Townsville foundry, waterside; MLA Townsville 1894-1896: secretary northern district AMIEU 1914-1925; secretary Townsville WWF 1911, 1926-1933; Alderman city council, mayor 1924-1927.

on recruiting committees, and led a vituperative campaign against the appointment of an eminent, German-born specialist in tropical diseases to the Townsville hospital.⁴¹

Fears of economic difficulties following the outbreak of war were quickly realised. The Australian economy depended on overseas markets for the sale of primary products, imports of manufactured goods, and overseas capital investment. With its regional economy based almost solely on primary industry, North Queensland was obviously even more dependent on outside influences. The war interrupted overseas trade and therefore dislocated Australian industry. Estimated unemployment among Australian trade unionists consequently rose sharply from 5.7% in June 1914 to 10.7% in September; in Queensland the rise was from 4.3% to 14.3%.⁴² Higher import prices (because of rising shipping costs and overseas prices), a drought in the summer of 1914-15, and federal government expansion of the note issue (to finance war preparations), all contributed to a sharp rise in the cost of living. In 1915 prices in Australia rose by 12%. Although Queensland remained one of the cheapest states in which to live, it recorded a cost of living increase of 16.5% in 1915.⁴³ Rising prices naturally meant a reduction in real wages, especially since many wage-fixing tribunals accepted wage restraint

41 M. Douman, *Townsville 1914-1919: a study of group attitudes and behaviour*, B.A. Hons. thesis, University College of Townsville, 1969, pp.20-22. The doctor, Anton Breinl, was born in Bohemia, had studied and worked at the Tropical Disease Research Institute at Liverpool, and was brought to Australia by the federal government as director of the Tropical Health Institute at Townsville. He was naturalised in May 1914. In February 1916, upon the resignation of the hospital surgeon, Breinl offered his services - which were accepted - to fill the vacancy.

42 *Labour Report*, 5 (1914), p.15.

43 *CYB*, 12, 1918, p.1155. Between July 1914 and June 1919 retail prices in Australia increased by 47%. In Queensland the rise was by 60%; *ibid.*, p.1159. Cf. A.G.L. Shaw, *The Economic Development of Australia* (6th edition, Melbourne, 1973), pp.130-131; E. Scott, *Australia during the War* (Sydney, 1936), pp.503, 635. [vol. XI of C.E.W. Bean (ed.), *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*].

as a patriotic dictum. Accordingly, as unemployment spread and prices soared, many trade unionists began to feel justified in their fear that they would bear a disproportionate share of the burden of war.⁴⁴

In North Queensland, war and drought led to economic chaos in the six months following August 1914. The northern metal mining industry, which had declined steadily because of low prices during the year, ground to a complete halt. Australian base metal mining operations were tied closely to the German market before the war; upon the outbreak of hostilities this market was closed, throwing the entire industry into confusion.⁴⁵ The meat industry was affected both by the drought, which decreased the supply of stock, and by the war, which closed markets and made shipping scarce. Many northern meatworkers found themselves out of work, though the problem of markets was solved when the British government later contracted to buy the whole supply of available meat for the duration of the war. In the meantime the meat companies coped by raising the domestic price of meat considerably.⁴⁶ Although the sugar industry was in the middle of a good harvest, it too was temporarily dislocated by the war. Price control boards in New South Wales and Victoria held sugar prices down, while the cost of imported goods essential to the industry rose. Hundreds of unemployed miners, meatworkers and general labourers swelled the labour supply. Wharf labourers were out of work because of the dislocation of shipping. The building industry curtailed its operations; even some retail firms responded to the prevailing climate of economic uncertainty in North Queensland

44 Cf. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.76: "For 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 disbelief in the politicians' promises of equality of sacrifice and a spur to their agitation for a reduction in working hours and for the right to work".

45 *QPP* 1915-1916, III, p.1371; *CYB*, 10, 1916, p.459; Scott, *Australia during the War*, pp.563-564.

46 Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.95-96; *Worker*, 5 November 1914.

by retrenching staff.⁴⁷

As early as 25 August 1914 public meetings in Townsville had protested against rapid and exorbitant price rises, said to be caused more by local profiteering than by international circumstances. Throughout North Queensland, unemployed workers, trade unions and businessmen urged the state government to begin new railway construction in order to alleviate distress.⁴⁸ The Liberal Premier, however, in a statement which seemed both unrealistic and politically foolish, refused even to admit the existence of an exceptional unemployment problem. In contrast, the Labor Party attacked the government for indifference, and suggested the extension of public works programmes, stricter control of retail prices, and the granting of relief to miners and mining concerns to tide them over until the base metal market was reorganised.⁴⁹ Labor's political stocks thus rose, as it seemed the party most concerned with the welfare of the people, with practical schemes to alleviate the economic dislocation caused by the war.

The labour movement's response to the economic effects of the war was predominantly political. This was not accompanied by any atrophy of unionism; on the contrary, the close unity of industrial and political labour in Queensland was maintained. But it was realised that the provision of public works, price control and unemployment relief was a government, and therefore a political, responsibility. Moreover, a state election was due in May 1915, and the rejuvenated Labor Party confidently expected to win the reins of government. Queensland Labor's parliamentary hopes were encouraged significantly by the results of the 1913 and 1914 federal elections. Although the party lost the election of 31 May 1913 by the narrowest of margins, in Queensland Labor polled 54.77% of the total valid

47 *QPP* 1915-1916, II, p.681; *Worker*, 12 November 1914.

48 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 August 1914; *QPD* CXVII (26 August 1914), p.742.

49 *QPD* CXVIII (26 August 1914), p.736.

vote, winning seven of the ten House of Representatives seats. The "double dissolution" election held on 5 September 1914 resulted in a sweeping national victory to Labor, which in Queensland amounted to 55.65% of the vote for the House, and the spectacular figure of 57.37% for the Senate.⁵⁰ In the North, the sitting party members recorded the expected large majorities in both elections:

HERBERT		KENNEDY	
1913 Labor Bamford	16709 [58.04%]	McDonald	17745 [74.38%]
Liberal Mann	12081 [41.96%]	Edwards	6112 [25.62%]
1914 Labor Bamford	18700 [63.37%]	McDonald	Unopposed.
Liberal Fraser	10350 [35.63%]		

The Labor Party entered the 1915 Queensland election campaign united, confident and with policies which appealed to a broad section of the community. Facing it was a divided and demoralised Liberal government. Important groups such as sugar growers and public servants were disillusioned with government policies; there was also dissension within both Liberal parliamentary ranks and the extra-parliamentary organisations. All this, combined with war-induced inflation and widespread unemployment, gave the impression of an incompetent administration led by a weak and vacillating Premier.⁵¹ In a well organised and carefully orchestrated campaign, Labor seized the issue of high food prices, charged the government with "callous indifference to the welfare of the people",⁵² and put

50 In 1913 the Liberal Party won 38 seats to Labor's 37, yet did not gain control of the Senate. A double dissolution was subsequently granted in June 1914. The election saw Labor win 42 seats to the Liberals' 32; and 31 of the 36 senate seats. Sawyer, *Federal Politics and Law*, pp.121-129; Hughes and Graham, *Australian Government and Politics*, pp.306-310, 312-313.

51 Cf. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, ch.4; Perry, *Memoirs of Sir Robert Philp*, p.334; Bernays, *Queensland Politics*, pp.182-183; Bertei, *Non-Labour Politics*, ch.1, describes the disaffection of northern sugar farmers with the Denham government.

52 *Worker*, 29 March 1915. Labor candidates habitually referred to the Liberal Party as the "Dear Food and Low-Wage Party". e.g., *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 April 1915, 8 April 1915.

forward a comprehensive scheme of ameliorative social and economic reform. Labor promised price control, the restoration of the automatic annual increases in public servants' wages (which the government had suspended as a wartime austerity measure), a new deal in industrial legislation to replace the existing antiquated measures, and increased spending on public works and education. Primary producers were promised the establishment of a state export agency, government-sponsored co-operative marketing schemes, and the extension of the state central sugar mill system and cane prices boards to ensure a fair price to sugar farmers. To counteract the "evil of private monopoly" and to reduce consumer prices, Labor planned various state enterprises, including ore batteries, coal mines, sawmills, agricultural machinery works, a shipping line, granaries, abattoirs and a state sugar refinery.⁵³

The election of 22 May 1915 resulted in a substantial swing to Labor, which won 52.06% of the vote and forty-five of the seventy-two parliamentary seats. Six of the eight Liberal ministers, including the Premier, Denham, lost their seats. In North Queensland, Labor retained its hold on Cairns, Chillagoe, Eacham, Flinders, Herbert, Kennedy, Mundingburra, and Queenton, and picked up the seats of Bowen, Charters Towers, Cook, Mackay and Townsville - "the Gibraltar of Toryism".⁵⁴ Only Burke, held by an independent, and Mirani, held by a Liberal, eluded Labor's grasp in the North.

53 *Worker*, 29 March 1915.

54 So called by the successful Labor candidate Dan Ryan, Townsville merited the label because it had been held by the arch-conservative Robert Philp since 1888. Douman, Townsville 1914-1919, p.10.

TABLE I⁵⁵

LABOR VOTE IN NORTH QUEENSLAND ELECTORATES, 1915

I. Coastal Seats		II. Hinterland/Western Seats	
Bowen	57.48%	Burke	48.22%
Cairns	70.38%	Charters Towers	58.25%
Herbert	64.56%	Chillagoe	79.70%
Mackay	54.42%	Cook	53.91%
Mirani	43.75%	Eacham	66.53%
Mundingburra	70.16%	Flinders	Labor unopposed
Townsville	52.33%	Kennedy	67.83%
		Queenton	70.16%

The Labor victory was due partly to the prevailing economic conditions, partly to the divisions in the Liberal Party, and probably also to the almost charismatic image of Ryan, the capable and intelligent Labor leader. Most importantly, Labor in Queensland in 1915 was a resolute, strong and united party, with reasonable, positive and electorally attractive policies which were presented as enticing electoral promises. As the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* sardonically remarked:

Labor has promised higher wages, cheaper food, shorter hours, greater happiness. They have three years to hand us the millenium.⁵⁶

The *Bowen Independent*, on the other hand, had a more sanguine view of Labor's win. After remarking that it was no surprise that the local electorate returned a Labor member, given the treatment of Bowen by Liberal governments in the past, the paper continued:

55 Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.99-105.

56 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, editorial, 29 May 1915.

We do not fear the result of a trial of the Labour Government, and quite agree with one of our most conservative friends, who in speaking of the recent elections remarked that "it was the best thing that ever happened to Bowen".⁵⁷

The labour movement's reaction to the election was predictable, and was best summed up by the *Worker's* single-word editorial headline: "JUBILATE".⁵⁸ Notwithstanding that Labor had finally achieved office in Queensland by winning votes of electors outside the working class, in a very real sense the victory belonged to the trade unions. It was the revival of unionism in the previous decade which had laid the organisational and inspirational base for the resurgence of Labor in politics. Under the guidance of men like Theodore and McCormack, strong and zealously political unions, especially the AWU, had been responsible for North Queensland's becoming a conspicuously safe Labor stronghold. Indeed, in many northern and western electorates, the successful candidates were virtual nominees of the local AWU organisation. Active unionists were heavily represented in the PLP, and the party's espousal of far-reaching and detailed industrial reforms symbolised the close concord between political and industrial labour. With the removal of the "most conservative of capitalistic rule" in Australia,⁵⁹ many felt that Labor would usher in "the golden age of Queensland workers".⁶⁰ The Labor Party now held office in the Commonwealth and in five of the six state governments. Amid the elation, idealism and emotion of May 1915, Ryan sounded a note of caution. Now that Labor had won,

57 *Bowen Independent*, 8 June 1915.

58 *Worker*, 27 May 1915.

59 Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, p.269.

60 J. Larcombe, *Notes on the political history of the Labor movement in Queensland* (Brisbane, 1934), p.49. Davis, in *MIJQ*, May 1943, says that "the workers were enthusiastic in their belief that a state Labor Government would be the means of establishing in the near future a social order in which they as workers would be masters of their future destiny".

he said, many would expect the moon; 'however, I am afraid they will have to be content with a few moonbeams"⁶¹.

Labor in Power

Ryan's "moonbeams" nevertheless comprised a substantial body of industrial, economic and social reform, which was not only enthusiastically welcomed by the labour movement, but also appreciated by many small farmers and indeed by most Queensland electors. Rejecting the conservative plea that contentious legislation be shelved during the war, the Labor government⁶² lost no time in effecting its policy promises. Steps were immediately taken to fix prices by proclamation, to regulate the marketing of essential goods such as wheat, flour and butter, and to ensure the continued operation of the two industries most important to the economy of North Queensland - meat and sugar.

Shortly after the outbreak of war, the British government had indicated its intension of purchasing for its troops the entire Australian meat export supply, the bulk of which was produced in Queensland. To facilitate this, the Denham government had passed the *Meat Supply for Imperial Uses Act*, under which it commandeered all available meat at an agreed price on behalf of the British government.⁶³ This export trade, and the severe drought, reduced the supply of meat in Queensland; local meat prices consequently

61 M.G. Birrell, T.J. Ryan and the Queensland Labour Party, B.A. Hons. thesis, Queensland, 1951, p.38.

62 The government comprised: Ryan (PLP leader), Premier, Chief Secretary and Attorney-General; Theodore (deputy leader), Treasurer and Secretary for Public Works; Bowman, Home Secretary; Lennon, Secretary for Agriculture and Stock; Hunter, Secretary for Public Lands; Adamson, Secretary for Railways; Hardacre, Secretary for Public Instruction; Hamilton (appointed to the Legislative Council), Secretary for Mines. Fihelly and Huxham were appointed ministers without portfolio. PLP minutes, 31 May 1915; Hughes and Graham, *Australian Government and Politics*, p.177.

63 5 Geo. V 2, *QGG*, CIII, 58 (12 August 1914); *QPD* CXVIII (11 August 1914), p.579.

rose. Pastoralists also sent cattle across the border to be killed, taking advantage of the higher price paid in New South Wales for beef exported to Britain. Blaming both this practice and the drought, the meat companies threatened to cease slaughtering operations in Queensland if the state export price were not increased; in fact when Labor took office some meatworks had already closed. The Labor Party, trade unions and the general public were all concerned about the scarcity and high price of meat as well as increased unemployment among meatworkers. The government was anxious to secure a guaranteed supply of meat to the Allied armies in Europe, but it was disturbed by evidence that the American-owned meat companies were deliberately raising the price of cattle in order to force a higher sale price of both local and export meat.⁶⁴

To deal with these problems in the meat industry the Ryan government first placed an embargo on the disposal of live cattle and sheep outside the state in order to enable an accurate count of marketable stock and to prevent stockowners from sending cattle to southern markets. Second, the Meatworks Bill, an ambitious piece of legislation which would give the government power to take control of the meatworks, was introduced into parliament in September 1915. Although Labor stressed that the proposed legislation was simply a response to wartime conditions and to a British request, and that the government would not interfere if the meatworks provided meat at fair prices, the conservative-dominated Legislative Council rejected the bill. Meanwhile, to discover the costs involved in marketing meat, and to provide cheaper meat for consumers, the government opened a state butcher's shop in Brisbane in November 1915. Its successful operation led to the establishment of a series of other state butchers' shops and state cattle stations in the following years.⁶⁵

64 *Worker*, 9 September 1915; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.96, 130.

65 D.J. Murphy, 'The Establishment of State Enterprises in Queensland, 1915-1918', *Labour History*, 14 (May 1968), pp.13-22.

Early in 1916 the meat supply agreement with Britain was re-negotiated. As the negotiating authority, the Queensland government secured a guaranteed meat supply for both the British government and the Queensland public in return for an increased export price to the meat companies. This solved the immediate problem of meat marketing, and during the war years the meat companies operated very profitably. Notwithstanding this profitability, the Ryan government achieved stability in the meat industry only against a continual background of litigation, political posturing and upper house obstruction, as the meat companies, pastoralists and their political representatives resisted every attempt by the state to assume even supervisory control over meat marketing in Queensland.⁶⁶

Labor also had to deal with dislocation in the sugar industry immediately upon taking office. A drought in early 1915 caused a severe fall in sugar production, and wartime price control boards in southern states fixed the wholesale selling price of refined sugar at a relatively low level. As a result, the price paid to the mills for raw sugar, and the price paid to farmers for cane, were also low.⁶⁷ The cost of production meanwhile increased substantially. To complete this picture of discontent in the sugar industry, North Queensland workers had responded to the election of the Labor government by renewing their agitation against the remaining coloured labour employed in the mills and fields.⁶⁸

Both the Commonwealth and Queensland Labor governments wanted to stabilise the sugar industry, curb the monopoly of the CSR, and ensure fair prices to producers and consumers. The two governments in June 1915 agreed that the Queensland government would acquire the entire 1915 sugar crop at a price £3 per ton higher than the average 1914 price. In turn, the Commonwealth was to purchase the sugar

66 See Murphy, 'Queensland', p.190, and *T.J. Ryan*, pp.110-112, 127-129, 148-150, 435-438.

67 'Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for 1914-1915', *QPP* 1915-1916, II, p.681.

68 *Worker*, 10 June 1915, 17 June 1915, 8 July 1915.

from Queensland and sell the refined product to the community.⁶⁹ The sugar growers' position in the price structure of the industry was improved by the *Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Act* of 1915, which set up cane prices boards to determine fair prices to be paid for cane by the mills. Most sugar growers applauded these marketing arrangements; for the first time they felt that a fair return for their crops was attainable. A Mossman cane grower wrote that:

Many farmers undoubtedly will feel the pinch of the poor season. Fortunately, the Government action in regard to sugar prices has helped to make up for this to a great extent, for which growers are extremely thankful.⁷⁰

The demand for action to help sugar growers was a central aspect of the successful Labor election campaign in 1915; it exemplified a strong strand of agrarianism in the ideology of Queensland Labor. The party assiduously promoted the interests of sugar farmers, fostering state and co-operative milling and encouraging scientific farming methods. In response, a substantial number of farmers, especially those with small holdings, voted for Labor in state elections. Their support was neither committed nor consistent, but was rather a pragmatic reaction to Labor's legislative initiatives and sympathy for farmers *vis-a-vis* millers.

69 'Agreement with the Commonwealth Government relative to the Sugar Industry and Sugar Supplies', *QPP* 1915-1916, II, p.853. The agreement was ratified federally by the *Sugar Purchase Act*, 1915, and in the state sphere by the *Sugar Acquisition Act*, 1915. The latter empowered the government to acquire "any foodstuffs, commodities, goods, chattels or livestock". *QPD* CXX (28 July 1915), p.244ff.

70 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 4 November 1915.

and refiners.⁷¹ At the same time, the continuing mutual antagonism between sugar-working unionists and sugar growers not only remained an obstacle to rural support for Labor, but was also a potential source of conflict within the party itself.

One issue on which many cane farmers now agreed with sugar workers was the necessity of keeping the industry the preserve of white labour. The Queensland *Sugar Cultivation Act* of 1913 was intended to exclude most non-European labour, but the Liberal government subsequently granted some fifteen hundred exemption certificates to Indian, Japanese and Pacific Island workers.⁷² Many white sugar workers saw the election of a Labor government as the signal for the complete exclusion of such labour from the industry. Early in June 1915 the far northern district AWU resolved not to begin the sugar harvest until "all coloured aliens" were removed from the mills and fields. There was a brief stoppage at Innisfail later that month.⁷³ The unionists were tacitly supported by various farmers, who urged the government to legislate immediately for the elimination of coloured labour.⁷⁴ The government gave some vague assurances, and in fact its recent sugar legislation gave the treasurer power to set a lower price for raw sugar to mills employing

71 Higgins, *Queensland Labor Governments*, p.6; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, p.352 and *passim*; D.W. Hunt, *Federal Politics in the Herbert Electorate 1915-1925*, B.A. Hons. thesis, James Cook University, 1974, pp.34, 119-120. For the influence of agrarianism in the Queensland Labor Party see W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (2nd edition, Melbourne, 1961 [1930]), p.175; H. Hughes, in M. Gough, H. Hughes, B.J. Macfarlane and G.R. Palmer, *Queensland: Industrial Enigma* (Melbourne, 1964), p.7; G. Lewis, 'Queensland Nationalism and Australian Capitalism', in E.L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. 2 (Sydney, 1978), pp.110-147.

72 *Worker*, 15 April 1915. Cf. Birrell, *T.J. Ryan*, p.49.

73 *Worker*, 10 June 1915, 8 July 1915; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 8 July 1915; AWU branch executive minutes, 22 July 1915.

74 *Worker*, 17 June 1915. The Mackay farmers' association had earlier complained about the number of permits granted to aliens to grow cane and work in sugar. P.T. Dunworth to W.H. Barnes, Acting Premier, 20 March 1914, file 161G, AGS/N360, QSA.

non-Europeans. But after consultation with the federal government Ryan and Theodore were mindful of the international ramifications of revoking permits already granted to Indians and Japanese; they preferred to let the issue of coloured labour die down without such drastic action.⁷⁵

The fact that farmers and workers agreed on white labour was indicative of the sugar industry's prominent place in Australian nationalism. The actual economic importance of sugar was far surpassed in public estimation by its social implications "as a contribution of the first importance to the policy of a white Australia":

Unsettled areas in the tropical parts of Australia are not only a source of strategic weakness. They constitute a positive temptation to Asiatic invasion; and may give to the white Australia policy a complexion which must inevitably weaken the claims of Australia to external support. . .the ultimate, and in our opinion the effective justification for the protection of the Sugar Industry lies beyond questions of industry or wealth production. It must be sought in the very existence of Australia as a nation.⁷⁶

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- 75 Ryan to Fisher, (Prime Minister), 14 June 1915 and Fisher to Ryan, 17 June 1915, file 161G, AGS/N360, QSA. When the AWU again urged the government to legislate against the employment of coloured labour, Theodore stressed "the necessity of advising members of the AWU handling [*sic*] the matter diplomatically and cautiously owing to the Japanese government using pressure on both the Imperial and Commonwealth governments", PLP minutes, 24 February 1916; AWU branch executive minutes, 17 January 1916; W. Dunstan to W. Lennon, 15 March 1916, *loc.cit.*, QSA.
- 76 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', QPP 1912, III, p.1055. Few public pronouncements on the industry were not prefaced by some reference to its importance in settlement and defence. Cf. *ibid.*, 1920-1921, IV, p.954; S.M. Bruce (Prime Minister) in CPD CIII (5 July 1923), p.729; Morgan, *Our First Half Century*, p.143.

All political parties accepted this view of the sugar industry. The emotive ideal of white Australia was consonant with Labor's practical desire to win votes and also with the party's agrarian sentiments. For some Labor parliamentarians the sugar industry was becoming more a moral issue than a question of economic policy.

Other reform measures introduced by the Labor government included the establishment of a public curator's office, an election act which reduced residential requirements from three months to one, and the repeal of the act requiring selectors to guarantee the financial success of railways built in their areas. The most innovative of Labor's achievements, however, was the entry of the state into the realm of business activity. State enterprises had been a feature of Labor policy since the party's inception, although only the most optimistic utopian socialists saw their introduction as a step towards the abolition of capitalism. Their purpose was rather to compete with private enterprise, to prevent exploitation by monopolies, and to reduce consumer prices. The Ryan administration set up state butchers' shops, sheep and cattle stations to reduce meat prices, a fishery to regulate fish marketing, a fruit cannery, sawmills to provide cheaper timber, coalmines, an hotel at Babinda, ore batteries as an alternative means of crushing for northern miners, and a state insurance office with a monopoly on workers' compensation. Other enterprises planned, but never established, included an iron and steel works, a sugar refinery, and a shipping line. None was justified purely on ideological grounds: they simply met a perceived public need.

Although Labor's state businesses were intended only to curb some of the excesses of capitalism, to both sides of the political fence, they represented, at least rhetorically, the furtherance of "socialism". As such they were respectively defended or condemned. For the 1918 state election campaign, the government prepared a booklet describing the benefits of the state enterprises, under the title "Socialism at Work". This publication could not disguise the limited success of the government enterprises, but for the ardent Laborite and trade unionist it at least represented a catalogue of

essential political symbols of Labor's supposed onslaught on monopoly and privilege.⁷⁷

Workers in the North appreciated Labor's reforms, state enterprises and general style of government, but it was the new industrial legislation which fully vindicated their faith in the political party. The appointment of Theodore, the Deputy Premier, as both Treasurer and Secretary for Public Works (responsible for most industrial matters), indicated that industrial reform was a top government priority. Theodore, who still retained the presidency of the AWU, brought to his ministry an experience, ability and customary zeal which were readily acknowledged by the Queensland labour movement.

A measure of Labor's concern for improving working-class conditions came within days of its achieving office, when the automatic annual wage increases to public servants, withheld by the Liberal government, were restored. Shortly afterwards, permanent railway employees' wages were raised by a further 8%, casual railway construction workers paid an extra one shilling a day, and a policy of preference to unionists and day labour in state employment instituted.⁷⁸ Legislation was passed improving safety regulations, sanitary conditions, ventilation and eating facilities in factories and shops; the *Workers' Accommodation Act* of 1915 raised the standard of accommodation which employers were compelled to provide for shearers and sugar workers;⁷⁹ a Wages Bill, initially rejected but eventually passed (in 1918) by the Legislative Council, repealed the archaic provisions of the *Masters and Servants Act* of 1861.⁸⁰

77 *Official Report of the Ninth State Labour-in-Politics Convention, Brisbane, February-March 1918*, (Brisbane, 1918), pp.10-11; T.J. Ryan [sic], *Socialism at Work* (Brisbane, 1918). Murphy says that by 1918, the state enterprises had passed "from the realm of rational political discussion to the realm of propaganda". 'The Establishment of State Enterprises', p.22.

78 *Labour Bulletin*, 12, October-December 1915; *Worker*, 10 June 1915, 29 July 1915; *Socialism at Work*, pp.10-16.

79 QPD CXX (26 August 1915), p.458; CXXI (6 October 1915), p.1155; QGG CV, 268 (30 December 1915) [6 Geo. V 30].

80 QPD CXXIII (4 October 1916), p.1105; Bernays, *Queensland Politics*, p.490.

Theodore's first important piece of legislation was the *Labour Exchanges Act* of 1915, which extended and improved the system of unemployment registration. Labour exchanges were increased in number and given extra staff in order to obtain more accurate information about the supply and demand of labour in Queensland. The object was to make labour more mobile, and thus aid in "mitigating the evil of unemployment as far as possible".⁸¹ The Department of Labour was also re-organised and given wider powers; Jack Crampton, the highly-respected AMIEU official, was appointed as director. The emphasis placed on such measures reflected Theodore's acceptance of the problem of unemployment as the responsibility of the state. In Labor's first year in power, 7269 unemployed railway workers were placed in government employment, mainly on railway construction. This compared with only 918 similarly placed in the previous year.⁸²

Meanwhile, with Theodore's help, J.A. Fihelly, the assistant Minister for Justice, also introduced legislation incorporating reforms long sought by unionists. *The Trade Union Act* of 1915 gave unions the legal protection which had been jeopardised by the Queensland Supreme Court's application of the English Taff Vale and Osborne judgments. It made trade union funds secure, and gave unions the authority to conduct newspapers and to apply their funds to political purposes.⁸³ *The Workers' Compensation Act* set up a scale of compensation for industrial injuries, made accident insurance compulsory for all employers, and founded a state insurance office [the SGIO] with a monopoly on workers' compensation.⁸⁴

81 Theodore, in *QPD CXX* (31 August 1915), p.499. For the Act (6 Geo. V 6) see *QGG, CV*, 168 (2 November 1915); cf. *Worker*, 13 January 1916.

82 *QPP* 1916-17, III, pp.35-38; *ibid.*, 1915-16, III, p.805; *Worker*, 29 July 1915; *Queensland Industrial Gazette [QIG]*, I, 2, 10 April 1916. This publication, initiated by Theodore, was the official organ of the state Department of Labour; the first issue appeared on 10 March 1916.

83 6 Geo. V 31, *QGG, CV* (30 December 1915), 269; *QPD CXX* (28 September 1915), p.940ff., *CXXI* (14 October 1915), pp.1315-1340.

84 The setting up of such a monopoly was hotly opposed by the Legislative Council. The Act became law, however, through "the bungling of excessively zealous insurance directors in that chamber": Murphy, 'Queensland', p.189.

It was the introduction of the most advanced system of arbitration in Australia, however, which Theodore - and the labour movement generally - regarded as Labor's most important achievement in the area of industrial legislation.⁸⁵ The *Industrial Arbitration Act* was introduced into parliament in August 1915, though the rejection of its principles by the conservative Legislative Council delayed its passage until November 1916. The Act repealed the *Industrial Peace Act*, hated by labour for its progenitors as much as its provisions. The old state industrial court could act only on appeal from wages boards determinations; in any case its jurisdiction was limited. In its place Labor established a Court of Industrial Arbitration, which had both legislative and judicial authority over a wide range of industrial matters. The court - a branch of the Supreme Court - was given sole jurisdiction over "practically everything that may lead to serious differences between employers and employees".⁸⁶ It could make general rulings on the standard of living, standard hours and standard wage; and as a pointer to its intended function, the Act made a maximum 48-hour week statutory.

The central feature of the *Industrial Arbitration Act* was its full recognition of trade unions as fundamental to the effective operation of the arbitration system. In contrast to the previous Act which ignored unionism, the 1916 Act accepted trade unions as the sole representatives of employees. It went further in giving the industrial court power to grant preference in employment to unionists. Theodore especially believed that if unions had access

85 Cf. D.G. Greenwood, Edward Granville Theodore: political tactician and financial administrator, B.Ec. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1966, pp.130-131: "this measure. . .reflected all that Theodore had been fighting for since he first became interested in union organisation in 1907, and for this reason the Bill possessed a degree of personal significance for Theodore which made him determined to secure its passage".

86 Theodore, *QPD* CXX (2 September 1915), p.572; cf. Mathews, 'A History of Industrial Law in Queensland', pp.157-161. Thomas McCawley, who as crown solicitor had played an important part in drafting the *Industrial Arbitration Act*, was appointed president of the court. See his liberal interpretation of the wide powers conferred on the court, in *QGG*, CVIII, 85 (24 February 1917).

to a system through which they could obtain judicial redress of grievances, the need for severe industrial conflict could be obviated. This view reflected a conviction that trade unions were socially responsible organisations which had the weaker position in industrial bargaining:

. . . it is necessary to confer upon unions the recognition which we are giving them in this Bill in order to make the system of arbitration effective. The whole system is founded upon an understanding by the employees - through their organisations - to observe the awards and to live up to the spirit of arbitration.⁸⁷

The *Industrial Arbitration Act* had a rough passage through parliament, however, as the Legislative Council twice rejected its provisions for preferential employment to unionists. It was not until late 1916 that a compromise was reached, the government agreeing to the deletion of the preference clause in order to secure the passage of the other important measures. But this apparent victory for the conservatives was short-lived; the arbitration court judges subsequently ruled that under the wide powers conferred by the Act, they could in any case order union preference if they saw fit.⁸⁸

The union movement generally welcomed the extended arbitration system, and the court was deluged by claims for industrial awards. The *Worker* praised the Act as "the most comprehensive and far-reaching bill for securing compulsory arbitration and conciliation in industrial matters yet evolved in an Australian, or any other, Legislature".

87 *QPD CXX* (2 September 1915), p.571; cf. T.W. McCawley, 'Industrial Arbitration in Queensland', *International Labour Review*, March 1922, pp.386-408; M. Cope, *A Study of Labour Government and the Law in Queensland 1915-1922*, B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1972, ch. 2.

88 In May 1917 McCawley granted preference to AWU members at Mt Morgan. The case was referred to the full bench of the Court of Industrial Arbitration (i.e. McCawley and Macnaughton), who agreed that the court's jurisdiction over "industrial matters" gave it authority to grant union preference. *QIG*, II, 6 (11 June 1917); *Worker*, 10 May 1917.

Even the more radical *Daily Standard* hailed it as "a legislative measure for which the Cabinet and the Party have every good reason to be proud".⁸⁹ The state's largest union, the AWU, had for years advocated such a system of arbitration; smaller and weaker unions eagerly sought the protection afforded jointly by the *Trade Union Act* and the *Industrial Arbitration Act*; railway workers, excluded from access to the previous industrial court, lost no time in preparing a claim for an award.⁹⁰ Of the major unions in the state, only the waterside workers, who remained under the jurisdiction of the federal arbitration court, and the meatworkers, who stuck to their system of private negotiation, were for the moment unaffected by the new Queensland legislation.

The faith of unionists in arbitration and the Labor Party seemed justified - at least by some criteria. Under Labor rule, wages and working conditions of Queensland workers improved substantially. In 1919, average hourly wages in the state were the highest in Australia; four years previously they were the second lowest. The awards granted by the state arbitration court were acknowledged as the most liberal in the country.⁹¹

As a direct result of the Labor Party's integral connection with unionism, and the arbitration court's sympathy with workers, the union movement in Queensland grew rapidly after 1915. In 1914, 38.7% of the male workforce were trade union members; this figure rose to 45.8% in 1916, 51.3% in 1917, and 61.7% in 1919, thus

89 *Worker*, 7 December 1916; *Daily Standard*, 1 December 1916; cf. *Official Report of the Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland Branch, Brisbane, January 1917* (Brisbane, 1917), p.5.

90 Moroney, *Railway Advocate*, July 1966; Archie Dawson, *Points and Politics: a history of the Electrical Trades Union of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1977), pp.67-68.

91 *CYB*, 12, 1920, p.1003; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, pp.218-219; Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, p.245.

comparing favourably with the proportion of unionists in other Australian States.⁹²

TABLE II⁹³
UNIONISM IN QUEENSLAND, 1912-1920

	No. of Unions	Total Membership	AWU Membership
1912	67	44768	
1913	94	51583	
1914	86	55580	22231
1915	89	58310	23569
1916	93	66807	26321
1917	96	75393	27629
1918	102	87737	31832
1919	106	97378	34959
1920	115	103784	36386

The gratified acceptance of arbitration by most unions did not mean that they abandoned other methods of settling job grievances. On the contrary, most unions regarded arbitration awards mainly as a legally enforceable minimum standard of wages and working conditions. This they welcomed wholeheartedly; but the arbitration system did not have an appreciable effect on lowering the incidence of strikes in North Queensland, though it clearly raised the level of wages. Trade unions seldom renounced, as compulsory arbitration implied they should, the right to strike in order to secure better conditions,

92	Percentage Unionists: Male Workforce, 1912-1919						
	Q	NSW	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	AUSTRALIA
1912	33.4	50.4	44.0	43.7	40.9	24.5	44.0
1913	37.2	58.4	47.8	47.4	41.8	27.4	49.2
1914	38.7	60.7	50.0	48.8	45.4	25.2	51.2
1915	40.7	61.7	51.5	48.2	44.5	25.8	52.2
1916	45.8	64.0	54.0	54.6	44.4	28.9	55.0
1917	51.3	63.9	53.4	58.0	43.4	30.2	55.9
1918	60.0	60.2	52.7	63.2	42.9	30.6	56.0
1919	61.7	59.2	51.4	62.7	43.1	32.4	55.5

93 Table compiled from *Labour Reports* and AWU Queensland Branch Secretary's *Annual Reports and Balance Sheets* [E154/48, RSSS-ANUA]. Buckley, *op.cit.*, p.315 shows ASE Membership in Queensland rising from 1527 in 1914 to 2537 in 1916 and 2793 in 1918. Moroney, *Railway Advocate*, August 1966, reported a rise in QRU membership from 4000 in February 1916 to 7800 in December 1917.

to hasten the workings of the court, or to influence its decisions. This view tended to clash with the attitude increasingly typical of government that an advanced and equitable arbitration process should render strikes unnecessary. In future years, when the institution of a Labor government became virtually the political norm in Queensland, some cabinet ministers attempted to avoid responsibility in industrial matters, insisting that unions adhere to the verdict of the independent court. During the years of the first Ryan government, however, Labor ministers worked actively to encourage the smooth functioning of arbitration and of industrial relations generally. Accordingly they approached industrial disputes cautiously and in a conciliatory fashion.

There was a pronounced upsurge of interest in politics among trade unionists when Labor won office. Appreciating the benefits of a Labor government, they saw also the advantage of having a greater voice in deciding Labor Party policies. Consequently, the number of trade unions affiliated with the party grew from twenty-four in 1913 to thirty-nine in 1916.⁹⁴ As they became involved with, and paid dues to the Labor Party, union leaders sought a more formal role in its administration and policy-making. They were encouraged by politicians such as McCormack, who felt that as the unions were the inspirational and financial backbone of the party, they should be represented on its governing bodies. At McCormack's instigation, the Labor-in-Politics convention in February 1916 altered the composition of both the CPE and the convention to give affiliated

94 *Official Report of the Eighth State Labour-in-Politics Convention, Rockhampton, February-March 1916*, (Brisbane, 1916), p.7.

unions direct representation.⁹⁵ This reorganisation should not be interpreted simply as a victory for the industrial wing over the political wing of the labour movement in Queensland. Rather it represented the close and integral unity of industrial and political labour; direct union representation on the CPE and at the convention was the natural culmination of the trend of unionism to involvement in politics, which had been stimulated a decade ago.

On the whole, relationships between the unions, the Labor Party executive and the government were close and amicable from 1915 to 1918. The government listened to and consulted the trade unions, especially the dominant AWU; the unions applauded Labor's reforms and held their political leaders in high esteem. Gordon Childe, otherwise very critical of Labor reformism, conceded that:

There were in [Queensland] many unionists in the House and in the Cabinet, and the Labour Government paid especial attention to industrial legislation, and in its administration showed a sympathetic understanding of the aims of unionism.⁹⁶

95 *Ibid.*, pp.22, 27. Hitherto, convention representation was on the basis of 1 delegate from each state electorate. The 1916 convention added delegates from affiliated unions on the basis of 1 delegate for unions with 1000 to 5000 members; 2 delegates for 3000 to 6000 members; 3 delegates for 6000 to 10000; 4 delegates for unions with over 10000 members. CPE representation from 1898 to 1907 was 11 elected by convention; 2 from the PLP (from 1905, 2 also from the federal PLP); 2 from the ALF. The 1907 convention added 3 delegates from the AWU. Union representation became simply 5 AWU delegates with the demise of the ALF in 1913. In 1916, the CPE composition became 11 elected by convention; 1 each from the state and federal PLPs; unions with over 2000 members, 1 delegate; 5000 members, 2 delegates; 10000, 3 delegates; all smaller unions, 2 delegates. This alteration gave the AWU 3 delegates on the CPE, and the AMIEU, WWF and QRU, 1 each.

96 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.70. The general tenor of Childe's criticism of the Labor Party in Australia is epitomised in his classic statement, *ibid.*, p.181: "The Labour Party, starting with a band of inspired Socialists, degenerated into a vast machine for capturing political power, but did not know how to use that power when attained except for the profit of individuals".

Nevertheless, the Queensland Labor government could not avert the social and political upheaval engendered throughout Australia by the war. The labour movement clearly remained much more united than in other states; there was only a pale reflection of the intense ideological conflict and faction-fighting which reached crisis point in New South Wales.⁹⁷ But even the unity of Queensland labour was strained to the limit by economic and political tensions during the war which augmented working-class militancy and provided more fertile ground for socialistic ideologies. By 1916, manifestations of these trends were already apparent in the labour movement in North Queensland.

97 Cf. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, ch. 3; D. Coward, *The Impact of War on New South Wales: some aspects of Social and Political History: 1914-1917*, Ph.D. thesis, ANU, 1974; M. Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War I* (Melbourne, 1975).



Plate 17. E.G. Theodore, 1915. [Oxley Library].



Plate 18. T.J. Ryan, 1916. [Oxley Library].

CHAPTER VIII

CONSCRIPTION AND INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT, 1916-1917

Labour in 1916

In the twelve to eighteen months following the outbreak of war, the industrial scene in North Queensland was relatively peaceful. The combination of unemployment caused by economic dislocation, trade union satisfaction with Labor's elevation to office, and patriotic fervour - all militated against direct industrial action. Yet by 1916 these conditions no longer obtained. On the one hand military recruitment and partial economic recovery caused unemployment to decline (although the cost of living continued to rise); on the other, unionists gradually realised that not even a Labor government brought the millenium much closer. Simultaneously, the community became deeply divided about the nature and extent of Australian participation in the war in Europe. The workers themselves became less and less disposed towards accepting either the war or the election of the Labor Party as an excuse for a decline in living standards. It was in this political and economic context that the labour movement in North Queensland, as throughout Australia, became industrially more militant and more susceptible to the influence of socialism and syndicalism.

Estimated unemployment among Queensland trade unionists peaked at nearly 18% in the first quarter of 1915. It then decreased substantially, and although averaging over 13% during 1915, was down to slightly over 4% in the third quarter of 1916. Unemployment rose early in 1917 to 10.6%, averaging 7% for the year. Seasonal unemployment among unskilled workers thus remained characteristically high, though it was mitigated to some extent by Labor's policy of placing unemployed labourers on railway construction work during the

slack season.¹ Hazardous as it is to postulate any absolute relationship between the extent of unemployment and the level of union militancy, it may be suggested that unemployment in 1916 and 1917 was sufficient to cause significant discontent among workers yet not sufficiently widespread to inhibit direct industrial action.²

The rapid inflation of late 1914 and 1915 decreased substantially in 1916, when the Commonwealth Statistician's cost of living index actually dropped. Prices remained relatively high, however, and rose sharply once again in 1917 and 1918. The following table charts the

1 Quarterly % unemployment among Queensland trade unionists, 1914-17					
1914	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	Average
Queensland	5.7	4.3	14.3	17.7	10.5%
Australia	5.9	5.7	10.7	11.0	8.3%
1915					
Queensland	17.9	9.6	15.6	10.0	13.3%
Australia	12.0	9.5	8.8	6.8	9.3%
1916					
Queensland	7.5	4.9	4.2	6.7	5.8%
Australia	5.9	5.3	5.3	6.7	5.8%
1917					
Queensland	10.6	5.1	4.9	7.5	7.0%
Australia	7.5	6.3	7.1	7.4	7.1%

from *Labour Reports*, 6 (1915), p.17; 8 (1917), p.349. Unemployment in North Queensland itself is impossible to estimate, since there are no regional calculations available. The published figures of total monthly registrations at the state labour exchanges indicate little more than seasonal trends at the major centres. *QPP* 1915-1916, III, p.806; *ibid.* 1916-1917, II, pp.35-38.

- 2 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.82, postulates a relationship between union militancy and the trade cycle, but it "is not a simple one". He suggests as "the general rule" that disputes in which the unions are on the defensive (e.g., resisting wage cuts) occur on the downturn of the economic cycle, and that disputes in which the unions are on the offensive occur on the upturn of that cycle: "A possible explanation is that the widespread unemployment which characterises the trough of the trade cycle creates fear among unionists, first that a reserve of unemployed is also a reserve of strikebreakers, and secondly that if an industry is closed down by a strike, it may not reopen". Cf. Oxnam, 'The Incidence of Strikes in Australia', pp.19-57.

comparative cost of living generally, in Brisbane, and in the average of eight North Queensland centres during the first world war.

	<u>Cost of Living Indices, 1913-1918</u> ³					
	<u>1913</u>	<u>1914</u>	<u>1915</u>	<u>1916</u>	<u>1917</u>	<u>1918</u>
Australia	1000	1035	1234	1204	1238	1282
Brisbane	878	919	1166	1050	1129	1205
North Queensland	1034	1097	1279	1206	1302	1376

Largely because distance and isolation meant dearer freight charges, the cost of living in the North was higher than the Australian average and much higher than in Brisbane. Consequently, although the *rate* of inflation in the North was lower than in the state capital (25% and 31% respectively between 1914 and 1918), price rises were felt more keenly than in the South.

Real wages in Queensland - and throughout Australia - had tumbled in 1914 and 1915; they recovered slightly in 1916, 1917 and 1918 as a result of arbitration awards, the stabilisation of prices during 1916, and union action. Unfortunately, official statistics for wages were compiled only for Queensland as a whole. Although wage rates were nominally higher in North Queensland, real wages were lower since the cost of living was so much higher than in Brisbane. At the same time, real wages in Queensland were higher than the Australian average.

	<u>Average Real Wages Indices, 1913-1918</u> ⁴					
	<u>1913</u>	<u>1914</u>	<u>1915</u>	<u>1916</u>	<u>1917</u>	<u>1918</u>
Australia	975	952	862	894	950	952
Queensland	1060	1045	912	991	1078	1083

3 *CYB* 14, 1920, pp.1032-1033. The eight northern cities and towns were Charters Towers, Cairns, Chillagoe, Cooktown, Hughenden, Townsville, and from 1915, Cloncurry and Mackay. These cost of living indices are calculated on the basis of house rent as well as food and groceries; they are therefore not directly comparable with the figures cited in Chapter VII, p. 222, which relate to retail prices only.

4 *Ibid.*, p.1006.

In Queensland generally, real wages had actually recovered to the immediate pre-war level by 1917. However, indices of real wages were for *average* wages only and were therefore influenced after 1915 by the extension of arbitration awards to many workers not previously covered by an award. Thus in some industries real wages recovered less quickly. Moreover, as the Commonwealth Statistician himself pointed out, the official figures did not provide an accurate assessment of the "standard of living"; which was influenced both by tangible and intangible factors - such as the quality and quantity of commodities purchased - as well as concepts of real wages and the purchasing power of money. Statistics alone could not alter the perception of many unionists that profiteering and the economic exigencies of war in fact threatened living standards⁵ - despite the existence of a Labor government and a comparatively generous arbitration system.

Notwithstanding the labour movement's appreciation of the government's industrial and social reforms, the Queensland Labor Party was able neither to match the grandiose expectations of the more optimistic of its supporters nor to alleviate radical suspicion of political reformism. These disappointments became more apparent as financial constraints and the conservative Legislative Council hampered Labor's implementation of its policies. In 1915 and again in 1916, Theodore complained in his budget speech of the tight money situation and the unavailability during the war of loans for public works, which forced the curtailment of Labor's railway construction programme in 1916. Economic problems were aggravated by inflation and by a drought in the pastoral districts.⁶ The Legislative Council meanwhile rejected, mutilated and amended several of Labor's most important bills, including income tax proposals which were necessary to the financing of state enterprises and public works, as well as

5 *Ibid.*, p.1007; *Worker*, 21 October 1915.

6 *QPD* CXXI (13 October 1915), pp.1265-1274; CXXIV (1 November 1916), pp. 1423-1429. Cf. 'Annual Report of the Auditor-General', *QPP* 1915-1917, I, p.2. The loan position during 1916 also limited the government's ability to provide employment on railway construction work. *Ibid.*, III, p.35.

the Commonwealth Powers (War) Bill (to cede authority over prices to the federal government for the duration of the war), the Meatworks Bill, and the "preference to unionists" section of the Industrial Arbitration Bill. Attempts to abolish the upper house or curb its powers were unsuccessful.

Many unionists and Labor supporters gradually became more frustrated and impatient with these checks to the government's legislation. Having expected so much from Labor's advent to the treasury benches, a section of the movement was inclined to blame the parliamentary party for the delay in implementing Labor policy. Labor parliamentarians themselves were also forced to realise that holding political office in a capitalist state was not quite the same as holding *power*.⁷

By the beginning of 1916, the virtual unanimity with which Australia entered the war in August 1914 had been replaced by significant and growing divisions in the community about the extent of Australian involvement. On the one hand, as casualties mounted and the supply of volunteers dwindled, the press, Protestant clergy and conservative opinion generally called for compulsory military service as a means of ensuring sufficient reinforcements for Australian troops abroad. On the other hand, the economic distress arising from unemployment and inflation, linked with a growing feeling of weariness with, and doubts about, a costly war on the other side of the world, ensured growing opposition to conscription. Already suspicious of Hughes and the federal Labor government, the left wing of the labour movement saw the *War Census Act* (enabling an accurate estimate of Australian wealth and manpower) and the authoritarian regulations of the *War Precautions Act* as the first step towards not only compulsory overseas military service, but also industrial conscription - the enforced mobilisation of labour at fixed wages.⁸ As the war dragged on interminably, working-class

7 Murphy, *F. J. Ryan*, Chapters 6-10, *passim*.

8 *Worker*, 26 August 1915; cf. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics* pp.98-101; Gollan, *Coalminers of NSW*, pp.140-141; Weller, in *Caucus Minutes*, I, p.373.

disillusionment with the federal government became profound when the promised referendum to give power over prices to the Commonwealth was abandoned in late October 1915.⁹

Demands for the introduction of conscription gathered force during the first half of 1916. Simultaneously, the opposition to conscription crystallised, centering on the labour movement and embracing radical anti-war socialists as well as Labor Party and trade union moderates who still supported a vigorous war effort but would accept neither the principle of compulsion nor the subordination of social reform. The reaction of the industrial movement in Queensland reflected the Australia-wide reaction. In January 1916 the annual delegate meeting of the Queensland AWU resolved to oppose any attempt at conscription which did not include "conscription of wealth"; later that month the annual AWU convention in Sydney unanimously supported a straightforward and unqualified anti-conscription motion. In March the state Labour-in-Politics convention opposed "any attempt to impose conscription on the people of Australia, as it is unnecessary and would place further burdens on the people least able to bear them".¹⁰

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- 9 *Caucus Minutes*, I (4 November 1915), p.430; *Daily Standard*, 8 December 1915. If carried, the prices referendum would give the Commonwealth power to regulate industrial conditions as well as prices. States' rights jealousies, and a fear among its proponents that the referendum might fail, caused the government to abandon it. Instead, state premiers agreed to hand over the necessary authority for the duration of the war: a forlorn hope, if not a cynical offer, since the parliament of most states (including the Queensland Legislative Council) rejected the required legislation. The Prime Minister, Hughes, and the Labor Premier of New South Wales, W.A. Holman, were severely criticised by union leaders in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. In Queensland, although Ryan and Theodore were prime movers of the decision to scrap the referendum, there was only a faint reflection of the uproar in southern states. In fact, the Queensland branch of the AWU, fearing with Theodore that Commonwealth control over labour and wages might jeopardise Queensland's new industrial legislation, had asked the federal PLP not to proceed with the referendum. *Caucus Minutes*, I (18 August 1915), p.422; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.76-81; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.137-142.
- 10 *Official Report of the Third Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland branch, January 1916* (Brisbane 1916), p.3; *Worker*, 10 February 1916; *Official Record of the Eighth State Labour-in-Politics Convention, Rockhampton, February-March 1916* (Brisbane 1916), p.25.

Whereas the parliamentary Labor parties federally and in all other states were seriously divided on the issue, only one Labor member of the Queensland parliament - the clergyman and Minister for Railways, John Adamson - supported conscription. Consequently the Labor split over conscription later in 1916, although marked by bitter recriminations in Queensland, did not damage the party's parliamentary fortunes as severely as elsewhere in Australia. The unity already existing between industrial and political labour in Queensland meant that the unionist drive in other states to ensure tighter industrial control over the Labor Party, conspicuously gathering force in New South Wales in 1915, 1916 and 1917, was never so pronounced in the northern state. Most unionists and politicians probably felt that "industrial control" in Queensland was either unnecessary or that it had already been attained. Thus McCormack, speaking in New South Wales at the conference of the Railway Workers' and General Labourers' Union in 1916, claimed that the AWU was so strong in Queensland that half the Labor parliamentarians were "direct nominees" of that union: this was "the way to gain industrial control of the political machine".¹¹

Although only one of the Queensland state parliamentarians left the Labor Party over conscription, two Queensland members of the federal parliament - both from the North - did so. The member for Herbert, Fred Bamford, was in fact the first MHR openly and unreservedly to advocate conscription - during the debate on the War Census Bill in July 1915;¹² the senator and former state member for Cairns, Tom Givens, joined him. An element of acrimony was thus injected into the internal Labor controversy in the North, which did not exist in the South of Queensland. In September 1915 the Townsville *Federal*, which as the war progressed increasingly espoused radical ideology, noted that:

11 Turner, *op.cit.*, p.96.

12 CPD LXXVII (16 July 1915), pp.5053-5055. Bamford later boasted that he led the way in calling for conscription, *ibid.*, LXXX (14 September 1916), p.8599.

Herbert's G.O.M. [Grand Old Man] seems to be an ardent Conscriptionist. How does that fit in this his boasted Socialism? . . . If a representative of the people is not a straightout Socialist he is against the best, truest interests of the people.¹³

Thus the scene for a violent confrontation on the issue in North Queensland was already set long before Hughes announced the conscription referendum on 30 August 1916.

The unity and unanimity of purpose which characterised the labour movement in Queensland in 1915-1916 is incontrovertible.¹⁴ Nevertheless, economic discontents, financial and constitutional impediments to the implementation of Labor policy, the debate about conscription and the war, and increasing criticism of the Labor Party both in the federal sphere and in other states, were all bound to have repercussions in Queensland, causing the movement as a whole to veer leftwards during the war. Apart from the miniscule, albeit vocal and notorious IWW, there was no significant opposition to the Labor Party. However, there were definite signs of disillusionment and unrest within rank and file union circles. It was in an effort to allay such discontent that Ryan made a strong plea for resolution and patience at the state Labor-in-Politics convention in February-March 1916: despite the "inauspicious circumstances" of war, drought, and legislative obstruction, he said, his government had accomplished more in a single parliamentary session than had been done "by any Liberal or Labor government in any of the states of Australia".

13 *Federal*, 25 September 1915.

14 Cf. Murphy, 'Queensland', p.193: "The reality of Queensland Labor in 1916 was that the CPE, BIC, AWU, WPOs and the PLP saw themselves as belonging to the one movement, whose goals were clear and whose representatives in parliament were making a determined bid to oust the controllers of economic and political power".

They could not accomplish everything and see all their principles realised in one session, or any one Parliament, or two Parliaments, or three Parliaments, and it was necessary that their supporters should understand that but by going step by step, as they had been doing, they were redeeming the pledges that had been made to the electors of Queensland. If the present policy was pursued it would lead to ultimate success and the realisation of their hopes.

Concluding with a flourish that brought a standing ovation from the assembled delegates, Ryan declared:

A Labor government cannot do everything. The people must assist. To the Labor movement, comprised of loyal men and women steadfast in faith, confidence, and patriotism for the cause, do we look for the ultimate emancipation of the worker from the bondage of Capitalism.¹⁵

Ryan's words indicated that the equanimity of the Queensland labour movement had received some sharp jolts not twelve months after the 1915 election. Labour unease was especially apparent in the North, where economic tensions and geographical isolation produced an increasing incidence of industrial disputes in the stevedoring, meat export, mining and sugar industries.

The Waterfront

Throughout Australia the rising cost of living and the strictures of federal arbitration induced waterside workers to agitate for increased wages in 1915 and 1916, often against the instructions of the national WWF executive which was composed mainly of federal politicians. The disruption to shipping occasioned by war caused considerable unemployment and under-employment among North Queensland wharfies. As a direct result of lack of work, in May 1915 Mackay watersiders refused to work at the Flat Top island anchorage, in protest against the employment of seamen in the unloading of cargo

15 *Eighth State Labour-in-Politics Convention Report*, 1916, pp.16-18; *Worker*, 9 March 1916.

there. The dispute lasted three weeks, but work was resumed on the shipping companies' terms following the recommendation of the WWF Council, itself acting on the advice of the registrar of the Commonwealth arbitration court.¹⁶ Mackay was again the site of brief stoppages in January, May and June 1916, though on these occasions the local WWF was successful in its interpretation of conditions laid down by the award.¹⁷ These incidents illustrated yet again how often northern branches of the union chafed under the authority of the executive and resented the subversion of local wharf customs by an arbitration court sitting in Melbourne.

A fresh strike at Mackay in July-August 1916 surpassed the previous disputes in severity. Waterside workers demanded pay for time spent in travelling to Flat Top and also for meal hours there. Such payment had been customary at Flat Top where working conditions were often dangerous,¹⁸ but the federal arbitration court now ruled that payment for travelling time and meal hours was not permitted under the new award. Accepting the ruling, the WWF general secretary, already preoccupied with a serious wages dispute at Sydney, advised the Mackay wharfies to return to work. Predictably, however, the northern unionists stuck to their claim, stating that "nobody in the South has any right to make arrangements for local unions".¹⁹ When the wharfies added a demand for a slightly increased wage rate, to shipping companies and business interests generally this amounted to extortion:

16 *Labour Bulletin* 10 (April-June 1915). The Mackay harbour (on the Pioneer river) was too shallow for larger vessels, and cargo consequently was lightered to and from Flat Top. For the WWF Australia-wide at this time, see Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.83-84; Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers*, chs. 6-7.

17 *Labour Bulletin* 13 (January-March 1916), 14 (April-June 1916); *QIG* I, 4 (10 June 1916), p.238.

18 See V. Williams, *The Years of Big Jim* (Perth, 1975), ch. 1: "Flat Top".

19 *Bowen Independent*, 22 July 1916; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 18 August 1916; *Worker*, 24 August 1916; *QIG*, I, 6 (10 August 1916), p.416.

The old breed of coastal pirate is not yet extinct. He still flourishes at all our seaports, especially at Mackay, but nowadays he calls himself a waterside worker, and he is a power in the land. . . .The Mackay branch of these highly organised brigands are now demanding 2s.3d. per hour, inclusive of the time spent reclining on the deck of the tender and spitting over the side.²⁰

The shipping situation at Mackay became worse as the sugar crushing season progressed, bagged sugar piling up on the wharves and in storage sheds. In mid-August two sugar mills ceased operations upon the exhaustion of their storage capacity, and the state government stepped in. Theodore, the acting premier, asked Hughes, prime minister and federal WWF president, to persuade the shipowners to accept the arbitration of Judge Douglas of the state industrial court; Hughes was agreeable, but the shipping companies refused, insisting on the jurisdiction of the federal court.²¹

In a climate of social tension produced by the national debate over conscription, industrial conflict in North Queensland became entangled with wider issues relating to the war. The president of the ASPA, Thomas Crawford, entreated Hughes:

. . .that while their sons are fighting the military Huns abroad, it is your Government's duty to protect the Mackay farmers from oppression by industrial Huns at home.²²

20 *Cairns Post*, 14 July 1916.

21 Theodore to Hughes, 11 August 1916, 15 August 1916; Mackay harbour board to Hughes, 12 August 1916; Hughes to Theodore, 17 August 1916. 1916/3673 pt. IV, CRS A2, Australian Archives, Canberra [AA(C)]. A judge of the district court (later Supreme Court justice), Douglas at this time also held a commission as acting-judge of the industrial court.

22 Crawford to Hughes, 16 August 1916, *ibid.*

Issues linked with the conscription campaign were further complicated by the allegation from conservatives that the waterfront strike was attributable to the sinister influence of the IWW: "Six men are holding up the town and harbour of Mackay. They are IWW men, and they hold the entire union and its nominal leaders in the hollow of their hands", was the *Cairns Post's* comment.²³

The recurring strikes at Mackay certainly indicated militancy in the local WWF, but this stemmed more from the peculiar conditions of the waterside work at Mackay than from the presence of IWW votaries. Although IWW organisers were active in North Queensland at this time, their journal, *Direct Action* (never slow to claim responsibility for strikes), made no mention of the Mackay dispute; nor did it at any stage report the presence of IWW supporters in the ranks of the WWF at Mackay. The 1916 waterside strike arose essentially out of the long hours of work, the frequently dangerous working conditions, and the arbitration court's interference with the special wage rate custom at Flat Top.

Watersiders in other Australian ports meanwhile refused to handle cargo to or from the strike-affected Sydney and Mackay ports. Justice Higgins, president of the federal arbitration court, directed the WWF federal council to discipline its branches and order them back to work. Faced with evidence of rank and file solidarity, however, the council realised that its authority would be disregarded, and ignored Higgins' direction. A national waterfront stoppage loomed²⁴ and, notwithstanding the shipowners' objections, Hughes made arrangements under the *War Precautions Act* for Judge Douglas to hear the Mackay dispute. But this became unnecessary when Higgins finally agreed to call a compulsory conference on 31 August 1916. The shipowners capitulated on both the Mackay and Sydney issues, and

23 *Cairns Post*, 4 September 1916.

24 WWF federal council minutes, 30 August 1916; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.84.

the disputes were then settled by a new award conceding most of the union claims.²⁵

Conflict between local waterside customs and national award regulations, exacerbated by sectional discord between union branches and the federal executive, also occurred in Townsville in August and October 1916, and in February 1917. Wharfies successfully demanded special rates for handling frozen meat, copper and kerosene, and for waiting time while working at Lucinda Point, the Herbert River district's sugar port some fifty miles north of Townsville. In these cases, as at Mackay, the federal award had improved wages and conditions generally, but had tampered with some individual wharf customs. With inflation eroding the value of fixed wages, the workers demanded the retention of special cargo rates. Again, the WWF executive initially backed the court's ruling against its members, moving to resolve the dispute only when a strike actually occurred.²⁶

From his viewpoint of a broad survey of the internal dynamics of the Australian labour movement, Turner interprets the waterfront strikes of 1916 as an important symptom of the growing conflict between a militant rank and file and moderate politician-union officials; in the case of the WWF this culminated in the removal of Hughes and his fellow politicians from the union council of management in December 1916, in the wake of the conscription split.²⁷ From the parochial perspective of North Queensland, however, the 1916 waterside disputes also indicated the reluctance of local wharfies to sacrifice individual port customs or to surrender their

25 Secretary, Attorney-General's department, to secretary, Prime Minister's department, 16 September 1916, 1916/3673 pt.IV, CRS A2, [AA(C)].

26 Christie, secretary Townsville branch WWF to Morris, 21, 29 August 1916; Morris to Christie, 30 August 1916; Christie to Morris, 28 October 1916. WWF general secretary's correspondence with all branches, 1911-1928. [162/7, RSSS-ANUA]; *Labour Bulletin* 15 (July-September 1916), 17 (January-March 1917).

27 Turner, *loc.cit.*

autonomy to the federal WWF executive, especially when a rising cost of living wore down the value of arbitration awards. These were the more mundane circumstances in which northern WWF members became more militant during and after 1916.

The Meatworks

The attenuation of militancy which accompanied the outbreak of war likewise gave way among meatworkers to a greater readiness to strike in support of higher wages. A stable marketing system guaranteed by favourable contracts with the British government for the supply of meat to troops ensured profitable operations by the meat companies in Queensland. Since they could now afford to pay higher wages, and because any industrial stoppage meant considerable financial loss to employers, the AMIEU's already-strong bargaining position in the northern meatworks was enhanced.

Continuing to ignore arbitration, the union tightened up its control over the selection of labour during 1915-1916, enabling the shop committees at each works - the boards of control - to increase their influence as "the primary initiators of policy within the union".²⁸ In May 1916 freezers employed at the Alligator Creek plant stopped work, demanding increased wages. They were quickly supported on strike by workers in other departments, and within days the dispute spread to the Ross River works. At this stage the companies gave in and granted the wage rise to freezers.²⁹ Both meatworks were again idle on 12 June 1916, however, when the union claimed that the increase granted to freezers should be extended to all employees. The employers this time offered no resistance; they preferred the expense of a wage rise to the production loss of a strike, and all meatworkers accordingly won their pay increase.³⁰

28 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.85.

29 *Daily Standard*, 20 May 1916; *QIG*, I, 4 (10 June 1916), p.239.

30 *Labour Bulletin* 14 (April-June 1916).

This direct action set the pattern for industrial disputes in the northern meat industry until 1918. Ignoring the wage agreements reached periodically at round-table conferences, skilled workers in key departments such as slaughtering or freezing would without warning stop work to demand higher wages; management would then concede the claim in order to keep the works operating. A "go-slow" strike or the board of control's threat of a mass walk-out typically led to a similar wage increase for meatworks' employees generally. Each capitulation and concession by the employers encouraged the militants to make further demands - often to the chagrin of the AMIEU state executive, which was concerned by the sectional autonomy and contempt for union authority shown by the northern boards of control.³¹

Industrial action continued throughout 1916 and 1917. Against the opposition of the employers, who preferred to negotiate with the skilled mechanics separately, the AMIEU and ASE joined forces for the purpose of negotiating with employers. The militancy of the larger body evidently influenced the ASE in the Townsville meatworks: in October 1916, ASE members at Alligator Creek, with the promised backing of AMIEU workers, went on strike for higher wages: within three weeks the management capitulated.³²

The alliance of meat industry unions was broadened early in 1917 when the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association

31 See Mr Justice McCawley's summary of the AMIEU state secretary's argument in the judgment for the first meat export award in March 1918, *QIG*, III, 4 (10 April 1918), p.223: "Indeed, the action of the employers in giving way to sectional pressure, instead of insisting upon the observance of the agreement, weakened the authority of the executive. The unions alleged that the employers had given concessions without the recognition of the union, and had acquiesced in demands without ascertaining whether the demands had the union's approval. The natural tendency of these acts of the employers was to invite or encourage further demands".

32 Minutes of the Conference held on 14 August 1916 at Townsville, between representatives of the Meat Industry Employers of Queensland and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, [E220/479, RSSS-ANUA]; AMIEU northern district council minutes, 10 October 1916, 3 November 1916, 25 November 1916.

[FEDFA] joined the ASE and AMIEU in a demand for a joint state-wide conference with employers. Despite the prosperous condition of the meat exporting business, industrial disputes were obviously affecting company profits, and the employers resisted a move which would have further increased the bargaining strength of the employees: they were prepared to meet each union separately, but objected to meeting them jointly. When industrial trouble ensued, the employers gained a compulsory conference before Justice McCawley in February 1917. The Townsville meatworks clearly caused employers most bother; a company representative complained that agreements were ignored by northern unionists:

They [the AMIEU] were evidently strong enough last time to repudiate anything done at Townsville. They held us up and got more.³³

Notwithstanding the employers' claim that the private agreements were unsatisfactory and that industrial matters should consequently be dealt with by the arbitration court, McCawley was reluctant to interfere with the system of direct negotiation in vogue since 1911. He therefore ordered the companies to meet the unions jointly in private conference, and, after several weeks, an agreement embodying reduced working hours and substantial pay rises was reached.³⁴ This agreement - known as the red log - was to remain in force for a minimum of twelve months. But it soon became apparent that Townsville meatworkers did not consider themselves bound by it; in July 1917 after censuring the AMIEU state executive for its conduct of northern business, and calling for the head office to be moved to Townsville, the northern unionists negotiated a separate agreement - the blue log - which improved conditions in the North still further.³⁵ The northern

33 Transcript of shorthand notes taken at a Compulsory Conference between the Employers and the Employees in the Meat Industry, February 1917. [E220/479, RSSS-ANUA].

34 AMIEU northern district general meeting minutes, 20 March 1917.

35 AMIEU northern district council minutes, 4 May 1917, 27 July 1917; *Revised Log of Wages Rates for Northern District* (Townsville 1917), [University of Wollongong Archives].

district of the AMIEU was by now setting the standard for union claims throughout Queensland. In the Alligator Creek and Ross River meatworks the union acquired an Australia-wide reputation for militancy; it was hailed by southern syndicalists as the prototype of industrial unionism.³⁶

Bill Davis, an Alligator Creek meatworker, later asserted that in 1916 "Revolutionary Industrial Unionism" became the keynote of the northern AMIEU militants.³⁷ The anárcho-syndicalist tendency of many itinerant meatworkers, long evident in their scorn for work-discipline, arbitration, and union head office authority, was at that time reinforced by IWW propaganda, which was receiving growing acceptance among a radical minority throughout Australia. The IWW organiser William Jackson made the first of a number of visits to Townsville in May 1915. He found many meatworkers eager to accept a rationale of their experience in the IWW promise of industrial emancipation. However, their understanding of theoretical doctrine seems to have been imperfect, for, despite the many predictions of Jackson and others, no IWW "locals" were formed in Townsville. At the same time, a considerable number of AMIEU members bought *Direct Action* and other "Wobbly" publications, joined the IWW, and responded sympathetically to the syndicalist creed of industrial unionism, anti-politicalism, and the "go-slow" strike. The IWW claimed credit for the strike at Alligator Creek in June 1916; wobbly organisers such as Jackson, Edward Shannessey and Gordon Brown reported that meatworkers comprised much of their strength and support in the North.³⁸ In *Direct Action* of 18 August 1917 (the

36 *Direct Action*, 18 August 1917; *OBU* (Sydney, official organ of the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia), 20 March 1919; *One Big Union Herald* (Melbourne, official organ of the Workers' International Industrial Union), 30 September 1919; A.D. Dodds, *How One Big Union Works: an Australian Example* (Melbourne, n.d.); "Joe the Bear", *Job Control: the Shop Board of Control at Work: an example in the Meat Industry* (Melbourne, 1919).

37 *Meat Industry Journal of Queensland*, July 1943.

38 *Direct Action*, 1 June 1915, 24 June 1916, 16 June 1917. Cf. Inspector Sweetman, CIB Townsville, to Commissioner of Police, 27 August 1917, item 8658/1917, HOM/J243, QSA.

last issue before its suppression by the federal authorities) Jackson related how John Gilday, state president of the AMIEU and MLA for Ithaca, was boycotted by the workers at Alligator Creek, who resolved to "have nothing to do with politicians and to rely on 'Direct Action'". Jackson went on:

A fine spirit of solidarity is coming over the workers of North Queensland. The Alligator Creek Meat Works stand out on their own for militancy, and I doubt if there is any part of the world where you will find a more efficient fighting unit, who are every [*sic*] ready to fight for the cause of their class. The workers at Alligator Creek, who number 1000, are scientific in the application of the conscious withdrawal of industrial efficiency. . . .³⁹

The "conscious withdrawal of industrial efficiency", however, exemplified by "go-slow" and "lightning" strikes, was a matter of increasing concern not only to the meat companies but also to the state government. Theodore especially, as minister responsible for industrial matters, was disturbed by the frequency of industrial disputes in the northern meatworks and by the AMIEU's continued rejection of state arbitration, a system which was an article of faith for the orthodox Labor Party. Although the speedy concession to union claims had often encouraged further militant demands, the companies finally decided to take a firm stand after the northern district's success in forcing the "blue log" on them. They were encouraged to do so by a decline in the supply of stock available for slaughtering in 1918, which lessened the employees' bargaining power. Allegedly at Theodore's suggestion,⁴⁰ Queensland meat companies consequently filed a claim for an arbitration award in

39 *Direct Action*, 18 August 1917. *Ibid.*, 11 August 1917: "Alligator Creek Meat Works is the stronghold of the I.W.W. in North Queensland, and compares more than favourably with any other industrial centre in Australia for militancy".

40 AMIEU state executive minutes, 12 July 1917; Davis, in *MIJQ*, June 1944; Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.87.

late 1917. According to Frank Sherwood, a chronicler of the Townsville meatworkers' union,

The move for an Arbitration Award was really the get square stakes. The companies, smarting under the meaties' action in forcing a revised log in 1917, were bent on obtaining control of labour, and there is no doubt that the behaviour of some members accelerated this move.⁴¹

But northern meatworkers were not inclined to surrender lightly their system of direct bargaining; industrial relations accordingly threatened to become even more turbulent in 1918-19 than they had been during 1916-17.

The AWU

The Australian Workers' Union, with its conglomerate, largely itinerant membership of miners, navvies, sugar workers, shearers, pastoral workers, general labourers and domestics, did not escape the ructions of industrial militancy attendant upon the economic and social tensions of war. The largest union in the state, in 1916 the Queensland branch of the AWU had a membership of 26,321, of whom 8964 were enrolled in the northern and far northern districts. Although the amalgamation movement by which the AWU planned to become Australia's "one big union" had come to a halt, a vigorous organising policy ensured its continued growth among workers of North Queensland.⁴²

The AWU's large and transient membership meant that the union was necessarily administered by a group of permanent officials,

41 F. Sherwood, *History of AMIEU in North Queensland*, typescript ms., n.d. [AMIEU northern district office, Townsville]. Cf. McCawley's judgment, *QIG*, III, 4 (10 April 1918), pp.222-223.

42 AWU, Queensland Branch Secretary, *Annual Report and Balance Sheet*, 31 May 1916 (Brisbane, 1916).

ranging from the district organisers and district secretaries to the branch executive in Brisbane. Local "centres", as the sub-branches were known, and even the district committees, had little finance and only limited independence, being subject to the overriding direction of the state executive, which stressed the benefits of centralised control and uniform policy. Theoretically, the annual delegate meeting in Brisbane in January of each year, followed by the national annual convention in Sydney, gave the rank and file the opportunity to control union affairs. In practice, however, both these bodies were usually dominated by permanent officials, despite a sprinkling of rank and file activists and radicals such as Ernie Lane.⁴³ Districts were represented mainly by organisers and secretaries simply because they were, by virtue of their official positions, most familiar to the scattered membership; they sold the tickets and represented the AWU in negotiation with employers and at arbitration court hearings. For the same reason, there was a tendency for district and state officials to be re-elected year after year.⁴⁴

This kind of organisation was common to most trade unions; in the case of the AWU a bureaucratic structure superimposed on an itinerant membership predicated oligarchy. As the AWU consolidated its dominant position in the labour movement during the long period of Labor government in Queensland from 1915 to 1929, the union officials indeed seemed increasingly reluctant to accept differing views of unionism and intolerant of criticism of their administration by a vocal, militant minority of members.

After the election of Labor in 1915 the AWU remained closely

43 See Lane's militant apologia, *Dawn to Dusk, passim*, in which he severely castigates the political opportunism and bureaucracy of the AWU.

44 *Official Reports of the Annual Delegate Meetings of the AWU, Q, 1914 to 1930*. This characteristic was only a *tendency*; it was mitigated by the frequent election of rank and file members to the position of organiser.

aligned with the political party, though the relationship was not one of subservience, as some have suggested.⁴⁵ Rather, the close identification of the union with Labor politics, fostered and epitomised by Theodore and McCormack in the days of the AWA, continued. Indeed, in many districts in the North and West, the AWA *was* the Labor Party; in these places it seemed to be the political party which was subordinate to the union rather than *vice versa*. Although McCormack resigned as vice-president in July 1914, and Theodore relinquished the branch presidency in January 1916, both kept close contacts with the AWU.⁴⁶ Many of the industrial reforms introduced by the Labor government stemmed from complementary AWU-PLP initiatives.

AWU executive officials became increasingly committed to arbitration, especially after the passing of the *Industrial Arbitration Act* of 1916. As the branch secretary, W.J. Dunstan, stated, their policy was "to get direct to the Court".⁴⁷ There was nothing in the least perfidious about this commitment: not only the AWU but every other union in Queensland except the AMIEU had fought for, welcomed and appreciated arbitration. The great majority of the AWU rank and file believed, along with the union heads, that strong unionism in conjunction with a fair industrial court provided the best means for satisfactory redress of grievances. Even at the end of 1918, when ideas of direct action were at their peak in Australia, including North Queensland, a state-wide ballot of AWU members revealed a vote for arbitration in excess of 70%.⁴⁸

45 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp.118-160; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p.125; A.A. Morrison, 'Militant Labour in Queensland 1912-1927', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, XXVIII (November 1952), pp.209-234.

46 Thus McCormack was elected as a delegate to the annual convention in 1916. *Third Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1916*, p.8. Both Murphy and Armstrong argue that at this time it was the Labor Party which was tied to the unions, rather than the reverse. Murphy, *Prelude to Power*, p.106; Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, p.179. Of the AWU's dominance in North Queensland, Bolton writes: "It could almost have been said that an AWU organiser carried a cabinet minister's portfolio in his tucker-box": *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.335.

47 *Third Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1916*, p.7.

48 *Worker*, 2 January 1919.

Although the AWU bosses maintained an aggressive posture against employers, and usually (though not always) supported their members in local strikes, as the years went by it was with increasing reluctance and an awareness of the adverse political implications of strikes for the Labor government. Consequently, when industrial disputes occurred in the mining and sugar districts of North Queensland in the middle and later years of the war, a cleavage began to appear between a militant minority and the moderate mass led ("manipulated", said radical critics) by the branch executive.

The mining industry in the far north and north-west of Queensland was brought to a virtual standstill by the dislocation of metal markets following the outbreak of hostilities in Europe; but before long, metal contracts were re-arranged to supply the Allied nations, and markets recovered. Indeed, mineral prices soared with the extraordinary demand for metal for munitions. Consequently, mining operations in the Cloncurry region and to a lesser, though still substantial, extent in the Herberton-Chillagoe district revived. After a significant increase in 1915, the price of copper rose from 85 per ton in January 1916 to 150 per ton in December; in 1917 it was fixed at 110.5s. Tin averaged 182 per ton during 1916, rising to an extraordinary 300 per ton in 1917, enough to stimulate the reopening of abandoned mines near Herberton. Not surprisingly, the value of base metals mined in Queensland also reached a record high in 1916. The Cloncurry mining warden reported that both from a financial and a prospecting aspect, the district had "never gone through a more prosperous and progressive year".⁴⁹ In contrast with the pronounced unemployment among miners and mining labourers in 1914 and 1915, there was now a scarcity of such labour in the North.

Such circumstances greatly improved the collective bargaining position of mining employees, yet there were only infrequent strikes

49 *QPP* 1917, III, pp.715-716; 1918, I, pp.1394-1481; *QGMJ*, 15 March 1916.

by northern miners during 1916. On 14 February 1916 an award of the state industrial court granted Cloncurry district workers a 44 hour week, together with a slight increase in the hourly wage rate. The wage increase, however, was not sufficient to give some employees as much pay for a week's work as they had previously received for working 48 hours at a lesser rate. Consequently, on 28 February the mine employees went on strike, and after only five days were successful in gaining above-award wages.⁵⁰ Similar disputes occurred - with similar results - at Wolfram and on the Etheridge field in the far north in June and August 1916 respectively.⁵¹ In these cases the men's grievances stemmed from an apparent mistake by the industrial court, and after only brief stoppages the claims were conceded. An indication of increased union militancy in the future, however, came in mid-August 1916, when employees of the Duchess copper mine south-west of Cloncurry went on strike in an attempt to secure the dismissal of the mine manager. The matter came before the industrial court, which ruled against the men, leaving bitter industrial relations at the Duchess mine. The manager's conduct was again the ostensible cause of a lengthy strike in early 1918.⁵² Towards the end of 1916 railway construction workers on the Oona to Dobbyn line struck for an extra 1s.9d. per day, which would bring their wages to the ruling minimum rate of 14s. in the Cloncurry district. The railway department at first turned down the demand, and moreover refused the usual rail passes to the workers involved; only after strong representation by the AWU executive to the new minister for railways, J.H. Coyne - himself a member of the AWU - was the claim conceded.⁵³

50 *QGMJ*, 15 April 1916; *QIG*, I, 2 (10 April 1916), p.

51 *Worker*, 1 June 1916; *Labour Bulletin* 14 (April-June 1916).

52 *Labour Bulletin* 15 (July-September 1916); *QIG*, II (10 May 1918), pp.250-251.

53 *Official Report of the Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland branch, January 1917* (Brisbane 1917), p.5. John Harry Coyne (1866-1926), born Melbourne; bushworker, shearer, organiser; ALF president 1906-1913, MLA Warrego 1908-1923; secretary for railways 1916-1918 (elected to ministry in October 1916 following resignation of conscription advocate Adamson); secretary for public lands 1918-1923; member CPE 1910-1916.

In 1917 working-class militancy in the Cloncurry district received a fillip with the visit of IWW propagandists to the western mineral field. Brown, Jackson and Shannessey from the South, and the Cairns wobbly convert, Denny Foley, all toured the north-west between June and August 1917. Jackson predicted that:

[J]udging by the enthusiasm at the meetings and the number of rebels already on the job, it appears the mining industry of N.W. Queensland, which comprises 5000 men, will be, in the near future, for the I.W.W.⁵⁴

With characteristic ebullience, the IWW organisers overestimated their support among the western miners, whose militancy was a product mainly of their working and living conditions. Nevertheless, for exactly this reason, the optimistic IWW reports did have some basis in reality.

The Cloncurry copper miners shared many of the militant characteristics of the northern meatworkers, who at this time included a number of IWW votaries. Both were itinerant, yet at the same time fairly homogeneous, groups. In both cases, too, a relatively large workforce faced a small and distinct management group with none of the diverse gradations of social status usually found in urban centres. Both were isolated socially by occupation; the western miners (like their counterparts in Broken Hill and the United States) were also isolated by distance; both worked at unusually onerous labour in frequently desolate living conditions. Finally, the mining industry, like the meat industry, enjoyed boom conditions during the first world war; employees consequently felt justified in seeking a greater measure of the apparent prosperity,

54 *Direct Action*, 28 July 1917.

especially when inflation rapidly eroded the real value of wages.⁵⁵

For their part, mining companies resisted every move to increase employees' wages, and did their best to evade clauses of the arbitration award. In fact, dissatisfaction with the effective enforcement of awards was an important cause of union militancy in the Cloncurry mines. As one moderate AWU representative found:

We get an award, and there is no-one to see that the award is carried out. If it is not carried out the men have to use direct action to get what they are legally entitled to, and that is what is giving the IWW such a strong hold in this and other districts.⁵⁶

There is possibly some truth also in the suggestion that as the mining settlements gained a reputation for militancy, they attracted militant workers from other parts of Australia. A number of Russians - many of them émigrés after the 1905 revolution - worked in the Cloncurry mines at this time; they were allegedly among the most prominent IWW supporters in North Queensland. The general manager of the Mt Elliott mines and smelters, W.H. Corbould, recalled later that during World War I a number of Russians arrived in Townsville, then "flocked to Cloncurry":

55 Distance and high transport charges ensured that, like Broken Hill, Cloncurry's cost of living was one of the highest in Australia. *CYB*, 14, 1920, p.1032. See Osborne, 'Town and Company', pp.27-29. For the isolated and autonomous character of the mining camps of Colorado and Idaho in the USA, see J.H.M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left: a study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York, 1970), pp.241-257.

56 *Worker*, 16 August 1917.

All previous trouble with the Australian lads was a child's play compared with the times when the Russians arrived to take a hand in the game. . . .The IWW made every use of the Russians to advance their cause. 57

Certainly many miners, and not only Russians, sympathised with the crude ideology, and especially with the anti-capitalist slogans, of the IWW. Even those - the great majority - who had little sympathy for IWW doctrine appreciated the entertainment provided by the wobbly stump orators and sing-songs. In an area where social diversions were few and far between, this explained the bumper meetings which the IWW organisers held, and which were often misconstrued as an indication of support for their philosophy. As Jackson wrote after a visit to Selwyn: "The camp now resounds with the strains of wobbly songs. All the musical instruments in boarding houses and pubs are going day and night, hammering away at the I.W.W. songs". 58

Partly influenced by the IWW, which provided the slogans and the syndicalist rationale, go-slow strikes and lightning stoppages were frequent on the Cloncurry mineral field by August 1917, exasperating not only the mining companies but also the moderate AWU heads. Already at loggerheads with a militant section of their membership in the pastoral industry, the AWU officials endeavoured to quell IWW influence in the mining industry. Early in August 1917 the *Cloncurry Advocate* reported a victory for AWU moderation at Mt Cuthbert, where the IWW, with 110 supporters, took charge of union meetings "with the intention of causing trouble with the AWU". The AWU district secretary, former Cloncurry miner Jack Dash, thereupon visited Mt Cuthbert, and two IWW ring-leaders were declared "non-union"; with the collusion of the manager, both were refused

57 W.H. Corbould, *The Life of Alias Jimmy*, ms. [Mitchell Library], pp.372, 376. Cf. *Cloncurry Advocate*, 4 August 1917, cited in *Worker*, 24 September 1917: "A Russian named Broff organised the Russians with IWW propaganda". Also CIB, Townsville, to Police Commissioner, n.d. August 1917, item 8034/1917, HOM/J234, QSA.

58 *Direct Action*, 7 July 1917.

work. "About 80 IWWs and Russians" left work in sympathy, said the paper, leaving the orthodox AWU apparently in control at Mt Cuthbert.⁵⁹

Despite this apparent victory over the militants, industrial trouble nevertheless recurred at Mt Cuthbert and elsewhere on the Cloncurry mineral field. When metal prices declined in late 1918, employers responded by cutting costs and retrenching staff. Miners were ill-disposed towards accepting any lowering of their standard of living: circumstances which, as in the meat industry, portended serious industrial turbulence in the western mining industry in 1918 and 1919.

Sugar Workers and the Dickson Award

The main section of AWU membership in North Queensland - sugar workers - also responded militantly to the economic conditions of wartime. To some extent, the fact of a recently elected and presumably sympathetic Labor government encouraged sugar workers to agitate; the immediate response of many AWU members in the far north to the election was to push for the exclusion of the remaining non-European labour in the industry. In August 1915, a dispute at South Johnstone occurred as an indirect result of the government's action in improving the wages and conditions of its employees. The labourers at the construction site of the South Johnstone sugar mill demanded a similar wage increase to that awarded by the government to railway navvies; they also added a demand for a 44 hour week. The contractors' refusal led to a strike of eight weeks' duration, after which the requested extra one shilling per day (but not the reduction of hours) was conceded.⁶⁰

Further industrial trouble ensued as rapid inflation outstripped sugar workers' wage rates, which had remained static since the

59 *Worker*, 24 September 1917.

60 *Ibid.*, 12 August 1915, 9 September 1915.

gazettal of their first industrial court award - the Macnaughton award - on 1 July 1914. Dissatisfaction was exacerbated by the brevity of the 1915 sugar season owing to drought, which meant that workers had no prospect of earning as much money as in a normal harvest. In late August and September 1915 Mossman cane cutters went on strike for an extra shilling per ton over the Macnaughton award rates. The ASPA and the state executive of the AWA agreed to compromise, but the local unionists refused to recognise the agreement and did not return to work until granted the increase by the farmers.⁶¹ Cane cutters and mill hands at Mourilyan, Babinda and Mulgrave, all in the far north, were also able to force the concession of payment for time lost at their mills because of wet weather and machinery breakdowns.⁶²

Although these disputes were only small and local, discontent with existing conditions in the sugar industry was clearly evident. As the 1915 season drew to a close, the columns of the *Worker* carried unequivocal warnings that wages must be improved. A northern district AWU organiser, Con. Ryan, urged the necessity of "a little more militancy" in the sugar industry. James Moir, the far northern district secretary of the union, predicted that "conditions for both mill and field workers will have to be much improved next year, otherwise there will be trouble ahead". Similar warnings were voiced by northern representatives at the annual delegate meeting of the AWU in Brisbane in January 1916.⁶³ Shortly afterwards, the union filed a claim in the industrial court for a new award for sugar field and mill workers, notwithstanding the complaint by at least one employer that such action was "very bad form and unpatriotic".⁶⁴

61 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 9 September 1915; *Worker*, 28 October 1915; QPD CXX (25 August 1915), p.410.

62 *Worker*, 9, 30 September 1915; *Third Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1916*, p.21.

63 *Worker*, 28 October 1915, 18 November 1915; *Third Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1916*, pp.21-22.

64 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 9 March 1916.

Under the *Industrial Peace Act*, there was provision for only one industrial court judge (Macnaughton); when he was busy, acting judges could be appointed for short periods to clear up the backlog of claims. On 28 October 1915 the government appointed as acting judge, Frederick Dickson, a senior legal officer in the justice department who later became solicitor-general. In May 1916 Dickson began taking evidence for the sugar workers' award in Cairns before moving down the coast and concluding in Brisbane in July. During the lengthy hearing, the sugar harvest, which in contrast to the previous year promised a bumper crop, got under way. Workers anxiously awaited the determination of the award for there was as yet no indication of the conditions under which they would be working for the season; to accept work in these circumstances was, according to one AWU organiser, "like buying a pig in a bog".⁶⁵

But it was sugar industry employers who felt that they had been wronged when Dickson finally delivered the award on 23 August 1916. In a judgment of more than one hundred typed pages the acting judge presented the results of his exhaustive and detailed enquiry into not only the economics but also the industrial relations of sugar production in Queensland. His award comprised wage increases of between 40% and 50% to all employees; moreover, these provisions were made retrospective to 11 June. Dickson also abolished the "retention money" clause, by which employers had retained a percentage of each worker's wages until the end of the season as a guarantee against employees failing to fulfil their contracts. Furthermore, the Mackay district was included in the northern zone, where award wages were now up to 10% higher than in the south. Mackay had formerly occupied an intermediate position on the wages scale for most sugar industry occupations. Finally, Dickson inferred that it was only in deference to the exigencies of war that he still maintained a working week of 48 hours rather than the 44 hours demanded by the unions.⁶⁶

65 *Worker*, 3 August 1916.

66 *QGG*, CVII, 96 (15 September 1916), pp.789-820; *Worker*, 24 August 1916.

In making the sugar workers' award, Dickson was clearly influenced by the enormous cost of living increase since the previous award in July 1914, by the evidence of the wealth of the sugar millers and refiners, and by the fact that the relative financial position of the farmers had improved since the Labor Government's introduction of cane prices boards.⁶⁷ In reaching his determination, Dickson also appeared to have given greater weight to the position of the mills than to that of the farmers: he showed little patience with some of the employers' evidence, describing the estimate of sugar growing costs presented by the Liberal member for Mirani, Edmund Swayne (himself a sugar farmer), as "inflated" and "absurd".⁶⁸ The acting judge also seemed more impressed with the prospects of a very profitable sugar season in 1916 than with the realities of intermittent poor harvests.⁶⁹

Dickson was struck by the "vindictiveness and spleen between employer and employee" in the sugar industry,⁷⁰ which also proved a prophetic remark since the new sugar award was the signal for a bitter furore affecting not only industrial relations but state and federal politics. Sugar producers quickly declared that it was a death sentence for the industry; they were joined by the press, conservative politicians and chambers of commerce throughout the sugar districts, all of whom proclaimed the employers' inability to pay the prescribed wages. The intensity of the employers' reaction was illustrated by a large meeting of Mackay sugar growers on 26 August, just three days after the announcement of the award:

67 *QGG*, CVII, 96, pp.794-795, 798. The Commonwealth Statistician estimated that retail prices in Queensland rose by 28% between July 1914 and July 1916. *CYB*, 10, 1916, p.1110.

68 *QGG*, CVII, 96, p.797.

69 *Ibid.*, p.795.

70 *Ibid.*, p.794.

the meeting resolved that "owing to the impossible and ruinous nature" of the Dickson award, Mackay farmers would immediately cease harvesting operations until it was abolished. The ASPA advised all farmers and millers to take similar action.⁷¹

On 29 August 1916 the Queensland legislative assembly, on a motion for adjournment by Swayne, debated the effects of the Dickson award. Swayne and other opposition speakers demanded that the government immediately intervene and rescind the award; failure to do so would lead to the imminent demise of sugar production in the state. The Labor government in fact found itself in a difficult and embarrassing predicament. Pledged to assist sugar farmers - indeed relying on their political support in various electorates - it could hardly ignore the situation in the sugar districts and hope to ride out the storm. Of the Labor parliamentarians, only the radical Charles Collins, now the member for Bowen, braved the ire of sugar farmers in his electorate by venturing a vigorous justification of the Dickson award.⁷² By the same token, the government could scarcely interfere with an arbitration award perchance favourable to employees: to do so would not only destroy the labour movement's faith in the process of arbitration but make nonsense of the Labor Party's claim to be champion of the workers. Accordingly, the parliamentary debate was characterised on both sides by evasion of the real issues at hand. The Opposition preached darkly of the evils of "socialism"; Theodore, for the government, deplored the Opposition's hypocrisy:

71 *Cairns Post*, 25 August 1916; *Bowen Independent*, 29 August 1916; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 10 October 1916.

72 *QPD CXXIII* (29 August 1916), pp.136-138.

The same hon. members who have been condemning the government for not enforcing the Industrial Peace Act against the workers who are alleged to be on strike at various places, are now encouraging the farmers and millowners all over Queensland to go on strike.⁷³

The state government quickly sought the most expedient solution to the sugar industry crisis - and to its own predicament - by asking the federal government to increase the price of raw sugar, which would enable growers to pay the new award rates. However, in the climate of intense political feelings aroused both by the conscription controversy and the public discord between Ryan, the Queensland premier, and Hughes, the Australian prime minister, early in September 1916 the latter refused to raise the price of raw sugar.⁷⁴ Within a few weeks the growers' and millers' "strike" spread. Led by the Mackay district, all mills south of Townsville ceased crushing, while in the far north, after some confusion, mills and farmers decided to proceed with harvesting but refused to pay the Dickson award. The consequence was, as the *Australian Sugar Journal* reported,

73 *Ibid.*, p.128. Cf. W.J. Dunstan, state secretary of the AWU, in *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1917*, p.7: ". . . we have heard from public press and platforms many statements regarding workmen refusing to carry out awards when made. The case of the employers in the sugar industry is one of the clearest cases in the history of industrial arbitration where one side absolutely refused to carry out the decision of the court". The government could probably only have interfered with the award by special legislation, which might, as Theodore said, "destroy the whole essence of arbitration". *QPD loc.cit.*

74 Ryan to Hughes, 31 August 1916; Theodore to Ryan, 4 September 1916, item 6723/1916, Pre/A557, QSA.

. . .widespread unemployment in the sugar districts, a serious curtailment of sugar production, and a stoppage of cultivation which must militate against future crops, to say nothing of the incalculable damage to credit throughout North Queensland, and the anxiety and loss imposed upon a deserving class of agriculturalists, already suffering heavily under the effects of last year's drought, and other adverse conditions.⁷⁵

Still insisting that the award should be unilaterally revoked by the government, the ASPA, an organisation dominated by millers, and the UCGA, confined to sugar growers only, applied to Judge Macnaughton to rescind his subordinate's award. But Macnaughton ruled that such an application must be heard by the original judge, Dickson himself. The producers then appealed to the Supreme Court to declare the award invalid. On 5 October 1916 the full bench of the court, after severely criticising Dickson for "disrupting" the sugar industry, annulled the retrospective clauses but found that in its essential determination of wages and conditions the award was *intra vires*.⁷⁶ The ASPA thereupon appealed against this judgment to the High Court of Australia. At about the same time (early to mid-October), however, many Mackay and Bundaberg mills resumed crushing under the Dickson award - apparently influenced by the fact that most mills in the far north had not suspended operations. Nevertheless, the lengthy interruption to the harvest had already taken its toll. The best part of the crushing season had been lost, many out of work sugar hands had left for the south, and approximately 30% of the 1916 crop remained in the fields as "standover" cane for 1917.⁷⁷

75 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 10 October 1916. Cf. *Worker*, 14 September 1916; *QIG*, I, 8 (10 October 1916), p.567.

76 *QGG*, CVII, 135 (10 October 1916); *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU*, Q, 1917, p.4; Cope, *Labour Government and the Law*, p.62.

77 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 October 1916; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 8 February 1917, 5 April 1917, 5 July 1917; 'Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for 1916-17', *QPP* 1917, II, p.673; 'Annual Report of the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations', *ibid.*, p.827.

For their part, the AWU executive in the meantime quietly but firmly insisted that the Dickson award must stand unaltered, though without wishing needlessly to exacerbate public controversy. Rank and file unionists were not so conciliatory. A large and enthusiastic meeting of sugar workers at Mackay on 16 September 1916 resolved that they would not "under any circumstances tolerate any interference with the Dickson award by politicians, farmers or millers".⁷⁸ Industrial strife broke out at other centres as unionists fought for the retrospective payment of the Dickson rates despite the ruling of the Supreme Court. After a strike lasting four weeks, Mossman sugar workers were successful. Proserpine mill hands, by refusing to handle cane from those farmers withholding the increases, likewise won payment of the Dickson award retrospective to June for themselves and the cane cutters.⁷⁹ At Mulgrave Mill, south of Cairns, workers had refused to start the cutting season in June until they secured a written guarantee that the award, when delivered, would be paid from the beginning of the season. Subsequently, Mulgrave employees demanded full award payment under this guarantee, but it was only after a month-long strike in October and November 1916 that employers conceded the union claim. An associated dispute held up the nearby Hambleton mill when engineering mechanics, who were not covered by the Dickson award stopped work; their particular resentment stemmed from the long delay in their own award case, which by October 1916 had been before the court for nine months.⁸⁰

Thus the continual hold-up of sugar crushing over an industrial award which workers considered merely adequate - and belated - recompense, had the effect of arousing militant frustrations and dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly, this was in some cases translated

78 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 September 1916.

79 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 10 October 1916; *Worker*, 11 January 1917; *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1917*, p.4.

80 W.J. Dunstan to acting prime minister, 9 June 1916, item 3673/1916 pt. IV, CRS A2, AA(C); AWU branch executive minutes, 2 November 1916; *QIG, I*, 9 (10 November 1916), p.657; *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1917*, p.4.

into criticism of the union administration. Alf Moule, a far northern district organiser of the AWU, declared that

Dissatisfaction is rampant over the continual hanging on to the courts by the union. The predominant feeling amongst the men is that the union should have fought the question of retrospective pay by a general sugar strike as soon as the Full Court decision was delivered.⁸¹

Early in 1917 the AWU branch executive reprimanded the local centres of Innisfail, South Johnstone and Ayr for entering into independent negotiations with sugar industry employers over working conditions during the coming season.⁸²

With intermittent growers' strikes, workers' strikes, litigation, negotiations between state and federal authorities, and labyrinthine political posturing on all sides, the sugar industry was in a state of turmoil at the end of 1916. "Starts and stoppages of sugar mills succeed so closely", one northern newspaper confessed wearily, that it is difficult to follow them".⁸³ The situation was scarcely improved when, after circuitous deliberation, the High Court ruled in early January that the recently-passed Queensland *Industrial Arbitration Act* of 1916 validated all previous awards of the state industrial Court, including the Dickson award. The ASPA maintained its truculent attitude, asserting at its annual conference in Brisbane in February 1917 that sugar production in Queensland would cease if the Dickson award stayed in force. The ASPA also urged the Commonwealth government to intervene and take complete control of the industry. On this point, however, the ASPA conflicted with the UCGA, which was not so anti-Labor, its members fearing that federal control would mean the abolition of the cane prices boards.⁸⁴

81 *Worker*, 4 January 1917.

82 AWU branch executive minutes, 23 April 1917.

83 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 21 October 1916.

84 *Ibid.*, 22 March 1917; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 8 March 1917.

Astutely wooing the UCGA, Ryan arranged for a delegation of cane growers to put their case before the prime minister. Hughes agreed early in April 1917 to raise the price of raw sugar from £18 per ton to a guaranteed minimum of £21 per ton, subject to a review of the Dickson award. Hughes also insisted that sugar workers' wages and conditions should in these circumstances stay the same for the three year currency of the agreement with the state government. However, when Theodore subsequently convened a conference of growers, millers and workers, they failed to agree on wages, and the matter was referred to McCawley, president of the newly-constituted Court of Industrial Arbitration.⁸⁵

There it seemed likely that the affair of the Dickson award could end. But in May and again in June 1917 Hughes attempted to impose new conditions on the Queensland government, this time contending that the wages of waterside workers as well as sugar workers should remain static for three years; moreover, no new state legislation affecting the sugar industry should be introduced without the prior approval of the federal government. Ryan and Theodore argued that the first condition was not a state responsibility since waterside labour was covered by a federal award; the second condition was no more than an impractical and unwarranted interference in state rights. This conflict over the sugar industry formed part of a wider and increasingly personal conflict between Ryan and Hughes which dominated Queensland politics at this time; it was only at the urging of Queensland members of the Nationalist federal government, who feared any further postponement of the federal-state sugar agreement, that a compromise was finally reached. According to this, the federal government confirmed the £21 per ton minimum raw sugar price, while for his part Ryan assured Hughes that no further sugar legislation was intended, save for some minor amendments to the *Sugar Cane Prices Act*. The AWU signified its willingness to accept McCawley's revision of the Dickson award for a

85 Hughes to Ryan, 2 April 1917, *QPP* 1917, II, p.893; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 April 1917.

period of twelve months, though not the rather unrealistic three years stipulated by Hughes.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the sugar workers of North Queensland were probably most interested in the McCawley award, which was delivered on 28 May 1917. Sugar employers argued for the necessity of a 30% decrease in wages, the AWU for a 12% increase over the Dickson award. Using the same evidence as that heard by Dickson, McCawley only slightly reduced some of the wages rates in his predecessor's award. He did, however, reinstate the sugar districts in three zones as formerly, thus satisfying the lower wage demands of the Mackay farmers who had reacted so vigorously against the Dickson award. McCawley also restored the provision of retention money which Dickson had abolished. There was some grumbling: from millers whose wage costs remained virtually unaltered, and from workers in the far north who had won the full Dickson award by industrial action in 1916. However, under the McCawley award work now proceeded without serious hold-ups.⁸⁷

Industrial relations, on the other hand, were now even more volatile than before: the "vindictiveness and spleen" noticed by Dickson were, if anything, exacerbated by his award. A Cairns sugar farmer, remarking in March 1917 that growers were no longer employing as much labour as before, went on:

86 *QPP* 1917, II, pp.893-903. Cf. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.232-235, for a detailed discussion of the sugar crisis, and *ibid.*, ch. 10: "Confrontation", for the wrangling between Hughes and Ryan, in which issues were often subdued by personalities.

87 *QIG*, II, 7 (10 July 1917), pp.425-428; *Official Report of the Fifth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland Branch, Brisbane, January 1918* (Brisbane, 1918), p.27.

I notice many men walking up the road with "bluey" up. . . . Again, there is a deal of cadging for a bit of tucker, or for a job. This is like getting back to the conditions of a few years ago, with this difference, that while formerly a feed was given to all who asked for it, it is now frequently refused.⁸⁸

The Conscription Referendum, October 1916

Issues of industrial discord, union militancy and employer resistance to wage rises became inextricably entangled with the first conscription campaign in North Queensland. As elsewhere in Australia, once the Hughes group of conscriptionists - including the member for Herbert, Fred Bamford - left the Labor Party, the opposing sides polarised largely along the lines of existing socio-political divisions. Individual attitudes undeniably cut across party boundaries - conscription was a very personal issue and aroused intense emotions - but those most prominent in support of the referendum proposals were local dignitaries, chambers of commerce, protestant clergy and the conservative press. On the other hand, the "No" campaign in the North was based on trade union organisation and led by local union officials and Labor politicians. In North Queensland, Bamford's defection, the recurrence of waterside, meatworks and sugar strikes, and, especially, the controversy of the Dickson award all provided further dimensions of bitterness to the basic issue of conscription. Divisions and conflicts over the form and structure of society as a whole were thus superimposed on the struggle over compulsory military service overseas.⁸⁹

88 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 8 March 1917.

89 Of the voluminous historiography of the conscription referenda in Australia, the following have proved most relevant to this study: Scott, *Australia during the War*; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, ch.4; F.B. Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia, 1916-1917* (Melbourne, 1965); K.S. Inglis, 'Conscription in Peace and War 1911-1945', *Teaching History*, I, 2 (October 1967); D.J. Murphy, 'Religion, Race and Conscription in World War I', *AJPH*, XX, 2 (August 1974), pp.155-163; G.P. Shaw, *Conscription and Queensland 1916-1917*, B.A. Hons. thesis, Queensland, 1966.

Both G.P. Shaw, and to a lesser extent, Murphy contend that the conscription referenda in Queensland formed merely a part - albeit a vital one - of the political conflict which arose as Labor's determined reformism clashed with the material interests, political ambitions and professed patriotism of the capitalist establishment. The first conscription referendum thus provided an excellent opportunity for a non-Labor attack on the state government: if Labor's "socialistic" measures could be shown to be incompatible with a genuine war effort, that party would be politically discredited. To Shaw, this attempt by the non-Labor forces simultaneously to discredit the legislation and impugn the loyalty of the Labor government, though ultimately unsuccessful, assumed the proportions of a "private war" within Queensland's borders.⁹⁰

Shaw concentrates on the Brisbane political scene and is only marginally concerned with the implications of industrial conflict in North Queensland, but he still regards the Dickson award crisis as an important element in the political "private war". The full extent to which class antagonism over wages and working conditions formed a pervasive background to the conscription campaign of 1916 in the North can be seen from a juxtaposition of vital events: the proposals for the referendum were announced at the end of August, though some move towards the introduction of conscription had been expected for months; waterside workers were on strike in the town of Mackay in July and during the entire month of August 1916; Townsville meatworkers were idle during June and October; miners in the west and far north agitated for higher wages during the same period; the Dickson award imbroglio began virtually at the same time as the referendum was announced, and continued until well after polling day on 28 October 1916.

90 Shaw, *Conscription and Queensland*, Ch. 2; G.P. Shaw, 'Patriotism versus Socialism: Queensland's Private War, 1916', *AJPH* XIX, 2 (August 1973), pp.167-178; Murphy, 'Queensland', pp.192-195, and *T.J. Ryan*, chs. 8, 9, 13, *passim*.

At the height of both the controversy over the sugar industry and the conscription campaign, a northern unionist wrote to the *Worker*:

The Dickson award for the sugar workers still is the sensation of the season, and in the minds of the cane growers and the Tory press the war and conscription are quite tin pot affairs compared with the prospect of having to give the sugar workers a fair deal.⁹¹

Judging by local press coverage and public agitation, for a number of weeks the sugar question was indeed more important even than conscription as a divisive political issue in the North. An *Australian Sugar Journal* correspondent acknowledged the overriding importance of industrial matters during September-October 1916.

The topsy-turvyness of things, caused by the Dickson award, overshadows everything else, so much so that nothing else seems to count. Even the war takes secondary place.⁹²

Conflict over conscription accordingly became intertwined with economic conflict over workers' wages and union militancy.

To the advocates of conscription, convinced of the absolute necessity and rectitude of their cause, the anti-conscriptionists were not only disloyal and lacking in moral principle but also closely identified with militant trade unionism. This connection was readily drawn throughout Australia - in North Queensland the more distinctly since it was the AMIEU which initiated the anti-conscription movement in Townsville. On 20 July and 13 August 1916 the AMIEU convened two public meetings to oppose conscription even before the referendum was announced.⁹³ Throughout North Queensland, the unions -

91 *Worker*, 7 September 1916.

92 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 10 October 1916.

93 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 August 1916, 14 August 1916.

especially the AMIEU and the AWU - provided the dynamic of the anti-conscription movement. Accordingly, the pro-conscription campaign linked the "No" campaign with strikes, and connected both with the alleged prevalence of an avowedly disloyal IWW: the IWW was blamed for the Mackay waterfront hold-up and for suspicious cane fires in areas where sugar workers were on strike. Thus industrial disturbances were expressly associated with the syndicalists' attitude to the war.⁹⁴ As the referendum drew nearer, trade unionists were held responsible for increasing street violence. Cane cutters were said to be the chief offenders at a *mêlée* in Cairns which the entire local police force was unable to contain; disruptions and assaults in Townsville were allegedly caused by meatworkers.⁹⁵

On the other hand, conscription to the labour movement was the weapon of capitalist oppression, the instrument for deporting agitators, of breaking up unions, and of depleting the supply of white labour as a subterfuge for the importation of coloured workers. The "No" campaign also argued that conscription was unnecessary to the war effort since Australia had already done her share; the Allies would win without Australian conscripts. It was stressed that conscription was against all democratic principles and individual freedoms. Yet although the conscriptionist could be represented as a murderer, or at least as a malingerer glad to have others fight his battles, the most persistent theme in the North Queensland "anti" campaign was that unionism itself was under attack. Thus sugar workers simultaneously resolved against conscription and

94 *Ibid.*, 15 August 1916, 12 October 1916, 23 October 1916; *Cairns Post*, 4 September 1916.

95 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 September 1916, 23 October 1916; *Cairns Post*, 11 October 1916.

expressed determination to uphold the Dickson award.⁹⁶ A telling weapon in the "No" arsenal was the use of direct quotations from articles appearing in the daily press: the Brisbane *Telegraph* in urging the case for conscription trumpeted that a "Yes" victory would be "the deadliest blow ever dealt to Industrial Unionism".⁹⁷

The theme of conscription as an assault on trade unionism was thus an important element of the referendum campaign throughout Australia, as Turner and Shaw have acknowledged. Not only that, Turner's work, and the union histories of Gollan, Hagan and Merritt, also indicate that conscription was an important aspect of conflict arising from the economic dislocation wrought by war.⁹⁸ North Queensland was hardly unique in this respect: a wide range of economic and social grievances throughout Australia were caught up in the issue of conscription. Nevertheless, in North Queensland, the intensity of industrial disturbances, especially the Dickson award crisis, perhaps lent greater force to the conscription controversy as an expression of class conflict - of which Shaw's private political "war" was merely one symptom.

96 Matt McCabe charged "capitalists" with "seizing this opportunity to strike a blow at the Labour movement by trading upon the patriotic feelings of the people". (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 October 1916). Jack Dash warned that conscription for defence would be followed by industrial conscription (*ibid.*, 7 October 1916). James Stopford declared that "If conscription was introduced there would be no sugar strikes as the women would have to go out and work in the canefields". (*Bowen Independent*, 17 October 1916). The history of labour in North Queensland ensured that the argument that conscription would lead to the removal of white workers and their replacement by coloured labour was used frequently. Stated in its crudest form, by McCormack in Townsville, this was that "the black men would come here if they sent the white men away". (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 25 October 1916).

97 Cit. *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 October 1916; *Worker*, 26 October 1916.

98 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.106-113; Shaw, *Conscription and Queensland*, pp.5-8, 35-38; Gollan, *Coalminers of NSW*, pp.142-146; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, pp.190-193; J.A. Merritt, *A History of the Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia, 1909-1952*, Ph.D. thesis, ANU, 1968, p.85.

On 28 October 1916 Australian voters rejected the referendum proposals for compulsory military service. Nationwide, the vote for "No" was 51.61%; in Queensland it was 52.69%. North Queensland electors voted decisively if not overwhelmingly against conscription. In the coastal and hinterland electorate of Herbert, the "No" vote was 53.14%; in Kennedy, the western pastoral and mining electorate, it was 59.42% - the highest figure for "No" in the state. The majority for "No" was not surprising in view of the vigour of the anti-conscription campaign. Indeed, especially in Herbert, it would perhaps seem more surprising not that conscription was defeated, but that so many people voted for it.⁹⁹

Various historians suggest that the vote of Irish Catholics was important in the national defeat of conscription in 1916. The ruthless suppression of the Sinn Fein rebellion in Ireland that year aroused among many Australian Catholics a reaction against Britain and consequently against support for the Allied cause in the War. The strident anti-conscription stand of some prominent Catholic clergy was a major feature of the referendum campaign in southern states.¹⁰⁰ In southern Queensland too, a bitter religious sectarianism developed at this time.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the role of the Irish Catholic vote in North Queensland remains problematical. The local Catholic church was silent on the issue of conscription

99 *CPP 1914-1917*, II, pp.795-796. See also P. Bastian, 'The 1916 Conscription Referendum in New South Wales', *Teaching History*, 5, 1 (June 1971), p.36: "When one considers the groups and interests that were aroused into opposing conscription in New South Wales, it is not really surprising that conscription was defeated but that its advocates could poll so well".

100 A.D. Gilbert, 'The Conscription Referenda 1916-17: the Impact of the Irish Crisis', *Historical Studies*, 53 (October 1969); A.D. Gilbert, 'Protestants, Catholics and Loyalty: an Aspect of Conscription Controversies, 1916-17', *Politics*, 6, 1 (May 1971); M. McKernan, 'Catholics, Conscription and Archbishop Mannix', *Historical Studies*, 68 (April 1977).

101 Shaw, 'Patriotism versus Socialism'; Murphy, 'Religion, Race and Conscription in World War I'.

and there is no direct evidence of sectarian conflict in the region. Voting figures suggest, however, that the Catholic vote may have been important in the Innisfail area, which had a large Irish population and which returned a "No" vote of 72.72%.¹⁰²

Clearly, with such an emotional and individual issue as conscription, it is questionable whether the principal issues advanced by the campaigners were of overriding significance in determining the outcome of the referendum. Consequently, attempts to isolate any decisive group amongst those voting "No" invariably founder, as did the *Townsville Bulletin's* conjecture on the diverse interests involved. It is significant, however, that the *Bulletin's* explanation gave precedence to "Labor voters who were afraid the Trade Unions would be ruined", and continued:

married women fearing conscription would be used against their husbands, exemption courts which showed little respect for persons or prejudice, employers fearing loss of employees, farmers and dairy men fearing for their produce, and the eligible single men, and their cousins, and aunts, and many men of means fearing a greater conscription of wealth.¹⁰³

The Conscription Aftermath: Labour in 1917

Leaving aside speculation about the reasons for the actual referendum voting figures, it is less difficult to assess the effects of the conscription altercation both on the labour movement and within North Queensland society generally. Again, the most

102 *CFP* 1914-1917, II, p.800. On the other hand, the vote in Innisfail, a staunch Labor town, may support the view that voting in the conscription referendum was largely determined by habitual party allegiance: see Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.113-114. For studies of the referenda in North Queensland, see Douman, *Townsville, 1914-1919*, pp.13-46, and Hunt, *Federal Politics*, ch. 3.

103 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 30 October 1916.

significant factor in such an evaluation is the extent to which the socially divisive issue of conscription *per se* formed a focus for antagonisms engendered by industrial disputes. It can be shown that the bitter invective and violence of the conscription campaign was not only reinforced by but in turn augmented the abiding wage conflict between employers and employees. Such conflict created a split in the community which transcended the norm of political behaviour.

On the purely political level, the 1916 conscription referendum was swiftly followed by official confirmation of the previously unofficial exclusion of conscriptionists from the Labor Party. On 14 November 1916 Hughes led his followers from caucus to set up a "National Labor" government for a few months before a formal merger was arranged with the Liberal Party to create the Nationalist Party. The Queensland CPE of the Labor Party had already expelled Bamford and Givens on 30 October 1916.¹⁰⁴

In the North the conscription split had caused some ructions in local Labor organisation, though the most serious effect on parliamentary politics in the region was simply Bamford's defection. Such was his personal following in North Queensland after fifteen years of representing Herbert, and such was the manifest disarray of the federal Labor Party, that Bamford was re-elected as a Nationalist in 1917 and in every subsequent federal election until his retirement in 1925. The election of 5 May 1917 was a particularly tumultuous campaign, during which Bamford was continually reviled and shouted down by Labor supporters for "ratting" on the party. The Labor campaign in Herbert, however, was weakened by the mediocrity of its candidate - an Innisfail journalist and Irishman, Eugene McKenna. North Queensland electors also shared the belief of many Australians that Labor, demoralised by the loss of its federal leaders, and now under the overt control of its industrial wing, would not prosecute the war effort with the determination of the Nationalists. Consequently, in an election victory in which the

104 *Caucus Minutes*, I (14 November 1916), pp.438-439; CPE minutes, 30 October 1916.

Nationalists won all Senate seats and 53 House of Representatives seats to Labor's 22, Bamford captured 51.31% of the vote, gaining Herbert by 949 votes. Labor retained the adjacent seat of Kennedy, though with reduced support: Charles MacDonald had won 74.38% of the vote in 1913 and had been unopposed in 1914; he managed a still safe 62.84% in 1917.¹⁰⁵

During and after 1916 the Australian labour movement veered to the left, becoming both more radical politically and more militant industrially. This was an outcome of the conjunction of several factors: economic discontent, the *angst* of the conscription campaign, and the Labor split, the last not only shearing off the more conservative section of the movement but leaving an increasingly authoritarian Commonwealth government.¹⁰⁶ In Queensland the leftward swing was not so apparent since the state PLP was already almost unanimously anti-conscriptionist and moreover pressing resolutely ahead with reformist legislation. Nevertheless similar influences were at work among the trade unions in Queensland - and especially, it seemed, in the North - as elsewhere in Australia; the conscription campaign, fought against a background of intermittent industrial conflict, left a residue of heightened class consciousness in the northern labour movement.

The struggle against conscription had allied moderate and orthodox Laborites, who still supported a vigorous Australian war effort, not only with militant unionists whose main concern was the adverse economic effects of war, but with radical anti-war socialists and pacifists. In the process, the labour movement became more and more inclined to question both Allied war aims and the extent of Australia's contribution to the hostilities, reflecting a more general feeling of war weariness in the Australian community.

105 *CPP 1917-1919*, IV, pp.1410-1411; Sawyer, *Federal Politics and Law*, p.157; Hunt, *op.cit.*, pp.60-71.

106 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, ch.4; see above, fn.98.

Another aspect of the conscription campaign was that trade unionists became more aware of the benefits of concerted action; ideas of industrial unionism often with distinct syndicalist overtones, thus gained wider acceptance - though neither industrial unionism nor the amalgamation movement had much practical organisational success. Instead, unionists sought closer unity in regional trade union alliances. The Townsville Industrial Council was established in late 1916 as a logical extension both of the anti-conscription campaign and of active co-operation by the AMIEU, ASE, AWU and FEDFA during a dispute at the Alligator Creek meatworks. A trades and labour council was formed in Cairns at about the same time.¹⁰⁷

But the unity of the anti-conscription campaign to some extent veiled incipient differences of opinion within the ranks of political and industrial labour in the North. In particular, there were growing indications that a small, though increasingly significant minority was disillusioned with arbitration and unsympathetic with the delays and compromises of the political system.

Throughout the 1916 referendum and the 1917 federal election campaigns the conscriptionists and Nationalists had done their best to link the Labor Party and trade unions with the IWW.¹⁰⁸ In reality, just as the wobblies denigrated everything orthodox labour stood for - politics, arbitration, mass and craft unionism - so the mainstream of the movement vehemently dissociated itself from the IWW. In July 1916 Theodore vigorously denounced the IWW in a speech aimed primarily at western pastoral workers and northern meatworkers. His words epitomised the attitude of both the Labor Party and moderate trade unionists:

107 AMIEU northern district council minutes, 18 November 1916; AMIEU northern district general meeting minutes, 31 December 1916, 8 April 1917.

108 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 15 August 1916; *Cairns Post*, 4 September 1916. G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol.IV: *Communism and Social Democracy 1914-1931* (London, 1958), pt.2, p.721, describes how in America employers "did their utmost to identify the entire movement with its very militant left wing, of which the symbol was the I.W.W."

The IWW-ite preaches a doctrine that was promulgated in a country where the industrial workers are ground under the iron heel of Capitalism, where the workers have no liberty and few rights, no political rights, no arbitration, and no advanced legislation of any kind, and where, when a dispute occurs between wealthy corporations and the employers, armed strike-breakers and gunmen are called out, and the places of the workers are filled with blacklegs. In such a country the IWW policy may be justified; it may be the only means which the worker has to get redress; but in Australia, there is not a shred nor shadow of justification for such a policy. Here the worker has full liberty of organisation to get his rights, full political representation, and more than that, complete control of the political machine. . . .I believe every person in Queensland who will in the present circumstances invite the workers to adopt sabotage, or any phase of sabotage, is an enemy of unionism - a curse on the country - and should be treated as an industrial parasite and not permitted into the ranks of intelligent unionism.¹⁰⁹

It is difficult to gauge with any certainty the amount of support enjoyed by the IWW in North Queensland during 1916 and 1917. Historians have differed widely in their assessment of the significance of the wobblies in Australian labour history generally. Childe, Fitzpatrick and Turner assign to the IWW an important, even decisive influence both on industrial militancy and the spread of ideas of industrial unionism during the first world war.¹¹⁰ Other scholars have asserted that the role of the IWW has been vastly over-rated; Bede Nairn even questions "whether the organisation is not better placed in a history of Australian crime rather than of

109 *Worker*, 13 July 1916.

110 Childe, *How Labour Governs*, ch.X; B.C. Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement* (Melbourne, 2nd edition, 1968), p.166; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.64-66, and I. Turner, *Sydney's Burning* (Melbourne, 1967), *passim*.

Australian labour".¹¹¹ The most balanced estimate of the relevance of the IWW is made by P.J. Rushton, who argues that if the wobblies are viewed only in the context of their own time, "it is difficult to regard them as an authentic and integral segment of the labour movement"; their abuse and rejection of all that mainstream political and industrial labour represented "would seem to argue that the I.W.W. was an alien body". On the other hand:

. . .if the Wobblies are viewed within the broad sweep of labour history they can be seen as a legitimate segment. The labour movement is perennially subject to internal tensions - tensions expressed in terms of left versus right, idealist versus realist, trade unionists versus politicians, caucus versus the party machinery, etc. - and the I.W.W. formed for a limited period an element in an internal vector of forces. The I.W.W. was a reaction - neither the first nor the last - to the more or less Fabian reformist views and attitudes held by the majority of the movement.¹¹²

As we have seen, the IWW certainly achieved a substantial measure of support in the North, especially among the Townsville meatworkers and the Cloncurry miners. The reception accorded the IWW's direct action syndicalism, however, varied at different times and places; it was naturally most favourable whenever and wherever economic conditions already caused discontent. Thus when sugar workers became resentful of their static wages at a time of rapid inflation in late 1915, wobbly organisers reported that their propaganda in the northern cane fields was having a marked effect; thereafter there was no further mention of IWW support among sugar

111 Review of Turner, *Sydney's Burning*, in *Historical Studies*, 49 (October 1967), p.131; I. Bedford, 'The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia', *Labour History*, 13 (November 1967), pp.40-46; Hagan, *Printers and Politics*, p.193; Armstrong, *Closer Unity*, pp.193, 210-215.

112 P.J. Rushton, 'The Revolutionary Ideology of the Industrial Workers of the World in Australia', *Historical Studies*, 59 (October 1972), p.425.

workers.¹¹³ On the other hand, for the western miners and the meatworkers, harsh working and living conditions and a tradition of militancy were the context in which IWW slogans and elements of IWW philosophy were eagerly seized upon as auxiliary weapons in the battle to win higher wages and better conditions from employers. Thus certain Labor politicians such as Theodore misconstrued the importance of the IWW in castigating it *per se*: support for the IWW in North Queensland was more a symptom than a cause of burgeoning union militancy.

It is impossible to estimate the actual membership of the IWW in the region; indeed there are no reliable means of distinguishing between the unknown (though still small) number of sympathisers and fellow-travellers of the organisation and those who actually joined it. The wobbly organiser Shannessey claimed in August 1917 that there were "about 100 [IWW] workers" in Townsville alone; a police sergeant reported of a meeting in Townsville at about the same time that "the attendance was about 150. Mostly all members of the IWW organisation and a large percentage being Russians and Danes".¹¹⁴ There may in fact be some truth in the oft-repeated assertion that the IWW drew most of its support from transient foreigners and other non-local itinerant workers. As Shannessey declared at a meeting on the beach at Townsville:

We are accused of being foreigners and I can tell you we have some very good foreigners amongst us too. . . .A man born in Townsville he cannot revise the position as well as these good foreigners. He is only a sympathiser and will not take part in anything, he is too frightened of hurting his skin.¹¹⁵

113 *Direct Action*, 1 September 1915, 1 October 1915, 8 January 1916.

114 Inspector Sweetman to Commissioner of Police, 27 August 1917, and Sergeant Cross to Sweetman, 21 August 1917, item 8658/1917, HOM/J243, QSA.

115 *Ibid.*

The IWW attracted little interest as a formal organisation anywhere in the region; indeed its extreme anarcho-syndicalism tended to isolate it from the mainstream of political and industrial labour. Certainly no permanent trade union official in the North can be identified as having been a member of the IWW, though some members of the AMIEU boards of control probably were. Although *Direct Action* several times reported that the establishment of IWW locals in North Queensland was imminent, only one eventuated - an all-Russian local formed in Cairns in February 1916.¹¹⁶ The members had little influence among, and attracted little attention from their fellow workers; when news of the Russian revolution of February 1917 reached them, they returned home "to help to establish the IWW in Russia".¹¹⁷ That no other IWW locals were set up in North Queensland was evidence to the wobbly organisers themselves of their insubstantial hold even on the militant meatworkers and miners: ". . .if [we are] successful in launching a local in Townsville, the back country is ours", one IWW activist declared.¹¹⁸

It is significant that the IWW attracted most acceptance in North Queensland in the period from June to August 1917, when the federal government was about to suppress it through the *Unlawful Associations Act* and when the Left generally was agitating for the release of wobblies convicted of arson in Sydney. One of the main reasons for the extensive tour of the North by Jackson, Brown, and Shannessey was to inspire protests against the *Unlawful Associations Act* and to raise money for the campaign to secure the release of the "boys in jail"; it seemed rather less directly related to the propagation of IWW philosophy.¹¹⁹ A wider section of the labour movement could be more readily aroused to the support of specific and tangible causes than of anarcho-syndicalist theory.

116 *Direct Action*, 4 March 1916.

117 *Ibid.*, 12 May 1917, 28 July 1917.

118 *Ibid.*, 11 August 1917.

119 *Ibid.*, 16 June 1917, 28 July 1917.

Differing assessments of the significance of the IWW probably stem in part from the disparities relating to its very small membership (about 2000 in Australia, of whom 1500 were linked to the Sydney local);¹²⁰ its general influence in spreading syndicalist ideas; and the notoriety it achieved as the *bête noir* of respectable public opinion. In a time of war, political upheaval and industrial disputes, the influence of the IWW was freely exaggerated or over-estimated by press, politicians and the public. The police and especially military intelligence reports of subversive activity in the period after the outlawing of the IWW made unfounded and often absurd estimates of the degree of IWW-ism in North Queensland: any even slightly militant trade unionist - and many moderate ones - were arbitrarily classed as active members of the IWW.¹²¹

It is certainly true that only a small number joined the IWW and embraced its doctrine of class warfare and sabotage; it is nevertheless also true that its influence was greater than its membership suggested. The IWW was the most extreme expression of the labour movement's closer embrace of socialism and syndicalism during the first world war. But the labour movement in North Queensland was generally uninterested in doctrinal considerations; like Theodore, most workers probably thought of the IWW - if they did so at all - as an alien influence unsuited to Australian conditions. At the same time, this is not to deny that for a militant minority, the IWW's "unsophisticated type of syndicalism"¹²² epitomised their experience of, and their attitude to industrial society.

Notwithstanding that the attempt by "industrialists" to secure control over the parliamentary wing of the Labor Party had comparatively little relevance to Queensland, there was some

120 Rushton, 'The Revolutionary Ideology of the IWW', p.424.

121 Sweetman to Commissioner of Police, *loc.cit.*: List of members of the IWW, n.d. June 1918, no. 164, 66/5/115, Australian Archives, Brisbane [AA(B)].

122 Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, p.241.

dissension - mainly on the local level - between union and extra-union sections of the party. If this, on one level, reflected heightened class consciousness among unionists, equally on another it reflected the determination of some non-trade union members of the party to throw off what they saw as the taint of militant unionism. Thus a local political brawl broke out in Townsville in February 1917, when the district council of the Labor Party, then controlled by extra-union members, attempted to disqualify union officials from nominating in plebiscites for the selection of parliamentary candidates. In this dispute the CPE backed the unions, and consequently the "industrialists" - notably the AWU - emerged in control of the Townsville district council and more dominant than ever in local Labor politics.¹²³

Having regard to the vilification heaped on a section of the federal and New South Wales parliamentary parties in the months leading up to the first conscription referendum, some disillusionment was bound to rub off on Labor politics generally. Sentiments expressed at an anti-conscription meeting in Townsville on 13 August 1916 exemplified this trend. Pierce Carney, the northern district organiser of the AMIEU, stated that "the Federal Labor Party had adopted a policy of panic since the beginning of the war, and in a panicky state they were likely to foist anything on the workers". Another meatworker went further; to him, "the Labor Party was not worth a pinch of manure [*sic*]"¹²⁴.

Since these sentiments belonged to militant AMIEU members and were aimed mainly at the federal Labor Party, their significance can probably be discounted in terms of having arisen from the heat and bitterness of the conscription issue and the imminent Labor split. But militant unrest in the mining and sugar industries indicated that similar disillusionment with the restrictions of arbitration and by implication with the state Labor Party was at

123 CPE minutes, 5 February 1917.

124 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 August 1916. The meeting amended "manure" to "salt".

least present among members of the AWU, the most politically-aligned and arbitration-oriented union in the state.

Apart from the Dickson award imbroglio, the most significant event for the AWU in 1916-1917 was a strike by pastoral workers in mid-1916. Shearers and shed hands in western Queensland demanded wage rates above those set by the federal arbitration award; when refused, they went on strike. The state executive of the AWU at first resolved by a narrow vote to support the men on strike, but after a visit to Queensland by the AWU general president, Spence, and the AWU general secretary, Grayndler, the executive agreed that no action could be taken to assist the strikers. The reason given for this *volte-face* was that the annual AWU convention in February 1916 had decided on a union policy of arbitration (a motion "that arbitration be abolished and direct action be enforced" had been defeated by 21 votes to 3). The action of the AWU heads both strengthened the resolve of the strikers and increased the influence of the militants; after several weeks the pastoralists and shearing contractors gave in to the men's demands, and increased wages were paid to pastoral workers in both Queensland and New South Wales.¹²⁵

In the AWU elections in Queensland at the end of 1916, workers who could be loosely categorised as "militants" polled fairly well, drawing most of their strength from the northern and western districts. They nevertheless failed to win any important administrative positions. Mick Kelly, a former western AWU organiser who had resigned during the pastoral strike, came within six votes of defeating Dunstan for the most powerful office of state secretary; Lane did defeat Dunstan for the largely figurehead position of national vice-president (Queensland); Kelly and Lane topped the ballot for the election of three AWU delegates to the CPE. But the voting for nine state delegates to the annual Sydney convention gave a more accurate indication of the relative strength of the militant section: although both Kelly and Lane were elected,

125 AWU, Queensland branch executive minutes, 16 July 1916, 4 August 1916; *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1917*, pp.7-9.

they were joined by only one other successful candidate who could be described as a "militant".¹²⁶

The annual delegate meeting of the AWU in Brisbane in January 1917 reflected both the militant presence and the moderate dominance which characterised the AWU. Lane's motion "that only industrial unionists be endorsed as Labor candidates", which he said "was the only way of militating against apostasy", was not voted upon. Northern delegates were successful, however, in moving a rebuke to the Labor Party for not appointing acting Judge Dickson to the new industrial court. Jack Dash, the northern district secretary, thought "it was shameful that the first Judge to give the workers bare justice should not be re-appointed"; Mossy Hynes, an organiser from the same district, argued that the Labor Party "had been swayed by the capitalists and employers" and should be severely censured.¹²⁷

Further evidence of unrest and dissension within the ranks of the AWU was evident when Theodore, as special guest speaker at the delegate meeting, deplored the tendency of the rank and file to drift from the control of the executive and the annual conventions. "Independence in the workers was a great thing", said Theodore, "so long as it was intelligent, but when irresponsible was a danger".¹²⁸ Theodore's remarks were echoed and amplified in North Queensland a few months later in May 1917. The far northern district officials of the AWU were concerned that in the Innisfail district some militant sugar workers were agitating for a return to the Dickson award conditions, and in the process criticising the local and state executives of the union. Accordingly, in a "manifesto" circularised by the far northern district office, AWU members were

126 *Fourth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q. 1917*, pp.10-14. Kelly protested bitterly against the result of the ballot for state secretary, contending that the Brisbane area figures (overwhelmingly for Dunstan) were rigged. His move for a recount was lost by the narrowest of margins, 8-7, *ibid.*, p.32.

127 *Ibid.*, p.29.

128 *Ibid.*, p.20.

warned that the policy of the union was arbitration, that those who rejected it were nefariously endeavouring to destroy the AWU, and that the union officials were determined to exorcise the "militant canker".¹²⁹

There were therefore clear indications of disharmony within the labour movement in North Queensland by 1917. Such incipient discord, however, did not yet amount to significant internal conflict of a kind which characterised the movement in subsequent years. The unifying influences of the conscription issue and of a popular Labor government were more powerful than the divisive influences of disaffection with Labor reformism and arbitration.

What is evident in North Queensland in 1916 and early 1917 is that economic conditions and the political and social upheavals of conscription and industrial disputes pushed the labour movement as a whole to the left. Unionists embraced a more aggressive industrial policy, and militancy expressed itself in the waterfront, meatworks, mining and sugar strikes of 1916-1917. This militancy assumed distinct overtones of syndicalism, though of a diluted and practical rather than an ideological kind; in the latter years of the war - from late 1917 to 1919 - class consciousness increased substantially, exploding intermittently into profound social conflict and occasioning serious dissension with the labour movement.

A persistent theme in the North Queensland strikes of 1916 and 1917 was a parochial "North versus South" sectionalism which took the form of conflict between northern unionists and the head offices of the various unions in southern cities. As we have seen, a major element in the militancy of northern waterside workers was the clash between sectional claims of the local branches and the federal WWF executive. Most unionists in North Queensland would probably have agreed vehemently with the Mackay wharfies, that "nobody in the South has any right to make arrangements for local unions".¹³⁰ The

129 *Worker*, 31 May 1917.

130 *Bowen Independent*, 22 July 1916.

northern district of the AMIEU in fact set the militant pace for meatworks wage standards throughout the state; they rejected and despised the state executive's half-hearted attempts to exercise jurisdiction over the North, and also its more conciliatory approach to the employers. In the AWU, the predominant trend towards the centralisation of executive power was resisted by both the north-western miners and the northern sugar workers, who often took sectional action to improve working conditions despite the union's official adherence to arbitration.

Regionalism was also strong among the northern railway workers. The North-South bitterness engendered by the disastrous Townsville rail strike of 1914 resulted in Townsville members of the QRU breaking away and establishing a rival "all-grades" railway union.¹³¹ Despite some improvements which were conceded by the Labor government, railway workers generally remained dissatisfied with their wages and working conditions. Discontent extended throughout the state railway service, but was more readily channelled into direct action in the North where a strike brought the railway service to a complete halt for three weeks in August 1917. In contrast to the short-lived and isolated strikes of 1916 and early 1917, this railway dispute was the first of a number of northern strikes which the Labor government could neither condone nor contain; as such it formed something of a turning-point in the history of labour in North Queensland.

131 See above, Ch. VII.

CHAPTER IX

THE TAINT OF MILITANCY, 1917-1919

The labour movement in North Queensland became increasingly class-conscious during the last years of the war and in the immediate post-war period. The strikes of 1916 and 1917 were succeeded by even more turbulent industrial disorder, beginning with the railway strike of August 1917 and subsequently encompassing strikes by waterside workers, miners, sugar workers, general labourers and, pre-eminently, meatworkers. In a world climate in which labour's affinity for socialism and revolution was suddenly thrust into prominence, union militancy clashed violently with employers, a section of returned soldiers, and a conservative establishment which feared the excesses of "Bolshevism". In late 1918 and during almost the whole of 1919 deteriorating economic conditions and a high level of unemployment produced acute social upheaval in North Queensland. Industrial conflict in the region itself was intensified by Australia-wide maritime strikes which intermittently isolated the North and caused a shortage of essential food supplies in many areas. It was during this time that North Queensland first acquired notoriety as a place of lawless union militancy, exemplified by the re-christening of Townsville as "Strikesville" by an exasperated southern press.¹

In Australia generally these years saw a more aggressive assertion of working-class economic demands coupled with a keen interest in the promotion of industrial unionism. The northern railway strike occurred at the same time as the 1917 "great strike" in New South Wales, probably the most extensive industrial dispute this country has experienced;² militant action continued in 1918, and lengthy disputes involving mainly miners and maritime workers led Turner to dub 1919 "The Year of Strikes".³

1 Douman, *Townsville 1914-1919*, p.ix.

2 D. Coward, 'Crime and Punishment: the Great Strike in New South Wales, August to October 1917', in Iremonger *et al.*, *Strikes*, pp.52-53.

3 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.194, and '1914-1919', p.354.

Industrial turmoil and growing support for socialism in Australia reflected world-wide social disturbance. Economic and political pressures produced strikes in the belligerent European nations and in America in 1916 and 1917; in the latter year the Russian revolution, with its shattering implications for radicals everywhere, broke out. From 1918 to 1920 and beyond, social unrest disturbed the economy and transformed the politics of Great Britain and of other European countries.⁴ Events in North Queensland to some extent mirrored the universal social disruption.

The 1917 Rail and Waterfront Strikes

In many ways the 1917 rail strike was a turning point in the history of North Queensland labour, though the roots of the strike lay in railwaymen's long-standing grievances from the period before the accession of the Labor government in 1915. The significance of the strike was two-fold: it was the first important dispute involving government employees under the Labor administration; it was a strike specifically against an arbitration award. The first factor raised the question of public servants' loyalty, for strikes by government employees were frequently seen as defiance of constitutional authority. Thus whenever Labor was in government, there was an inherent possibility of serious rifts in the movement.⁵ The second factor involved gave doubts on the part of workers about

4 D. Geary, 'Socialism, Revolution and the European Labour Movement, 1848-1918', *The Historical Journal*, XV, 4 (1972), pp.794-803; Cole, *Communism and Social Democracy*, p.419; Cole and Postgate, *The Common People*, pp.528-539; Pelling, *American Labor*, pp.134-135. Cf. P.J. O'Farrell, 'The Russian Revolution and the Labour Movements of Australia and New Zealand, 1917-1922', *International Review of Social History*, 8, 3 (1963), pp.177-179, and R. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955* (Canberra, 1975), pp.1-5.

5 Benham and Rickard, 'Masters and Servants', p.1, and Cribb, 'State in Emergency', p.225. See also K.H. Kennedy, 'The South Johnstone Strike and Railway Lockout, 1927', *Labour History*, 31 (November 1976), pp.1-13.

the efficacy of an arbitration system sponsored by the Labor Party as the panacea for industrial discontent. Previous strikes in other industries had contributed to an atmosphere of class conflict, especially at the time of the first conscription referendum, but they were isolated affairs which scarcely questioned the role of the state arbitration court; they lacked the severe effects on North Queensland industry of the 1917 railway strike.

Writing about the 1917 rail strike, one historian, Murphy, has focussed largely on higher-level political machinations. To Murphy, the strike was yet another critical test of statesmanship which T.J. Ryan, the Premier, passed with flying colours: his tact, caution and conciliatory handling of the dispute ended the strike after a little more than three weeks, securing him the approbation of the community and the augmented support and respect of the labour movement.⁶ It is certainly true that the government's caution and readiness to consult with the striking unionists minimised internal conflict in the movement at a crucial stage. It is also highly probable that the presence of Ryan as Premier and McCawley as president of the industrial court averted an explosive situation in the North. But it is important to realise that the settlement of the dispute left a legacy of rankling resentment of the Labor government among a significant section of northern unionists. Incipient disillusionment with political reformism, already evident among a radical minority, was magnified and made more explicit by the strike. Indeed, the conflict between the Labor Party and the QRU militants, which was to be a dominant feature of the 1920s, really began in 1917.

George Rymer, northern district secretary of the QRU at the time of the 1917 strike, has remarked that ". . .it was the aftermath

6 Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.264-277, and D.J. Murphy, *The North Queensland Railway Strike, 1917*, ms. in author's possession.

of 1914",⁷ which was a dispute concerning wage disparities between tradesmen employed in the railway workshops and those in private employment. Although defeated and divided by that strike, the QRU and other railway unions nevertheless recovered swiftly when Labor came to power and actively encouraged unionism. In mid-1916 the northern Amalgamated Railways Union voted to merge with the QRU, and the north-south split in all-grades unionism was thereby healed. Significantly, however, the northern district of the re-constructed union retained "as much local autonomy as possible", controlling its own finances and industrial policy.⁸

Notwithstanding the railway workers' general satisfaction with the Labor government, discontent in the service still simmered. The main grievance remained the different rates of pay for similar work inside and outside the railways. During 1915 and 1916, while the Legislative Council's objection to the Industrial Arbitration Bill denied the railway unions access to arbitration, wage disparities increased. Railway workshops' tradesmen especially were very dissatisfied,⁹ and in 1915 and 1916 this dissatisfaction surfaced in demands for the extension and raising of allowances for "dirty" work: for boilermakers in repairing corroded and clogged boilers, carpenters repairing cattle trucks, fitters dismantling greasy and sooty machinery. On 19 February 1916 a somewhat vague minute from

7 Interview with George Rymer, Sunnybank, Brisbane, 7 January 1976. George Walter Rymer (1886-), born Birmingham, arrived Townsville February 1914, employed as wagon carpenter, railway workshops; northern district secretary QRU 1917-1920; assistant general secretary QRU 1920-1921, state president Australian Railways Union [ARU] 1921-1930, editor *Militant/Advocate*, 1920-1930. Subsequently merchant, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, till retirement.

8 Moroney, in *Railway Advocate*, July 1966.

9 McCawley later commented on "the large amount of dissatisfaction in the Service, due to the fact that the wages of the Railway Commissioner's employees had not advanced to cope with the cost of living commensurate with those outside the service. . . ." He stated that ". . .the payment to tradesmen of less than the ruling rate outside is a constant source of friction". *QIG*, II, 8 (10 August 1917), pp.492, 504.

the Minister for Railways was taken as authorising the payment of "dirt money" to all workshop employees engaged on repair work. Subsequently, the expense and confusion of fresh demands for allowances for dirty jobs led the government to appoint a police magistrate, Arthur Dean, as a Royal Commissioner to inquire into the whole question of dirt money.¹⁰

Dirt money payments accordingly ceased on 31 October, an assurance being given that the commission's final recommendations would be effective from 1 November. Notwithstanding this assurance, the twenty members of the Boilermakers' Union employed in the Townsville railway workshops went on strike on 9 November 1916, demanding not only the uninterrupted payment of dirt money but also "outside" hours and wages, the latter being some 30% higher than those paid in the railways. The boilermakers remained out until 18 February 1917, when the government granted their requests. ASE members in the Townsville workshops immediately threatened to strike unless they too were conceded outside conditions. Their demand was agreed to, and increases were paid from 19 February, the date of the boilermakers' rise.¹¹ Members of those two unions now worked four hours less and were paid more than members of other unions working side by side with them. This situation naturally aggravated discontent, especially - though by no means exclusively - among the other workshop employees, most of whom were members of either the QRU or AWU.

On 20 February 1917 a meeting of Townsville railway workers convened by the AWU demanded outside rates for all tradesmen and

10 *Daily Standard*, 23 May 1916; 'Annual Report of the Commissioner for Railways', *QPP* 1917, III, pp.28-29; 'Royal Commission on the Payment of "Dirt Money" to Employees of the Queensland Railway Department', *ibid.*, 1916-1917, III, p.1067ff. Cf. *ibid.*, p.1087: "As various classes of workers heard of others getting the 'dirt money' allowance, or even of having a chance of getting it, they naturally desired to participate, and fresh applications came in".

11 *Labour Bulletin* 17 (January-March 1917); CPE minutes, 18 February 1917; *Railway Advocate*, July 1966; *Boilermakers' Journal* 9 (April 1917), cited in "Notes from Boilermakers' Journal 1915-1926", compiled by J. Egerton [AEU deposit, E220/669, RSSS-ANUA].

labourers in the North. The Minister for Railways, Harry Coyne, refused, suggesting that the unions approach the arbitration court, which, if it so decided, could make a subsequent award retrospective. The northern district council of the QRU was already preparing a claim for an award for the northern railway workshops; this was submitted on 22 February 1917 by the QRU general secretary, Frank Cooper. McCawley then called a compulsory conference of representatives of the AWU, QRU, and the Commissioner for Railways for 27 February, to consider an award for employees in the northern railway workshops.¹²

However, on 23 February 1917 a mass stopwork meeting of all Townsville railway workers protested against what they described as an attempt to confine the dispute to the workshops. It was resolved:

That this "stop work" meeting of all grades of employees again requests the Minister for Railways to give an assurance that the Arbitration Court award will be retrospective from February 19, and that the court will sit immediately and embrace all the employees. A compulsory conference for any one section is useless unless it includes all.¹³

The minister reiterated that the matter was up to the court. On 27 February McCawley took official cognisance only of the dispute in the workshops, intimating however that he was "inclined" to make an award retrospective to 19 February; he then adjourned the conference to Townsville, to consider a general claim for all northern railway workers which, it was stated, was in the course of preparation.¹⁴

The court sat in Townsville from 27 to 31 March 1917 but in the midst of the proceedings the unions notified their intention of claiming an award for railway workers in the central and southern

12 *QPP* 1917, III, p.29.

13 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 24 February 1917.

14 *QIG*, II, 8 (10 August 1917), p.502: "Railway Employees' Award, Whole State".

divisions. McCawley agreed to consolidate the claims, and adjourned the conference to Brisbane at a later date. Before concluding in Townsville, however, the judge stated that with regard to the northern division, he was

. . .disposed to consider favourably the making of any award retrospective from February 19 so far as relates to the claims of the general secretary of the QRU, in his claim of February 22, and the secretary of the Northern district of the AWU in his telegram of February 20. All other questions of retrospectivity to remain open.¹⁵

On 16 April the court hearing re-opened in Brisbane and on 4 May McCawley issued an interim award for railway workshop employees in the northern division. This award granted rates and conditions on a level equal to those in private employment, with wages being paid retrospectively to 19 February 1917, the date of the ASE and boilermakers' rise.¹⁶ On 4 July McCawley finally delivered the award for all Queensland railway employees. It comprised substantial increases in rates of pay for all sections of the service, granting conditions at least equal to those outside. Dirt money was abolished, since it was mutually agreed that the new rates of pay should compensate for objectionable work. Working hours in the North were set at 44 hours per week; in the rest of the state they remained at 48. The crucial feature of the award, however, was that it was retrospective

15 *Brisbane Courier*, 13 August 1917. Dash's telegram of 20 February 1917 asked the Minister "to grant all tradesmen employed by the Railway Department sixteen shillings per day, and all other labour be granted 12 shillings and eight pence per day. . .". *QPP* 1917, III, p.29. Because of the reference to "tradesmen" and since the mass meeting followed the granting of outside rates to ASE members in the workshops, some doubt arises as to whether this telegram referred to railway employees generally. McCawley and the Minister believed that it referred only to the other *workshop* employees in the North.

16 *QIG*, II, 6 (11 June 1917), p.354: "Railway Workshops Employees' Award, Northern Division".

only to 1 July, not, as the unions had urged, to 19 February.¹⁷

These proceedings leading up to the railway workers' award have been described in detail because it was the issue of retrospectivity which caused the strike. Northern railway unionists claimed that McCawley had implied that the award would take effect from 19 February in the entire northern division. But McCawley clearly had only workshop employees in mind when he spoke favourably of retrospectivity on 27 February in Brisbane and in March at Townsville. On the other hand, it is also clear that union advocates and railway workers genuinely believed that the award increases would be retrospective for northern employees generally. McCawley may even have unwittingly nourished such a belief because there was some doubt whether Jack Dash's telegram conveying the demands of the meeting on 20 February related solely to workshop employees, although the judge and the government evidently assumed that it did.¹⁸

Moreover, the workers' meeting on 23 February had clearly demonstrated that northern unionists - unlike McCawley - acknowledged no distinction between the workshop employees and other sections of the railway staff. Thus the interim award granted to northern workshop employees on 4 May, which to McCawley apparently settled the question of retrospectivity, to the unionists seemed confirmation that they would all receive increased wages from 19 February. As the *Daily Standard* later reported:

17 *Ibid.*, II, 8, pp.502-505. In the last paragraph of his judgment McCawley wrote: "Reasons were strongly advanced for dating the award back, but taking into consideration all the circumstances, including the absence of delay in making the award and the fact that the financial year commences on 1 July, I have decided upon that as the day on which the award shall take effect".

18 See above, fn. 15. On 27 February McCawley stated: "I am prepared to favourably consider the claims *actually made* by Mr Dash and Mr Cooper, the other questions of retrospective effects to be decided by the Court". [my emphasis].

The men claim that as all sections were represented in the original dispute, that in common justice they should all have received the same fair consideration from the Court and that the decision to cut a large proportion of the workers from the retrospective pay was both illogical and unfair.¹⁹

To this persuasive argument the men added the further claim that both the Minister and the Commissioner for Railways had promised that they would not oppose retrospectivity during the hearing of the claim, although in the event both had strenuously done so.

While resentment towards the retrospectivity decision was its principal cause, the background to the 1917 strike was the growing militancy of rank and file railwaymen in Queensland. This militancy, stemming both from specific job grievances and the general leftward trend of the broad labour movement, was expressed in the election of a number of syndicalist union officials in 1917. In Brisbane, Tim Moroney, a young, physically imposing and extremely capable committed socialist, prepared to take over the reins of QRU leadership from the moderate general secretary, Frank Cooper.²⁰ In the North, George Rymer, an astute, diminutive Englishman, was elected northern district secretary of the QRU. Other militants assisting him on the district committee included the chairman, Ernie Sampson, whose position as

19 *Daily Standard*, 13 August 1917.

20 Francis Arthur Cooper (1872-1949), born NSW, tramways worker Brisbane, sacked 1912; QREA and QRU general secretary, 1912-1917; MLA Bremer 1915-1946; Secretary Public Instruction 1932-1938; Treasurer 1938-1942; Premier 1943-1946.

Timothy Moroney (1890-1944), born Brisbane; clerk railways, professional cyclist; general secretary QRU and Queensland branch ARU 1917(?) - 1944; president ARU 1935-1944; vice-president ACTU 1942-1944. A plaque commemorating Moroney at Trades Hall in Brisbane gives his years as general secretary as 1918-1944. The absence of QRU records before 1919 makes confirmation difficult, but Moroney himself - apparently writing from official records - stated in his brief history of the Queensland "all-grades" union in 1922 that he replaced Cooper as general secretary at the annual meeting of the QRU in February-March 1917. *Railway Advocate*, July 1966.

chief clerk in the head office of the Great Northern Railways did not prevent his active promotion of industrial unionism; and Bill Morrow, a Charters Towers engine driver, (later a Tasmanian senator), who was treasurer.²¹

On 22 July 1917 a combined meeting of railways union members in Townsville protested to the Premier against McCawley's stand on retrospectivity. Despite Ryan's request that the men abide by arbitration, a ballot subsequently taken among all northern division employees resulted in a ten-to-one majority for strike action unless the retrospective payments were made.²² Work continued, however, pending a visit to Townsville by Theodore who hoped to dissuade the railwaymen from striking.

After a meeting with the combined union strike committee on 3 August Theodore reported to Ryan that in addition to the retrospectivity issue, there were grievances about other anomalies in the award; that the strike committee had adopted an "uncompromising attitude"; and that the situation was in fact beyond the control of the strike committee.²³ On Sunday morning, 5 August 1917, Theodore addressed a mass meeting of Townsville railwaymen, but to no avail since, as he related to Ryan, the men ". . . have made up their minds to have a strike[. Nothing we can do now will avert it".²⁴

The strike began at midnight on 5 August. It lasted three weeks, during which not a wheel turned on the northern railways. All

21 Rymer recalled two circumstances of Sampson's unusual position as chief clerk and active unionist: a high QRU membership among female office employees in Townsville, and the surreptitious typing of much union business (including the northern workshops claim in 1917) during working hours. *E relatione* Rymer, 10 January 1976.

22 J. Dash (AWU), F.A. Timson (QRU), T.C. Winning (Boilermakers' Union), E. Bloomfield (LEFCA), and H. Purcell (ASE), to Ryan, 24 July 1917; Ryan to Dash, 27 July 1917; Rymer to Ryan, 31 July 1917, under 11396/1920, Pre/A680, QSA.

23 Theodore to Ryan, 4 August 1917, *ibid.*

24 Theodore to Ryan, 5 August 1917, *ibid.*

employees (over 2000 men and women) except the highly-placed administrative staff took part, though the Cairns branch of the ASE and the Mackay LEFCA hesitated for a few days. To the unionists their claim was reasonable, even undeniable, but to the government and indeed to many observers the issue was broader: the *Worker* defined it on 2 August, before work actually stopped: "Thus it will be seen that on the issue of direct action as against arbitration, a big fight is imminent". The Minister for Railways concurred, forecasting that "the outcome of this sort of action will be to kill arbitration altogether as a method of settling industrial disputes".²⁵

The strike therefore threatened to provoke a serious row between the Labor Party and a major segment of the union movement. Prudently, the senior ministers of the government were careful to avoid provocation, following Theodore's advice. After a cabinet meeting which unanimously resolved to uphold the award, Ryan informed Theodore: "We think you should notify the men that [the] Government will give 48 hours within which to resume work". Theodore, however, replied that after a few days' idleness "the men might be in a more reasonable frame of mind. . . meantime [I] would not recommend any threat issued".²⁶ Nevertheless, the government had no intention of giving way. Theodore stated that it was "impossible" for the men's demands to be granted; the government would uphold the system of industrial arbitration, which would be given a "fatal blow" if the railway award were interfered with.²⁷

Theodore's main concern was undoubtedly finance. At a time when

25 *Worker*, 2 August 1917; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1 August 1917. Ryan to Theodore, 6 August 1917 and Theodore to Ryan, 6 August 1917, *loc.cit.*, QSA.

26 Murphy, who infers that it was Ryan who was responsible for the government's cautious handling of the rail strike (*T.J. Ryan*, p.273), makes no mention of these telegrams which appear to suggest, at least in the early stages of the dispute, that Ryan relied heavily on Theodore's advice, as he did in most industrial matters.

27 *Worker*, 9 August 1917.

he was preparing the 1917 budget, the award placed an additional charge of £250,000 on the state's expenditure. The retrospective wages sought would have amounted to a further £46,000 in the North alone. The Treasurer nonetheless conceded that the railwaymen had some cause for discontent: it was the general expectation in the North that the award would be retrospective. He denied, however, that either the court or the government was responsible for that impression.²⁸

On 9 August the Labor Party caucus discussed the strike. Some members urged strong action since the men "were not only striking against the Arbitration Court but also against the Government and the Labour Movement which had secured them great benefits and the notable reform of allowing them to approach the Arbitration Court". Others, including Theodore, counselled moderation, however, and caucus finally resolved that it:

. . . regrets the action of the Northern Railway men in flouting the Arbitration Award and the Party supports the Government in upholding the principle of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration, which is a cardinal principal [*sic*] of the Labour Party's platform.

To this resolution were added two others moved by McCormack: that Theodore should immediately contact the unions involved and convene a conference to resolve the dispute; that the government take no action to man the trains until such a conference was held and

28 *ibid.*

caucus again consulted.²⁹

The northern rail strike was made more complex by the great strike in New South Wales, which began on 2 August 1917 when nearly 6000 railway workshop employees stopped work. Against a background of mounting pay grievances, the proximate cause of this dispute was the introduction of a card system for checking work done, a process which the unions rejected as "speeding up". When the Nationalist state government denounced the "disloyal" strikers, declaring that constitutional authority was at risk and moving swiftly to crush the strikers, the strike spread rapidly through the railways to miners, seamen, wharf labourers and road transport workers. The great strike lasted 82 days and at its peak directly involved 70,000 workers. It was an upheaval which, however, could end only in the defeat of the unions.³⁰

To the labour movement the issue in the great strike was the very survival of trade unionism; accordingly it engendered sympathy and support from workers throughout Australia. In North Queensland, where railway workers were simultaneously on strike, the feeling of common cause was strong. As Murphy says:

29 PLP minutes, 9 August 1917. Voting for the first resolution was 32-9, with those against being Land, Stopford, Pollock, Gilday, Foley, Collins, McCormack, O'Sullivan and H.J. Ryan. The last five held seats in North Queensland. Murphy describes McCormack as urging firm action against the strikers (*T.J. Ryan*, p.266). McCormack spoke first in debate, and admitted that the men "had not a leg to stand on". But he voted *against* the first resolution, and moved the ensuing riders. Elsewhere Murphy describes McCormack while speaker as being frustrated at his exclusion from cabinet, and, by championing the rights of caucus against cabinet, emerging as a "special force" in the PLP. (*Ibid.*, pp.189-190) This may well explain his actions in the meeting of 9 August: that is, McCormack wanted caucus to keep an eye on the cabinet's actions in dealing with the strike.

30 Coward, 'Crime and Punishment', *passim*. Cf. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, pp.175ff; Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement*, pp.186-191; Gollan, *Coalminers of NSW*, pp.149-154; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.139-161; and '1914-1919', pp.341-342; Buckley, *Amalgamated Engineers*, ch. 20.

. . .it would have required merely a show of the same intransigence towards the unions, as the New South Wales Government was showing, to involve the Queensland railways in a long sympathy strike. It was moreover a strike a "thousand miles away" from Brisbane and the seat of government in an area of the state with a tradition of militancy and a feeling that people in Brisbane did not really appreciate the problems of the north.³¹

The rail strike seriously affected industry and commerce in North Queensland. It occurred at the peak of the sugar crushing and meat processing seasons, and the cessation of railway traffic very quickly disrupted those industries. Within a week the three sugar mills in the Lower Burdekin district had closed down; before the end of the strike mills in the Gordonvale, Mackay and Mourilyan areas, having reached the limit of their storage capacity, also stopped crushing.³² Northern meatworks, prevented from transporting beef to the wharves, closed down, throwing thousands of men out of work. The mining industry could neither receive supplies nor ship ore without the railway; mines and smelters, first at Cloncurry and later at Chillagoe, accordingly ceased operations. The maize, timber and dairy industries of the Atherton and Evelyn Tablelands were also brought to a standstill. Partly because of the maritime strike in the south, and partly because goods were not arriving at the waterfront, shipping companies soon curtailed shipping to North Queensland. As the strike entered its third week, local commercial firms began retrenching employees.³³

31 Murphy, North Queensland Railway Strike, p.9.

32 Lower Burdekin Farmers' Association to Ryan, 10 August 1917; secretary Aloomba Association (Gordonvale) to Ryan, 17 August 1917; Pritchard to Ryan, 27 August 1917, *loc.cit.* QSA. Cairns Post, 10 August 1917.

33 H. Grevey, Cloncurry, to Ryan, 8 August 1917; R.D. Kennedy, chairman meat exporters' committee, to Ryan, 20 August 1917; Inspector Quinn to Police Commissioner, 18 August 1917, *loc.cit.* QSA; *Atherton News and Barron Valley Advocate*, 12 August 1917; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 August 1917; *Cairns Post*, 11, 18 August 1917; *Worker*, 16 August 1917; *QIG*, II, 9 (10 September 1917), p.557.

The paralysis of northern transport caused not only industrial dislocation and widespread unemployment but also a serious shortage of food in many areas. Reports of hardship - Atherton farmers were said to be "on the verge of starvation" - deluged the government and the press. In isolated districts, pack horses and bullock teams carried food, and coaches carried passengers.³⁴ Such disruption altered public perceptions of the rail strike. At the beginning of the dispute, some conservative interests contrasted it with the New South Wales strike: the latter was "an outburst of pure anarchy", but northern railwaymen had "certain definite and tangible grievances".³⁵ As the North Queensland strike continued, however, local conservatives began to echo the sentiments of Nationalist politicians south of the border, approving Hughes' statement that "Strikes in time of war are a crime against society".³⁶ The annual conference of the Queensland National Political Council thus expressed its

abhorrence of the action of those North Queensland state servants who wilfully imperilled the safety of their fellow citizens and the soldiers at the front, by going out on strike for selfish ends without reasonable justification or excuse and at a time when the Empire is in deadly peril.³⁷

Angry at the inconvenience and shortages, farmers in the Atherton district became increasingly militant as the strike progressed. The government refused a request to place the Atherton to Tarzali railway in the hands of the local shire councils; on 23 August the farmers told the prime minister that they intended to take

34 McClelland, town clerk Charters Towers, to Ryan, 8 August 1917; Allison, chairman McKinlay shire council, to Ryan, 9 August 1917; Atherton storekeepers, 15 August, Herberton storekeepers, 15 August, and Irvinebank storekeepers, 16 August 1917, to Ryan; Wilson, AWU organiser, Cloncurry, to Ryan, 16 August 1917, *loc.cit.* QSA. *Bowen Independent*, 21 August 1917.

35 *Cairns Post*, 7 August 1917.

36 Cited by Coward, 'Crime and Punishment', p.51.

37 J. Shaw, secretary NPC, to Ryan, 20 August 1917, *loc.cit.*, QSA.

"forcible possession" of the railway, and asked for military protection. Hughes asked Ryan to furnish police protection, but Ryan predictably replied that the railways were under the control of the state government, which would deal severely with any unlawful interference with its property.³⁸

Food shortages and general inconvenience in the more isolated areas naturally cut both ways, affecting not only farmers and businessmen but also the working class, including railwaymen on strike. Indeed, a desire not to "starve their mates" may have been one factor influencing a return to work.³⁹ One of the vagaries of strikes was illustrated further by the fact that the northern rail stoppage may well have hindered the success of a shearers' strike in the pastoral districts of Queensland. One prominent activist among the shearers wrote on 13 August that: "The Railway Strike makes it bad here because none of our lads can get away, the mines and meatworks are all closed down, thus cutting off financial support".⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Theodore had contacted the executives of the unions whose northern members were on strike, and a conference of those unions - including five delegates from the strike committee - was convened in Brisbane on 21 August. Some of the northern militants viewed the conference with suspicion, hesitating to accept the involvement of southern unionists who had offered little support for the strike. In contrast, the strikers had the full backing of the

38 Hughes to Ryan, 23 August 1917; Ryan to Hughes and to Marnane, chairman farmers' union, Atherton, 24 August 1917, *ibid.*; *Atherton News*, 22 August 1917, 25 August 1917.

39 *E relatione* Bill Morrow, 20 January 1976.

40 R.J. Hansen, secretary "pastoral workers' executive council", to J. Welsh, 13 August 1917, intercepted by federal government agents, in "Papers relating to Pastoral Workers' Strike, 1917", file 16285, series 7, BP 230, AA(B).

Townsville Industrial Council and the northern AMIEU.⁴¹

On 21 August the trade union delegates nevertheless met with Ryan, Theodore and Coyne, and after several hours it was proposed that the strike be called off and the dispute submitted to the independent arbitration of Mr Justice Higgins, president of the federal arbitration court. Significantly, McCawley welcomed this proposal; indeed it could hardly have been entertained without his concurrence.⁴² Mackay and Cairns railwaymen accepted the terms, returning to work on 24 and 25 August 1917. In Townsville, Charters Towers, and Hughenden, however, mass meetings voted overwhelmingly to continue the fight, adding to the retrospectivity claim a demand that railwaymen be paid for the time they had been on strike. Strike officials in Townsville alleged that the conference was packed with delegates whom the government had previously influenced; they declared that henceforth they would deal directly with the government only.⁴³

Faced with this intransigence and the prospect of a continuing strike, the government agreed that Higgins should arbitrate on the question of strike pay as well. Simultaneously, encouraged by the results of the trade union conference and by the return to work at Mackay and Cairns, Ryan issued an ultimatum to the Townsville Strike

41 Theodore to Rymer, 13 August 1917; Thornton, secretary Townsville trades and labour council [*sic*], to Ryan, 15 August 1917; Ogden, secretary, northern district committee of AMIEU, to Ryan, 21 August 1917, *loc.cit.* QSA. The Rockhampton branch of the QRU actually disowned the northern strike, expressing support for the government's action in "upholding [the] principle of industrial arbitration". Hartley and Forde to Ryan, 13 August 1917, *ibid.*

42 The *Industrial Arbitration Act* allowed no appeal from the Queensland court. For this reason, the Opposition attacked the government for defying its own legislation: QPD CXXVI (29 August 1917), pp.807ff.

43 Hixon, secretary combined unions Mackay, to Ryan, 24 August 1917; Murchison, Cairns, to Ryan, 25 August 1917; Rymer to Ryan, 24 August 1917; *loc.cit.* QSA; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 23 August 1917; *Cairns Post*, 27 August 1917.

committee: railway employees had until 9 a.m. on Tuesday 28 August to return to work; those not complying would "cease to be in the employ" of the Commissioner. That the ultimatum was sweetened by Ryan's reference to the "great reluctance" with which the government had reached its decision did not alter its menace. Townsville railway workers accordingly voted to return to work, incorporating only a token act of defiance by declaring the strike off at midnight, rather than 9 a.m. on 28 August 1917.⁴⁴

It remained for Hughes to frustrate the basis of settlement by refusing to allow Higgins to arbitrate in the dispute, despite the agreement of the unions, the state government, McCawley and Higgins himself.⁴⁵ Ryan again consulted the unions, which agreed that another suitable judge should be sought. Ryan ultimately secured the services of Mr Justice Stringer of New Zealand, but the case was not submitted to him until April 1918. In September 1918 Stringer decided that he could not act in the dispute after all, and by this time the issue of retrospectivity had lost its immediacy.⁴⁶ In August 1918 and October 1919 the railway workers' award was reviewed by McCawley, who granted increased wages on both occasions but made no mention of either the 1917 strike or retrospectivity. Until 1920 the QRU occasionally reminded the government of the unresolved dispute, but with scant hope of reviving the issue.⁴⁷

44 Ryan to Rymer, 25 August 1917; Rymer to Ryan, 28 August 1917, *loc.cit.* QSA.

45 Higgins to Ryan, 22 August 1917; Hughes to Ryan, 24 August and 14 September 1917, *ibid.*

46 Ryan to W.F. Massey, Prime Minister of New Zealand, 19 September 1917; Massey to Ryan, 24 September 1917; Ryan to Massey, 22 April 1918; Stringer to Ryan, 2 September 1918, *ibid.* Ryan's cable of 19 September 1917 indicated that a judgment of the Queensland court was involved, but Stringer subsequently decided that there were "very serious" constitutional and judicial objections to his acting as "an informal appellate tribunal in connection with a judicial determination of another Dominion".

47 *QIG*, III, 9 (10 September 1918), pp.576-578; *ibid.*, IV, 11 (10 November 1919), pp.740-743; P.J. McDermott, Under-Secretary Premier's Department, to Rymer, 25 October 1920, *loc.cit.* QSA.

Through a firm but cautious approach and by continual consultation with the unions, Ryan and Theodore had ended the northern rail strike and avoided a head-on clash with the union movement. The government had emerged as the victor, but without humiliating the railway unionists. The reasonableness of Theodore and Ryan contrasted directly with the heavy-handed approach of the Fuller government in New South Wales, and the lesson was not lost on the labour movement. According to the *Worker*:

The experience of the government and the trades union movement in connection with the northern trouble shows clearly that when men with a grievance are treated decently, and not subject to bullying and harassing, they will generally listen to reason and adopt the course that appears to be the best in the circumstances.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding the politically satisfactory resolution of the rail strike, considerable disappointment was felt in the North over the failure to find a suitable arbitrator. When Hughes refused permission for Higgins to act, Ryan astutely diffused militant rumblings by presenting the issue as one of Hughes versus the labour movement: continued strike action would only mean victory for Hughes. Nevertheless, many erstwhile strikers agreed with their acerbic colleague, who wrote in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* that there was "a flavour of Dickens' circumlocution office" about the Government's efforts at "super-arbitration".⁴⁹

The 1917 northern rail strike increased support for the radical minority in the labour movement who were critical of arbitration and cynical about Labor Party reformism. Rymer later claimed that the "intelligent minority" knew they had been "sold a pup" by the

48 *Worker*, 31 August 1917.

49 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 8 February 1918.

government; Morrow simply recalled that the strike was the first defeat of railwaymen by a Labor government.⁵⁰ The strike did nothing to close the incipient rift between militants and moderates in the Queensland labour movement: indeed in the ranks of railway workers it probably created one. Frank Nolan, who succeeded Moroney as state secretary of the ARU, wrote in his memoirs:

Thus many railwaymen realised that a Labor government, whilst far better than the Tories, could not be relied upon to side with them in industrial disputes. But many did not see it in this light and became apologists for the government's anti-working class action and thus dissension developed within the union.⁵¹

Significantly, early in September 1917, very soon after the strike, a conference of representatives of the CPE, PLP, and the Brisbane Industrial Council agreed that "something should be done to bridge the widening gulf between the political and industrial sides of the movement".⁵² Admission of a breach was clearly accelerated by the recent rail strike.

Some of the bitterness with which Rymer, Morrow and Nolan recalled the 1917 strike in later life arose from experience of later Labor Premiers less sympathetic than Ryan; but not all of it. In spite of its circumspect and conciliatory approach the Ryan ministry had in the end presented an ultimatum and forced the strikers back to

50 *E. relatione* Rymer, 6 January 1976; Morrow, 20 January 1976.

51 F. Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once: reflections of a trade union leader* (ed. D.J. Murphy, Brisbane, 1974), p.23. Although Nolan appears to confuse some aspects of the 1917 strike with the Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1919, this does not detract from his assessment of the results of the 1917 dispute. Viv. Daddow offers another apposite comment on the strike: "It is because of such spirit-crushing experiences in the past that the trade unions of today are so very weary of being drawn from a solidly-organised stand on a matter of job justice by cajoling promises". *Puffing Pioneers*; p.128.

52 CPE minutes, 10 September 1917.

work. It was natural that this fact, noted by militants throughout Queensland, should have rankled especially in the North. Radical disaffection with both the Labor Party and the arbitration system was thus heightened.

The rail strike of 1917 was confined to North Queensland and directed from Townsville. Unionists saw little need to consult, or even to inform their southern colleagues before taking direct action; many resented the involvement of the Brisbane-based executive officers of their own unions in negotiations with the government. What all this illustrated was the feeling of distinctiveness which so infected the labour movement in the North. Regionalism was not peculiar to the working class; in crude ideological terms it stemmed rather from the bourgeoisie.⁵³ Northern labour was clearly an integrated part of the broader Queensland - and Australian - labour movement; but the part evinced some characteristics distinct from the whole.

Northern unionists tenaciously guarded their independence; they clung to as much autonomy as they could retain against the trend towards the centralisation of politics and industrial relations in Brisbane (the latter a concomitant of the growing importance of the arbitration court). In 1917, independent action by railway workers was facilitated by the geographical and administrative separation of the northern, central and southern components of the Queensland railway system. The northern district council of the QRU was at this time virtually self-governing. Parochial loyalty was a

53 The importance of parochialism and "distance" as a theme in the history of North Queensland has been acknowledged by various writers, especially since the seminal works of Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, and G. Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: how distance shaped Australia's history* (Melbourne, 1966). Yet there has been no adequate analysis of regionalism in North Queensland. Studies of the "New State" movement rarely transcend the level of politics. But see C. Doran, *Separatism in Townsville, 1884-1894*, B.A. Hons. thesis, James Cook University, 1978. Ms Doran is currently researching for a Ph.D. thesis on separatism and regionalism generally in North Queensland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

perennial feature of unionism generally in the North.

Questions of parochialism and regional unionism were probably most related to distance and consequently to the dependence of the North Queensland economy on transport. Prolonged transport strikes invariably entailed considerable inconvenience and economic disruption. Factors of distance and isolation also meant that the 1917 railway workers' strike had an immediate impact on the three mainstays of the northern economy - meat, mining and sugar - thus emphasising the regional character and organisation of those industries as well. This deleterious impact was intensified during the latter stages of the rail strike as a consequence of the attenuation of shipping to North Queensland.

Thus the railway workers' return to work did not signify the end of food shortages and industrial problems in the North; disruption to shipping caused by the New South Wales great strike continued. The Federated Seamen's Union remained out until 8 October 1917; the waterfront strike was prolonged, then extended to other states, when shipowners zealously protected the "national volunteers" (also known as "loyalists" and "scabs") who replaced the Sydney wharf labourers early in the strike.

On 28 August the dispute reached North Queensland. Against the instructions of the WWF council of management, Mackay wharf labourers refused to discharge coal or load sugar on ships destined for Sydney and Melbourne where predominantly non-union labour worked.⁵⁴ On 1 September Bowen waterside workers took similar action, refusing to load Inkerman sugar for Melbourne; when this sugar was railed to

54 Sub-inspector Wyer to Police Commissioner, 28 August 1917, 11396/1920, Pre/A680, QSA; Morris, WWF general secretary, to Hogan, secretary Mackay branch WWF, 3 September 1917. [E171/56, RSSS-ANUA].

Townsville, wharfies there also refused to touch it, since it had been declared "black" in Bowen.⁵⁵ In retaliation, the shipping companies refused to engage union labour to handle any cargo whatever in North Queensland. Consequently, nearly all coastal steamer traffic was suspended - even in Cairns, where waterside workers had with some misgivings obeyed WWF instructions to work all cargo.⁵⁶

As waterside workers continued their stoppage, the federal government used its powers under the *War Precautions Act* to cancel preference to WWF members in Sydney, Melbourne, Fremantle, Mackay, Bowen and Townsville. To Hughes' evident disappointment, Mr Justice Higgins subsequently refused to deregister the WWF, but the combined action of the federal and New South Wales governments and the shipowners had already done its damage: the WWF in Sydney found itself in complete disarray; in Melbourne it was almost as seriously affected.⁵⁷ In North Queensland, however, the cancellation of preference had merely a demoralising effect, since only an occasional ship now called at northern ports.

Following so closely on the rail strike, the maritime dispute isolated and seriously dislocated trade and industry in North Queensland. Produce could not be exported; food and capital goods

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- 55 *Bowen Independent*, 8 September 1917; D. Donald, representative Pioneer Sugar Co. to Hughes, 12 September 1917, 703/1918, CRS A2, AA(C); A.J. Long, secretary Bowen branch WWF, to Morris, 1 and 5 September 1917. [T62/8/2(i), RSSS-ANUA].
- 56 T.B. Edwards, acting secretary Bowen WWF, to Morris, 10 September 1917, *loc.cit.*; Hogan to Morris, 3 September 1917. [E171/56]; Dillon, Secretary Cairns branch WWF, to Morris, 30 August 1917. [T62/8/4(i), RSSS-ANUA]. Ryan to Christie, Mackay Traders Association, 17 September, 13113/1917, Pre/A570, QSA.
- 57 WWF federal council minutes, 8 September 1917 [T62/2/1(i)]; E. Cremer, assistant general secretary WWF, to Edwards, Bowen, 18 September 1917 [T62/8/2(i)]; Marriott, secretary Townsville branch WWF, to Morris, 24 September 1917 [T62/8/15]; Morris to A.H. Fenwick, secretary Brisbane WWF, 18 October 1917 [T62/8/1(i), RSSS-ANUA]; *QPD CXXVII* (27 September 1917), p.1427. Cf. Healy, *Brief History of the WWF*, p.30; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.156-157.

generally could not be imported. There was an "alarming scarcity of foodstuffs" in the Gulf country; Bowen tomatoes rotted on the wharf; sugar crushing was again interrupted.⁵⁸ Not only was storage space for bagged sugar nearly exhausted, but many sugar mills were forced to close down because of a lack of bags and lime.⁵⁹ Consequently, many men were again thrown out of work. After the Dickson award trouble in 1916 and the recent rail strike, sugar producers and business interests were angry. The state member for Mirani, Swayne, declared that "anything that interferes with shipping at the present time is tantamount to treason against the Empire"; one of his colleagues roundly condemned wharf labourers generally as "foreigners" and "anarchists. . .driven out of Russia".⁶⁰

But, significantly, many sugar farmers and citizens of North Queensland were inclined to blame the shipping companies and the federal government for the disruption. Less surprisingly, so did Labor members of state parliament, who criticised "the failure of the Commonwealth government to restore interstate shipping "and the refusal of shipowners to engage union labour in Queensland".⁶¹ Hughes, on the other hand, blamed Ryan for not permitting the national service bureau to organise volunteer non-union labour in Queensland, as it had done in other states. With the dispute thus

58 McDermott, Under-Secretary Premiers Department, memo. to Ryan, 3 September 1917; Hughes to Ryan, 7 September 1917, 13113/1917, Pre/A570, QSA; G.E. Kent, secretary Bowen Farmers' Association, to C. Collins, 9 September 1917, 11396/1920, Pre/A680, QSA; G.G. Haldane, Director-General of National Services, to Hughes, 10 September 1917, 703/1918, CRS A2, AA(C); *Bowen Independent*, 18 September 1917, *QIG*, II, 10 (10 October 1917), p.620; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 6 September 1917.

59 Milk of lime (calcium hydroxide [Ca(OH)²]) is used as a preserving and clarifying agent in the production of raw sugar; added to the juice extracted immediately after crushing, it neutralises the natural acidity of, and removes impurities from cane sugar.

60 *QPD* CXXVII (29 August 1917), p.824, (27 September 1917, p.1433; G. Morgan (Nationalist, Murilla).

61 *Ibid.*, (27 September 1917), pp.1421-1422.

deadlocked, the state government took what measures it could to relieve distress in the North: steamers were chartered to transport supplies, and the CSR, Hughes and Ryan co-operated at least in arranging a shipment of sugar bags to northern mills. At Mackay, however, relief did not come easily. Shipping companies refused to provide lighters to discharge cargo from the chartered *Allinga*, anchored at Flat Top, unless the lighters were manned by non-union labour. Consequently, only the harbour board's barge was available.⁶²

Angered at this demonstration of capitalist intransigence, Ryan attempted a long-cherished scheme for a state shipping line by using the *Sugar Acquisition Act* to control all ships in Queensland waters. The plan was foiled by Hughes, who issued a *War Precautions Act* proclamation prohibiting the acquisition of vessels trading interstate. But by now the strike was drawing to an embittered close. With the WWF already beaten in the south, the seamen surrendered unconditionally on 18 October 1917.⁶³

As in the past, the maritime dispute of 1917 impaired relations between the North Queensland branches and the federal executive of the WWF. A basic problem was communication: both the Bowen branch, which declined to handle strike-bound cargo, and the Cairns branch, which worked all ships, complained about lack of information and instructions from Melbourne.⁶⁴ Internal conflict continued when Higgins ordered the WWF to give greater authority in its constitution to the council of management. One proposed new rule, providing that

62 *Ibid.* Hughes to Ryan, 7 September 1917; Hogan to Ryan, 25 September 1917, Pre/A570, QSA; Hughes to Ryan, 12 September 1917, 703/1918, CRS A2, AA(C).

63 *QPD CXXVII* (4 October 1917), p.1589; Ryan to WWF secretaries, Rockhampton, Mackay, Bowen, Townsville, Cairns, 21 September 1917, Dowling to Ryan, 26 September 1917, 1287/1917, Pre/A659, QSA; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.157.

64 Dillon to Morris, 12 September 1917 [T62/8/4(ii), RSSS-ANUA]. The Bowen WWF complained that the executive had "failed utterly" to keep the northern "outposts" informed; this "seeming neglect" had caused "utter chaos". Edwards to Morris, 10 September 1917 [T62/8/2(i), RSSS-ANUA].

strike action by any branch must first be sanctioned by a ballot of all branches, aroused strong opposition: the Townsville wharfies, for example, rejected any limitation of their existing "rights and privileges".⁶⁵

One factor behind the discord between the northern rank and file and the head office of the WWF was the failure of waterside wages to keep pace with inflation during the war. Indeed, the frequency of local waterfront disputes in the months before the great strike suggests that the action of the Mackay, Bowen and Townsville branches in August-September 1917 was not motivated entirely by simple union solidarity. Industrial relations remained volatile after the strike. Northern wharf labourers failed to appreciate the demoralised, even diffident, policy of the WWF executive, which was wary of a local dispute inviting the renewed retribution of employers and the federal government when the latter, Morris warned, "we know for a positive fact [is] trying to down and out us".⁶⁶

In this context, northern waterside workers drew unfavourable comparisons between the delays and frustrations of the Commonwealth arbitration court and the relatively streamlined - and more generous - state arbitration court. By 1918, talk of seceding from the federation and registering with the state court was widespread. The secretary of the Bowen WWF, A.J. Long, was particularly bitter with the federal executive:

65 Marriott to Morris, 30 October 1917 [T62/8/15].

66 Morris to Marriott, 8 August 1918, *ibid.*

It seems a waste of time for any of us northern branches submitting any disputes to you for adjustment as they all get treated alike by you. . .and the only way for us in Queensland to do is act ourselves [*sic*]. . . .We often see in the Monthly meeting reports where some southern branch has had some little dispute and the expenses paid and so forth but what about some of the Branches up in the north. I suppose you think that we are a lot of Mugs.⁶⁷

Long was far from alone, however, in feeling that southern union authorities knew little and cared less about North Queensland problems. Although the Queensland branches of the WWF did not register with the state court until 1920, the movement towards this end had already begun.

The Second Conscription Referendum and the 1918 State Election

The 1917 rail and waterfront disputes underlined the emergence of those conflicts endemic to labour movements: militants versus moderates, unionists versus politicians, rank and file versus officials, even - in Queensland - North versus South. Towards the end of 1917, however, such differences were temporarily shelved by the need for a united front to fight both the second conscription referendum and the 1918 state elections.

The campaign for the "reinforcements referendum" of 20 December 1917 was vigorously and bitterly fought on both sides, but in North

67 Long to Morris, 20 April 1918 [T62/8/2(1)]. Long also chastised Morris on 14 July 1918: "do not think for one moment that you are beyond a little straight talk because you are general secretary and seeing that you do not visit the Branches only every 108 years we must do it by letter". Cf. Dillon (Cairns) to Morris, 11 July 1918 [T62/8/4]: "Our members are at boiling point, and if you can't go to the Court for a rise there is a big chance of our men applying to Brisbane for a Queensland Federation under the Queensland Industrial Arbitration Act".

Queensland at least it lacked the intensity of the 1916 campaign. Disrupted meetings and occasional violence demonstrated the emotionalism still aroused by conscription, but for many people the heat had died down. This was partly due to the personal contest between Ryan and Hughes, in which local issues were submerged by dramatic national incidents such as Hughes' attempt to censor the Queensland *Hansard*, and the "Warwick egg" fracas.⁶⁸ Further, notwithstanding the recent disruption of northern transport, there was during the 1917 campaign no concurrent politico-industrial wrangle of the magnitude of the Dickson award affair in 1916.

Turner argues that one of the significant shades of difference between the two referenda was the increased prevalence of pacifist sentiment in the labour movement: anti-war, as distinct from anti-conscription statements were common.⁶⁹ In north Queensland the main factor in the campaign was public war-weariness - or at least conscription coolness - which was not confined to the labour movement. This was confirmed by the referendum results: Australia rejected conscription by an increased majority; in North Queensland the swing to "No" was marked:

<u>% No Vote, Conscription referenda 1916-1917</u> ⁷⁰		
	<u>1916</u>	<u>1917</u>
Australia	51.61	54.41
Queensland	52.29	54.41
Herbert	53.14	61.36
Kennedy	59.43	67.18

Local observers were hardly surprised by this result:

68 Shaw, *Conscription and Queensland*, p.306; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, ch. 13.

69 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.164. Cf. M. Perks, 'Labour and the Governor-General's Recruitment Conference, Melbourne, April, 1918', *Labour History*, 34 (May 1978), pp.28-44.

70 *CPP 1914-1917*, II, pp. 796, 800-801; *ibid.* 1917-1919, IV, pp. 1469, 1521, 1526-27.

Stripped of all verbiage, the question was this: Is there evidence of a sufficient change in public opinion to warrant the reasonable expectation of a reversal of the former verdict? So far as this district was concerned, we saw no such evidence, and the result throughout the country has proved that those who professed to discern it in other places were grossly deceiving themselves.⁷¹

Disappointed by the referendum, conservative political forces hoped for more success in the state election held on 16 March 1918. There was very little evidence, however, of substantial community antipathy to the Labor government in Queensland. On the contrary, Labor's moderate reformism, and the capable leadership, not to say charisma, of Ryan were appreciated by many electors, including farmers and businessmen. Ironically perhaps the biggest question mark hovering over the 1918 election was not so much what the strength of the non-Labor opposition would be, but rather how disenchanted with Labor were left-wing radicals.

The political and industrial sections of the movement remained essentially united; outright condemnation of the Labor Party from the Left was still rare. A strong core of radical influence existed, however, among the North Queensland militants and in the industrial unions of the BIC, especially the QRU, WWF, AMIEU and the building workers. Such militants were critical of Labor's piecemeal approach towards the desired - if vaguely defined - goal of socialism. They were suspicious of Labor's aim of governing in the interests of the community at large rather than solely in the interests of the working class (which in practice meant the trade unions).

But any internal conflict was kept in check at the state Labor-in-Politics convention in Brisbane in January-February 1918. As

71 *Cairns Post*, editorial, 24 December 1917. The *Post*, a vigorous supporter of conscription in 1916, was editorially silent on the issue in 1917. Likewise, the *Bowen Independent* seemed more concerned with issues of local and state politics.

far as North Queensland was concerned, there was little opportunity for an expression of radicalism at the convention: ten of the twelve northern electorate delegates were members of parliament; the other two were also ideologically inclined towards the centre of moderate Labor orthodoxy. There were no clear lines of cleavage between moderates and militants at the convention, although the socialist radicals were recognisably led by Lane and Moroney, delegates from the AWU and QRU respectively.⁷²

At the previous convention in 1916 Ryan had counselled patience and resolution in working towards Labor's objectives; now in 1918 W.H. Demaine's presidential address called strongly for unity -- in itself an admission of incipient rifts in the labour movement. After paying lip service to the Russian revolution and its "possibilities for a world-wide democracy", Demaine turned to the coming state elections. Labor could win, he asserted,

but the fault-finding, the carping criticism, and the irreconcilable elements amongst us must drop it all and present a united front to the enemy. There has been amongst a certain section a tendency to expect too much from Queensland's first Labor government. It wanted the millenium right away, and overlooked the plain fact that the evils of 50 years of Tory-Boodle administration could not be wiped out in a day. . . ."Solidarity" must be our watchword. The industrial unionists who believe that the emancipation of the workers can be attained only through what is termed "direct action" must be shown that to attempt this without at the same time attaining control of the political administration is sheer folly.⁷³

72 Northern delegates were C. Collins, MLA (Bowen); W.J. Riordan, MLC (Burke); W. McCormack, MLA (Cairns); E.G. Theodore, MLA (Chillagoe); C. McDonald, MHR (Charters Towers); W.N. Gillies, MLA (Eacham); R. Sumner, MLC (Herbert); J. O'Sullivan, MLA (Kennedy); W.F. Smith, MLA (Mackay); M.P. Hynes (Mirani); A.E. Carling (Townsville). The electorates of Cook, Flinders and Mundingburra were not represented at the convention. Union delegates from the North included J. Dash and H. Bruce (AWU) and A. Ogden (AMIEU). *Official Record of Proceedings, Ninth State Labour-in-Politics Convention, Trades Hall, Brisbane, January-February 1918* (Brisbane 1918), pp.1-2.

73 *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

The moderates thus set the tone for the convention. Motions calling for a 44 and 40 hour week were defeated (39 to 28 and 37 to 31 votes respectively) in a sometimes heated debate. Theodore seemed to confirm the suspicions of those who already regarded the PLP as chary of its responsibilities to unionists when he declared that the reduction of working hours was a matter for the industrial rather than the political wing of the movement: ". . .it would be a sorry day for unionism when the political side took over the functions of the industrial forces". In reply to Ogden's suggestion that unions have more representation at conventions, it was stated that unionists could secure political control by joining party branches, and that there was "no definite assurance" that all union members favoured the Labor Party.⁷⁴ The only slight concession to the radicals came at the end of the proceedings when the convention called for a halt to abuses of the *War Precautions Act*, and for the repeal of the compulsory clauses of the *Defence Act*.

All told, the convention, astutely chaired by Ryan,⁷⁵ achieved its purpose of consolidating labour unity for the elections. It was true for the majority of unionists at this time that whatever the faults of the Queensland Labor government, it was - as was later claimed at the trade union congress in Brisbane in August 1918 - "the best they had had in Australia at any time in their history. . . the only working-class Government outside of Russia in the world to-day".⁷⁶

In recognition of the political importance of sugar growers and of North Queensland's significance to the labour movement, Ryan delivered his policy speech in Townsville on 18 February 1918. Although concentrating chiefly on Labor's achievements, he promised

74 *Ibid.*, pp.23-24, 38, 42.

75 Moroney recalled Ryan's skilful chairing of the 1918 convention as one of his lasting memories of the Premier. *Daily Standard*, 9 August 1921. Cf. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, p.350.

76 *Daily Standard*, 21 August 1918.

a comprehensive soldier settlement scheme, increased assistance to primary producers, more state butchers' shops, the development of state coal mines and iron and steel works at Bowen, the state purchase of the Chillagoe and Etheridge railway and mines, and an extension of welfare legislation.⁷⁷

Labor won the 1918 election decisively, increasing its share of the vote to 53.68% - the highest Labor vote ever recorded in Queensland. Although four metropolitan seats were lost, the party gained seven rural and provincial town electorates, thereby increasing its parliamentary representation from 45 to 48. Six sugar and farming electorates in the South went to Labor, together with Burke in North Queensland; of the northern seats, only Mirani now remained non-Labor.⁷⁸ These results confirmed the acceptance of the Labor Party not only by working men and women but also by a substantial number of small farmers. The government's action in relieving shortages during the 1917 maritime dispute was generally appreciated, and many sugar growers expressed support for Labor.⁷⁹

The political events of the second conscription referendum and the state elections temporarily overshadowed industrial matters in North Queensland. Nevertheless, strikes proliferated in 1918, stimulated by renewed inflation and embittered by unemployment. The return of Australian soldiers from the European battlefields further complicated traditional factors of wage militancy. Conservative opinion, many employers and some of the soldiers themselves believed that those who had fought overseas deserved preference in employment. This proposition was strenuously resisted

77 T.J. Ryan, *Policy Speech, 18 October 1918* (Oxley Library Pamphlet Collection).

78 Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.109-116.

79 Goondi Cane Suppliers' Association to Ryan, 4 October 1917; Cairns Harbour Board to Ryan, 16 October 1917, Pre/A570, QSA. Cf. *Australian Sugar Journal*, 7 March 1918; *Worker*, 4 October 1917, 7 March 1918.

by the trade unions. At the same time there were more conspicuous signs of contention between union militants, influenced partly by socialist ideology, and moderates who conformed to the "constitutional" ambit of arbitration.

Nowhere was the dominance of the moderates more apparent than in the AWU, which firmly maintained its faith in arbitration as the best means of winning better wages and conditions. Thus at the AWU annual delegate meeting in January 1918, W.J. Riordan, the state president, proudly proclaimed:

The fact of having an Industrial Arbitration Act such as we have, which is a credit to the Labor Party and the industrialists of Queensland, has made it possible for us to do the amount of good work that has been done during the year. It is to be hoped that the industrialists of Queensland will jealously safeguard that Act, and the one and only way to do it is by safeguarding the Labor Government.⁸⁰

As proof of the benefits of arbitration, AWU officials could point to substantial wage rises and improved conditions in every industry it covered. But this did little to assuage the militancy of some AWU members, who frequently ignored the provisions of industrial legislation in their efforts to win concessions from employers on the job. Many were influenced by, or at least in agreement with, the syndicalist tenet that arbitration was another tool of working-class oppression. But most strikes were not inspired by syndicalism; they occurred when a group of workers felt sufficiently strongly about immediate grievances to stop work, believing in that particular instance that a strike would be the surest and swiftest method of remedying the matter. Such a view conflicted with the state-wide one of the AWU hierarchy, which endeavoured to present a concerted policy and a disciplined front to both employers and the arbitration court.

⁸⁰ *Official Report of the Fifth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland branch, January 1918* (Brisbane, 1918), p.2.

Union Militancy and the Decline of Northern Mining

Internal disagreement between AWU moderates and militants was very evident during industrial disputes in the North Queensland mining industry. While the war demand for metal remained high, so also did metal prices. Labour's bargaining position was correspondingly strong, especially in the Cloncurry area, where there was at times a shortage of experienced miners. By the end of 1917 wages on the Cloncurry mineral field were the highest paid to miners in Australia. But the cost of living was also high, and working conditions were possibly more arduous than elsewhere.⁸¹

In 1918 union militancy repeatedly threatened the prosperity of the Cloncurry mines. In January employees at Mt Cuthbert went on strike for two weeks, alleging that the company was importing extra labour in order to dispense with its existing workforce. The company contended that it was merely ensuring an adequate labour supply, but a compulsory conference settled the dispute by providing that all workers were to be engaged through the local AWU secretary.⁸² In February a simmering dispute erupted at Duchess when mine employees - acting against the advice of both the local AWU secretary and the district organiser - refused to work under the mine manager. Workers at Trekelano (which like the Duchess mine was owned by the Hampden-Cloncurry company) struck in sympathy, but returned to work after two weeks. On 20 March Judge Macnaughton reluctantly agreed to call a compulsory conference, for he considered the Duchess workers "entirely in the wrong", especially since they had already defied a court order to resume work. There was little that Macnaughton could do, however, beyond admitting that the friction was caused largely by the "unfortunate manner" of the manager. The men returned but stoppages occurred frequently at Duchess during the rest of the year.⁸³

81 *QIG*, II, 11 (10 November 1917), p.716.

82 *Ibid.*, III, 4 (10 April 1918), p.202.

83 *Ibid.*, III, 5 (10 May 1918), pp.250-251; *QGMJ*, 15 March 1918; AWU branch executive minutes, 4 June 1918.

Industrial conflict also hindered the Mt Elliott mines and smelters: they were idle in July and November 1918. The latter dispute arose when an arbitration award failed to grant all the demands made by the employees. More than that, the AWU district secretary, Jack Dash, had deleted part of the claim prepared by the Mt Elliott workers. The local AWU centre consequently censured Dash, but the dispute fizzled out when the Mt Elliott mines and smelters closed down at the end of November 1918.⁸⁴

Likewise, the Herberton and Chillagoe mining district did not escape industrial turbulence in 1918. In May, following an arbitration award which set some wages lower than those already existing, employees at Wolfram expressed their disgust with the AWU, threatened to break away from the union, and went on strike. An abortive compulsory conference ensued, and the employers finally gave in to the demand for an increased minimum wage.⁸⁵ Subsequently, unionists at Herberton and Stannary Hills went on strike for the new Wolfram rates, which were granted them on 29 August 1918. Although the AWU ultimately supported the strikers and succeeded in settling the dispute to the men's satisfaction, the local union organiser subsequently reported that a strike was ill-advised: the employees should have approached the matter "in a less bellicose manner".⁸⁶

Economic conditions meant that mine workers in North Queensland frequently had the upper hand in negotiations with employers in 1918, but the situation changed dramatically with the end of the first world war in November. Fall in demand for metal led to a curtailment of markets and a sudden drop in prices. By December most Cloncurry

84 *QIG*, III, 7 (10 July 1918), p.404; *QPP* 1919-1920, III, p.13; *Official Report of the Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland Branch, January 1919* (Brisbane, 1919), p.18.

85 AWU branch executive minutes, 2 April 1918; AWU far northern district committee minutes, 2 June 1918; *Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1919*, p.20.

86 AWU far northern district committee minutes, 23 August 1918, 1 September 1918; *QIG* III, 9 (10 September 1918), p.328.

mines had stopped operating, throwing thousands out of work. Late in 1919 copper prices recovered briefly; the Hampden company resumed mining in September, and the Mt Cuthbert company in October 1919.⁸⁷ Strikes occurred again, however, as the militant miners attempted to preserve their former strong bargaining position. With a further slump in copper prices, mining on a large scale was virtually finished at Cloncurry by the end of 1920, although an evanescent revival was stimulated from 1943 to 1946 by another world war.

Many people blamed labour agitation - the IWW, "Russians", and "Bolsheviks" - for the demise of the mineral field.⁸⁸ Industrial disputes were indeed a factor; so was faulty management. But the basic cause of the decline of mining at Cloncurry was the depressed copper market at a time when both wages and prices generally were rising. The extensive, but isolated ore deposits around Cloncurry could be mined profitably only when high copper prices ruled.

The end of the first world war also caused a sharp attenuation of mining in the far north. There was a revival late in 1919, however, with the state government's purchase of the Chillagoe smelters and Mungana and Irvinebank mines.⁸⁹ The government's mining venture was established mainly to provide and stimulate employment in an important area of the state. But it too failed to meet the grandiose expectations of its advocates, and, having accumulated a vast financial loss, was mostly closed down in the late 1920s, amid rumours of mismanagement and a whiff of political corruption.⁹⁰

87 *QIG*, V, 1 (10 January 1920), p.41.

88 E.g., Corbould, *The Life of Alias Jimmy*, p.383; Intelligence report upon "The Closing of the Cloncurry Copper Fields due to the tactics employed by the I.W.W. Section", 26 May 1919, 66/5/115, BP 4/1, AA(B).

89 *QPP* 1920, II, p.395; *Official Report of the Seventh Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland branch, January 1920* (Brisbane, 1920), p.13.

90 See K.H. Kennedy, *The Mungana Affair: state mining and political corruption in the 1920s* (St Lucia, 1978).

As the mining industry declined, so too did the significance of the northern miners within the labour movement. Something of a militant tradition survived at Mt Isa in the 1930s and later, but mining was no longer a cynosure of union militancy in North Queensland: the focus increasingly turned to meatworkers, railway workers, wharf labourers, and sugar workers.

Northern sugar workers and the AWU

Disputes in the sugar industry during 1918 were even more significant for the AWU than strikes in the mining fields. The nature of work in the sugar fields and mills facilitated industrial disputes. Many sugar workers came from southern states, working itinerantly in the North for only six months of each year;⁹¹ most were young single men unconcerned about stable or long-term employment. Wage rates for cane cutters were set by arbitration awards, but experienced, reliable gangs frequently negotiated over-award contracts. Sugar-cane crops varied considerably, not only from district to district but also from field to adjacent field. A clean stand of cane on a well-cleared and drained field provided greater opportunity for high earnings than a sparse, trashy crop on rough ground. This variance in cane-cutting conditions, and the always exhausting work⁹² caused frequent, though isolated and usually brief disputes between cutters and farmers.

91 Evidence in the Dickson award hearing claimed that 40% of all cane cutters came from Tasmania and New South Wales: *QGG*, CVII, 96 (15 September 1916), p.802.

92 See Dickson's judgment, *ibid.*, p.803: ". . .cane cutting is very arduous and requires a man of special capacity, and has to be executed under most exhaustive conditions, very much more so than other employments generally have to be executed, in excessively hot places, under the broiling sun of the Northern climate. Nature will only stand a certain strain, and if that strain is overtaxed then its efficiency is lost. A man's physical endurance has its limit, and once that limit is overburdened he will strike, no matter what happens".

A cane cutter's first loyalty was to the gang with which he customarily worked season after season, and by extension to sugar workers in general. The situation of mill hands could be compared more readily to that of factory workers in industrialised cities, with an added cohesion engendered by mill employees' living, as well as working side by side. The working conditions of both mill hands and cane cutters fostered a strong sense of class solidarity, coupled with a rebellious attitude to authority - which for some militants frequently embraced a contempt for the authority of the AWU.

Strikes in the far northern district during 1918 illustrated the conflict between rank and file militants and AWU officialdom. Industrial unrest was aggravated by a poor sugar harvest in that year. Crops were depleted by frosts in the south and by cyclones at Mackay and Innisfail. Consequently, not only was less employment available for the itinerant workers who annually inundated North Queensland, but earnings for those finding work were relatively small because of the shorter sugar season.

Early in the season a brief strike occurred at the Mulgrave mill south of Cairns when mill workers refused to handle cane cut by coloured labour gangs. Most non-European workers had been phased out of the sugar industry by 1918, but a substantial number - possibly two hundred - remained in the far north. The presence of *any* coloured labour was still a very emotional issue for many European workers. A compulsory conference solved the Mulgrave dispute when the mill promised to use its influence with cane suppliers to replace coloured cutters with whites. However, both the Mulgrave and Babinda AWU local centres claimed that the agreement was not firm enough, and condemned the union's far northern district committee. The Babinda unionists added a demand that all future agreements be ratified by every local centre in the district, to "prevent the business of the union being run by a clique".⁹³

93 AWU far northern district committee minutes, 2 June 1918; *QIG*, III, 7 (10 July 1918), p.403.

When Herbert river district farmers refused to raise wage rates, local cutters went on strike from 12 to 24 August 1918. But the workers were far from unanimous: many gangs continued to work, and both Ingham mills crushed without interruption. Within a fortnight the strikers - alleged by farmers to be IWW advocates - returned to work under the old conditions.⁹⁴

As the Ingham strike petered out, a more severe dispute occurred at Innisfail. The crop had been so badly damaged by a cyclone that cutters complained that they could not earn a fair day's pay at the contract piece work rates (6/9 per ton). On 23 August the cutters demanded a guaranteed daily minimum of 25/-, or 20/- and food, which, it was said, some farmers were already paying. Most farmers, however, refused the demand, alleging that cane cutters should earn up to £2 per day at existing contract rates.⁹⁵ Innisfail cutters thereupon ceased work, and union solidarity was ensured when the AWU district committee officially sanctioned the strike. On 26 August Goondi mill hands stopped work in sympathy with the cutters; by the end of the month the Mourilyan and South Johnstone mills had also stopped crushing because of insufficient cane. Tensions increased with the outbreak of cane fires and reports of violent intimidation by "IWW" agitators; extra police were sent to the district to preserve public order.⁹⁶

After an abortive conference called by the local industrial magistrate, McCawley travelled to Innisfail to attempt a solution to the dispute; both farmers and workers rejected his proposals, and on 12 September the latter voted to continue the strike.⁹⁷ By

94 "Precis of Correspondence on the subject of the Ingham strike", item 9958/1918, Pre/A601, QSA; AWU far northern district committee minutes, 23 August, 1 September 1918.

95 AWU far northern district committee minutes, 23 August 1918: "Notes of a deputation to the Premier re the Innisfail sugar dispute", 3 September 1918, 10660/1918, Pre/A601, QSA.

96 "Precis of Correspondence on the subject of the Goondi mill strike", *loc.cit.*, QSA.

97 *Ibid.*; *QIG*, III, 9 (10 September 1918), p.530.

now, however, a split in the ranks of the workers was increasingly evident. One group, led by the AWU officials, wished to accept a compromise in order to return to work; a more militant section wanted the complete abolition of contract labour, demanding that cane be cut solely on a daily wage basis. Feelings between the two groups were bitter; the officer in charge of the Innisfail police reported privately that the AWU would "oust the IWW element which is accountable for the continuation of the strike".⁹⁸ The following day a meeting presided over by Dunstan, the general secretary of the Queensland AWU, ended in complete disorder. Finally, in a secret ballot held on 17 September 1918, workers voted by 504 votes to 292 to return to work, accepting the employers' offer to raise the rates per ton so that an average cutter could earn about 25/- a day.⁹⁹ This represented a successful conclusion to the strike on terms originally demanded by the men, but did not assuage the discontent of the union radicals.

Hostility between the militant leaders and the AWU officials continued. At the AWU annual delegate meeting in January 1919 the far northern district secretary blamed a slight fall-off in membership at Innisfail and Ingham on "a band of irreconcilables" who spread vicious propaganda against the AWU: "these self-styled emancipators, . . . doing Capitalism's dirty work of causing disruption and dissension among the members, were openly advising members not to buy tickets".¹⁰⁰ Similar sentiments would be repeated perennially at AWU conferences.

On the ballot papers for the annual election of AWU office bearers in December 1918, members were asked "Are you in favour of Arbitration as the policy of the Union?" Nearly 40% of the state membership voted (a high response for union elections). Of these,

98 Inspector King to Commissioner of Police, 12 September 1918, *loc.cit.*, QSA.

99 *Ibid.*, 13 and 17 September 1918.

100 *Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1919*, p.20.

74.3% voted "Yes". The "No" vote was highest in the western, far northern, and northern districts:¹⁰¹

	<u>S</u>	<u>SW</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>FN</u>	<u>N</u>	Total <u>Q'land</u>
Yes	2767	1276	1660	1213	1004	7920
No	891(24.4%)	299(23.4%)	632(29.5%)	501(29.2%)	419(27.6%)	2742(25.7%)

The AWU hierarchy claimed the vote as an overwhelming vindication of their pro-arbitration policy. Nevertheless, the overall 25% of members voting "No" clearly represented a very substantial minority disaffected with arbitration, particularly having regard to the way the question was posed. In a dispute situation the simple issue "direct action or arbitration" rarely arose. The arbitration system was a *fait accompli*: most unionists accepted it as such, but did not thereby exclude strike action from their range of industrial options.

The very fact that the AWU leadership thought it desirable to hold a ballot to sanction its policy was proof of the growing militancy of the labour movement. Not only was the AWU clashing with malcontents in its own ranks, but a schism was now apparent between moderate, politically-minded unions led by the AWU, and militant unions like the QRU and AMIEU. Both ideological and practical issues were at stake. There was an inherent conflict between mass unionism as epitomised by the AWU, and the partly theoretically-inspired industrial unionism espoused by the QRU and AMIEU. The industrial unions, resenting the AWU's dominance of labor politics in Queensland, criticised its reliance on arbitration and alleged subservience to the parliamentary party.

Political differences were compounded by jurisdictional disputes. In 1918 the AMIEU found that the system permitting an interchange of tickets between it and the AWU deprived the AMIEU of potential membership among itinerant labourers. Wishing to promote industrial unionism in the meatworks, in May 1918 the northern district of the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.2; *Worker*, 2 January 1919.

AMIEU abolished the system - forcing AWU ticket-holders to join the AMIEU if they wanted to work in the meat industry. Following the North's lead, in July 1918 the state executive of the meatworkers' union abolished the ticket exchange throughout the state.¹⁰² Later that year the QRU also protested strongly against the AWU's action in enrolling permanent-way fettlers, traditionally organised by the railway union.¹⁰³

The incipient discord in the North Queensland labour movement was exacerbated by the involvement of other unions in disputes affecting AWU members. Thus in October and early November 1918 two strikes which directly involved only a handful of AWU workers were transformed into a much broader industrial and social conflict by the willing participation of other unions, by a determined employer reaction against militant trade unionism, and by incidents of violence.

The Townsville Sanitary Strike and the Hughenden "Beer" Fracas

The month-long strike by Townsville night-soil disposal workers began innocuously enough when the city council took over the sanitary service from a private contractor on 1 October 1918. Towards the end of September, the twelve sanitary employees requested a wage rise, but the contractor refused, arguing that because his contract would soon expire, wages were rightly a matter for the council. On 30 September, however, the council announced that it would re-employ only ten workers and would replace two, including the AWU delegate who had first raised the question of higher pay. This naturally gave rise to the charge of victimisation, and the sanitary workers stated, through district secretary Jack Dash, that they would not work for the council unless *all* former employees were engaged. A

102 AMIEU northern district council minutes, 26 May 1918; AMIEU state executive minutes, 2 July 1918.

103 AWU branch executive minutes, 2 August 1918.

demand for a weekly wage of £6 instead of the existing £4.10s. was also served on the council. On 7 October the city council agreed to employ the original twelve men, but refused to pay the extra wages. In response the men continued the strike, reiterating their claim for £6 a week.¹⁰⁴

The strike widened when pickets were posted to prevent non-unionists accepting the work, and the Townsville Industrial Council swung its strength behind the sanitary workers. A public meeting convened by the TIC on 11 October elicited the support of many unions, including the WWF and AMIEU. Otto Lewis, one of the more militant of AWU organisers, set the tone for the meeting when he warned the council and any other employers that "if anything happened to union representatives, then God help them!" Mick Kelly, the president of the TIC, followed with a prediction that the city council "would get the biggest fight of their lives. . .[and] the biggest licking".¹⁰⁵

On 15 October 1918 the local industrial magistrate called a compulsory conference, but the sanitary workers rejected both an offer of £5 per week and the Mayor's suggestion that the dispute be submitted to the joint arbitration of Riordan, the state president of the AWU, and J.J. McGhee, the registrar of the arbitration court. From this point on, the atmosphere became increasingly envenomed as public rancour made itself felt; all sides disclaimed responsibility for an accumulation of sanitary refuse which seriously threatened the health of Townsville residents.

The city council and the parliamentary opposition claimed that the state government's duty was to intervene and crush an "illegal" strike; the TIC urged the government to take over control of public health in the city, assuming that it would concede the workers'

104 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 9 October 1918. See also *QIG*, III, 11 (11 November 1918), p.706.

105 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 October 1918.

wage demand. The government's reply to both groups was that the sanitary service was purely the responsibility of the local authority, and that the dispute should be solved by arbitration. Meanwhile, the sanitary workers themselves rather disingenuously insisted that since they were never actually employed by the council they were not actually on strike.¹⁰⁶

On the night of 22 October the contents of several night-soil pans were strewn along Flinders Lane (now Ogden Street) and piled against the office doors of the mayor and the city health inspector. Since the police had been depleted by the despatch of reinforcements to Hughenden, a threat to law and order, as well as to public health, was seen to exist in Townsville. Schools were closed indefinitely on 25 October. The following day the *Daily Bulletin* asked indignantly:

Is the Queen City of the North to be ruled by its eleven honorary aldermen or its twelve paid sanitary workers?¹⁰⁷

Fearing a typhoid epidemic, the government finally stepped in. On 28 October a senior government medical officer, Dr Moore, arrived in Townsville with authority to clean up the city. He employed the twelve strike workers at £6 a week, and - as expressly provided in the *Health Act* - billed the council for the cost.¹⁰⁸ It was more than a fortnight before the sanitary service returned to normal, however. Subsequently, the dispute was settled by the introduction of a daylight service and a new award which fixed wages at £5 a week.¹⁰⁹

106 QPD CXXXI (24 October 1918), pp.3454-3470; *Daily Standard*, 26 October 1918; Ryan to Mayor, Townsville, and to secretary TIC, 16 October 1918; Dash to Dunstan, 25 October 1918, 11396/1920, Pre/A680, QSA.

107 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 October 1918. This recalled an earlier suggestion by the local socialist weekly that the aldermen do the job for a week before deciding whether it was worth £6: *Federal*, 4 October 1918.

108 Moore to the Under-Secretary, Premier's Department, 28 October 1918, *loc.cit.*, QSA.

109 *Daily Mail*, 7 November 1918; *QIG*, III, 12 (10 December 1918, p.805.

During October Townsville also experienced two less noteworthy strikes by state butchers' shops employees and by tradesmen employed constructing harbour sheds. A more serious strike originating at Hughenden, however, ran a parallel course to the sanitary workers' strike, and ultimately involved Townsville unionists in yet another direct confrontation with employers. The Brisbane *Daily Mail* indicated the connection between the two disputes in an editorial on the sanitary strike:

The "beer strike" at Hughenden is also affecting Townsville. In one sense the two things have nothing to do with each other; in another sense they can not be separated - they are part and parcel of a general feeling of unrest.¹¹⁰

Like the sanitary strike, the Hughenden beer strike directly involved only a few workers: in this case about twenty-five female domestics employed by the pastoral town's hotels. The source of the dispute was an arbitration award for domestic employees in North Queensland, delivered in March 1918 but made retrospective to 1 December 1917. The award stipulated a weekly half-holiday, but in July 1918 the AWU found that seven of the eight Hughenden hotels were not allowing their employees a half-day off. Consequently the union demanded that the hotels pay the women concerned for working the half-holiday since 1 December 1917. The employers now agreed to recognise the stipulated half-holiday, but steadfastly refused to pay the retrospective wages. The amount involved about £2 for each employee, a total of £50.¹¹¹

In refusing to grant the half-holiday from December 1917 to July 1918 the employers were clearly in breach of the award, but

110 *Daily Mail*, 1 November 1918.

111 The issues in the strike are summarised in W. Huxley, honorary AWU secretary, Hughenden, to T.J. Ryan, 7 November 1918, and the "Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the official conduct of Police Officers at Hughenden during the month of October 1918" [unpublished typescript], 9907/1919, Hom/J311, QSA.

legal technicalities meant that they could not be compelled to pay the retrospective wages.¹¹² The women were nevertheless determined to get what they now considered their rightful payments. On 30 September a meeting of unionists in the Hughenden Workers' Hall declared the seven recalcitrant hotels "black" from 1 October 1918 until the licensees conceded the claim. To co-ordinate the "beer strike", a "temperance committee" was formed, comprising men and women AWU members and delegates from the QRU and ASE.¹¹³

In the following months the boycott was solidly applied by the unionists of Hughenden. The town establishment - and probably some workers - however, very much resented the open-air meetings held regularly by the temperance committee to urge people not to drink at the "black" hotels. On 16 October a group led by two local pastoralists, the Penny brothers, broke up one such meeting, assaulting the speakers and creating a general brawl in the streets, while the police stood by powerless to preserve order. Two nights later another meeting was similarly disrupted.¹¹⁴

From this point on there was an organised effort by the publicans, some pastoralists and a number of returned soldiers to oust the militant unionists and break the beer strike. The conservative press highlighted reports of fights between soldiers and unionists, presenting the issue as a conflict between "loyalists" and "IWW-ites". Thus the *Courier* of 21 October:

112 The award did not contain the usual provision that work done on the weekly half-holiday be paid for at overtime rates. The effect of this apparently chance omission was reinforced by a clause of the *Factories and Shops Act* which laid down the time permitted in which legal proceedings could be taken for the recovery of wages. Legal advice assured the employers that payment could not be enforced. Royal Commission Report, *op.cit.*, pp.3-4.

113 *Ibid.*

114 *Ibid.*

The loyalists had their blood up, and are determined to rid the town of the IWW adherents. . . . During Saturday afternoon [19 October] there was more fighting, the loyalists dealing out "the dinkum stoush" to the crowd known as the "I.W.W.". One of these men was very cruelly thrashed, but the loyalists state they warned him out of town by 4 o'clock.¹¹⁵

On 19 October a crowd of 300 gathered in front of the Hughenden Hotel, the only "white" hotel, to order James Durkin, an AWU organiser, and Mick Kelly, who had just arrived from Townsville, to leave town. In the afternoon, the QRU state organiser, Archie Eastcrabbe, was bashed and run out of town. Rampant disorder was further inflamed that night when an army lieutenant, employed by the Commonwealth to sell war loan bonds in Queensland, exhorted townspeople to "hop in and take a hand and deal with the IWW".¹¹⁶ On 21 October a meeting presided over by the mayor - an hotel owner - resolved to "exterminate the hot bed of IWW-ism in this town", and accordingly ordered the beer strike leaders - two women and five men, including two Labor aldermen - to leave Hughenden.¹¹⁷

Police reinforcements soon arrived from Townsville, and order was quickly re-established. Theodore also visited Hughenden, and wired his impressions of the disturbances to Ryan:

115 *Courier*, 21 October 1918, in 11396/1920, Pre/A680, QSA.

116 *Ibid.*, 22 October 1918. The officer, Lt. W.J. Byrne, had travelled to Hughenden from Charters Towers upon hearing rumours of mistreatment of returned soldiers. He later wrote: "I thought it my duty to proceed to Hughenden to help maintain law and order and to protect as far as lay in my power, the men who had fought and bled in the cause of freedom, from attacks of emissaries of the Hun, in other words the IWW, which section were to a very large extent predominant". W.J. Byrne to the organising secretary, North Queensland Recruiting Committee, 23 October 1918, 66/5/115/, BP 4/1, AA(B).

117 Royal Commission Report, p.3; *Courier*, 22 October 1918. Those ordered to leave were "Mr and Mrs Murray, Mrs Sallatina, Mr Huxley, Yank [*sic*], Montague Green and Alfred Henry Bartholomew".

It is evident several squatters acting in conjunction with publicans have organised disorderly element to hunt down persons whom they allege are IWW members but who are in reality merely staunch AWU men and women. Police though strong enough to afford protection and to arrest those responsible for intimidation do not appear to be fully carrying out duty.¹¹⁸

Significantly, a Townsville military intelligence officer also dismissed allegations of IWW influence at Hughenden, reporting confidentially that "the organised crowd of Pastoralists, Commercial and Professional men and others introduced the 'returned soldiers incidents' with a view of inciting the public and thus getting their sympathy with the intention of breaking the 'Beer Strike'".¹¹⁹

The events at Hughenden grabbed the attention of the whole state. With public order restored, the focus shifted to Townsville, where the sanitary strike was in full swing. On 21 October 1918 the TIC placed a black ban on beer, wine and spirits consigned to the boycotted Hughenden hotels. But the unions rejected moves to form a vigilante fighting party to travel to Hughenden, affirming their intention of abiding by the law.¹²⁰

Townsville employers, however, responded aggressively to the union bans: "the fight has begun" proclaimed one leading merchant. By 5 November over 60 carters had been sacked for refusing to cart goods for the "black" hotels to the railway station. When such goods reached the station, railway workers promptly refused to accept them. Predictions of an imminent general strike in the North abounded,

118 Theodore to Ryan, 21 October 1918, 8892/1919, Hom/J311, QSA.

119 Captain Wills to Captain Wood, intelligence section general staff, Brisbane, 27 October 1918, 66/5/115, BP 4/1, AA(B).

120 *Courier*, 22 October 1918.

with newspapers conveying an impression of wild lawlessness and describing a resolute employer-led move to resist militant unionism.¹²¹

The real situation was only slightly less dramatic: social tensions were clearly at a peak in North Queensland. The employers were determined to forcibly break the union bans, just as the carters and railway workers adamantly refused to handle "black" beer. Nevertheless, neither the unionists at Townsville nor their Hughenden colleagues wished to provoke a general confrontation with authority. Rymer scoffed at the predictions of a general strike:

It has been the ambition of the Industrial Council ever since the Hughenden trouble to localise the dispute. We have not been desirous of having any trouble in Townsville . . . neither the railway men nor the Industrial Council are desirous of having a general strike. . . . A general strike would be the last thing to get consideration.¹²²

Tension lessened eventually on 6 November when the Hughenden temperance committee asked the TIC to lift the black bans. The next day W.N. Gillies, state cabinet member and MLA for Eacham, persuaded employers to re-engage the sacked men in return to an assurance from the railwaymen that they would accept goods for Hughenden without discrimination.¹²³ To all intents and purposes the beer strike had ended.

The riots and the involvement of Townsville unionists had swamped the original issue in the dispute - the claim for retrospective overtime payments for Hughenden hotel employees. The boycott in fact fizzled out after a short while. In April 1919 the

121 *Ibid.*, 1 November 1918; *Daily Mail*, 1 November 1918, 4 November 1918.

122 *Daily Mail*, 1 November 1918.

123 Huxley to Ryan, 7 November 1918, Gillies to Ryan, 8 November 1918, 9907/1919, Hom/J311, QSA.

dispute was submitted to the arbitration of Judge Macnaughton, who found that:

. . .as a matter of common fairness, the employees are entitled to at least payment at ordinary rates for the time they worked such half holidays. It is much to be regretted that the employers did not take proper steps to ascertain their true position before refusing to entertain the claim of the employees, which turns out to be a just one.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, Macnaughton admitted that the hotel owners could not now be legally forced to pay the claim. The outcome of the beer strike was therefore essentially a victory for the employers, who had beaten the boycott and broken the strike, partly by violent methods.

The events at Hughenden were a chastening spectacle of the tensions and conflicts in an isolated community at the end of the first world war. They also demonstrated that the Right was at least as prone as the Left to use violence and intimidation to gain its industrial and social ends. In fact, the unionists at Hughenden and Townsville took pains to stress their strictly lawful position. It was the employers and their supporters who, with the approval of the conservative press and with considerable latitude allowed by the police, took the law into their own hands and deliberately provoked violence against the unionists.

In this respect a sequel to the beer strike came in June 1919 when a Royal Commission inquired into the conduct of a police sergeant and four constables during the disturbances of 16-20 October. Curiously, the terms of reference of the Commission did not include the officer in charge of police at Hughenden at the time, Sub-Inspector Harlan. The Commissioner, T.A. Perry, found that there was little or no evidence to substantiate charges of dereliction of duty on the part of the junior officers. He did, however, state that "a

¹²⁴ Royal Commission Report, p.4.

good deal of the lawlessness exhibited would have been avoided, if a firmer stand had been taken by Sub-Inspector Harlan against certain pastoralists, particularly the Penny Brothers".¹²⁵

It is a common judgment that the wartime experiences of socio-economic disruption radicalised the labour movement throughout the world.¹²⁶ Certainly in North Queensland the labour movement became recognisably more socialist in ideology, while the Townsville sanitary strike and the Hughenden disturbances clearly indicated the fervour of class antagonisms in the North. These events, following the 1917 rail strike and compounded by industrial turbulence on the waterfront and in the mines, sugar fields and meatworks, ensured the northern labour movement a widespread reputation for direct-action radicalism in 1918-1919. This reputation was enhanced by the often-exaggerated reporting of North Queensland events by newspapers in Brisbane and southern states.¹²⁷ The northern press also kept its readers aware of the region's allegedly peculiar militancy. During the sanitary strike the Townsville *Bulletin* complained that:

Townsville for the last year or so has been developing Bolshevism until now, except that there is no bloodshed, the mob management of affairs in this city differs very little from the Petrograd and Moscow brand. . . .With the exception of Broken Hill, there is less regard for industrial laws in Townsville than in any other centre.¹²⁸

125 *Ibid.*, pp.4-5, 33-34.

126 A. Briggs, introduction to A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* (London, 1971), p.15; Cole, *Communism and Social Democracy*, pp.410-419.

127 E.g., *Daily Mail*, 2 November 1918; *Courier*, 4 November 1918, 6 January 1919; *Argus*, 2 September 1918, 24 March 1919.

128 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 15 October 1918.

For the *Bulletin* writer, however, as for many others in Australia at the time, any tendency to strike action automatically implied "Bolshevism". As Turner has written of these years, "'Bolshevism' became a giant coverall which encompassed everything from revolutionary agitation and labour unrest to the 'new woman', loose morals, and jazz".¹²⁹

In fact, ideology had only a peripheral connection with labour unrest in North Queensland. It is true that many union militants who advocated direct action were avowed socialists and syndicalists, but strikes themselves stemmed from typical wage grievances at a time of inflation, and the frequent failure to arbitration to match unionists' aspirations. Despite the beliefs of the middle class, it is doubtful whether revolutionary socialism made any contribution to strikes in North Queensland in the latter years of the war, and it is certain that it did not cause any. Nevertheless, the economic unrest which caused the strikes also augmented interest in, and support for, socialism among northern workers.

The militancy of the North compared to the South of Queensland became a very significant factor in the increasing conflicts of interest within the labour movement itself. Towards the end of 1918, the state branch of the AWU commissioned P.H. Hickey to write a pamphlet urging labour unity. Hickey, a prominent New Zealand unionist, had impeccable qualifications as a militant, and later worked for some time as organiser for the QRU.¹³⁰ He penned a strongly-worded claim that "the parochial interests of a given section or locality must be subservient to the general mood".¹³¹ Condemning the "disruptive 'revolutionary' element", Hickey wrote:

129 Turner, '1914-1919', p.352.

130 See Ernie Lane's praise of Hickey, in *Down to Dusk*, pp.126-127. Hickey's New Zealand career is described in H. Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand: past and present* (Wellington, 1973), pp.28-32.

131 P.H. Hickey, *Solidarity or Sectionalism? a plea for unity* (Brisbane, 1918), p.2.

These reactionaries - and reactionaries they are, for their pose as revolutionaries would deceive no one except persons of weak intellect - sneer at union constitutions and rules, jeer at the organisations responsible for the conditions under which they labour, brand as traitors all duly elected officials, and bask in the sunshine of their own glory as uncompromising rebels and Simon Pure revolutionaries.¹³²

According to Hickey, this disruptive group - heirs to the IWW philosophy of sabotage - were located especially in North Queensland, where they were "very active of late. . . within the ranks of the AWU and AMIEU".¹³³

Among AWU members there was certainly a strong section of miners, sugar workers and general labourers (like the sanitary workers) increasingly critical of Labor reformism and the benefits of arbitration. This was demonstrated by the rash of strikes by these groups during 1918 and 1919. But it was the AMIEU which above all provided the basis for the militant reputation of labour in North Queensland.

132 *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

133 *Ibid.*, p.5.

CHAPTER X

THE TOWNSVILLE MEATWORKERS' STRIKE, 1919

The possibility of violence is immanent in all strikes, though in Australia relatively few give rise to overt violence, and very few indeed to actual bloodshed. One strike that did was the lengthy dispute in the Townsville meatworks at the end of the first world war, when police and unionists exchanged gun-fire in the centre of the city on 29 June 1919.¹ But the place of this incident in labour legend - where it is revered as "Bloody Sunday" - obscures the fact that the strike was an ill-advised move which ended in ignominious defeat for the meatworkers. Not only that, but the AMIEU's system of job control - and hence their strong bargaining position in the northern meatworks - was completely shattered. The bitter recriminations and factionalism which were the outcome plagued the union for decades. The strike also had wider ramifications, magnifying schisms in the Queensland labour movement and augmenting working-class disillusionment with the Labor Party state government.

The meatworkers' strike was fought in a context of profound social instability stemming from high local unemployment, and shipping dislocation which caused serious food shortages. It took place in a highly-charged atmosphere of political and class conflict; as D.W. Rawson points out, the isolation of Townsville exacerbated tensions felt generally in Australian society at the time:

1 The best account of the strike is Cutler's lengthy article, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday'. See also Douman, Townsville, 1914-1919, pp.70-88, and J.A. Phillips, The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike: a perspective on social conflict in Queensland, 1918-1919, B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1977.

The years around the end of the first world war were probably marked by more violent activity in politics and industrial affairs than any other period, and although the curious circumstances of Townsville made it particularly prone to violent outbreaks, there was a general social malaise almost throughout the country.²

The underlying issue in the industrial dispute which culminated in social violence was the attempt by the meat companies to curb the northern AMIEU's control over the selection of meatworks labour, and simultaneously - with the tacit support of the state government - to force the union to accept the authority of compulsory arbitration. The companies decided on this move after northern unionists compelled them to grant a new log of claims in July 1917, not six months after a round-table conference had reached a state-wide wages agreement that was supposed to last two years. Consequently, at the end of 1917 the companies lodged a claim in the arbitration court for an award regulating wages and conditions in the meat export industry. Against the strenuous objections of the AMIEU, the court ordered a compulsory conference; when the parties could not agree, a hearing in open court was set down for 25 February 1918. At this stage the northern delegates withdrew from the proceedings, acting on instructions from a special general meeting of AMIEU northern district members.³

The award hearing continued without the participation of northern unionists. The employers claimed that, especially in North Queensland, the union executive was powerless over its own membership, which wilfully flouted agreements. They alleged that the permit system - whereby meatworkers had to obtain authorisation from the union before commencing work each season - forced them to accept many "malcontents, professional loafers, revolutionaries, disloyalists,

2 D.W. Rawson, review of Iremonger *et al.*, *Strikes*, in *AJPH*, XX, 2 (August 1974), p.264.

3 AMIEU, northern district general meeting minutes, 12 February 1918.

irreconcilables and I.W.W. sympathisers".⁴ Accordingly, the companies' representative pressed strongly for the abolition of union preference. Judge McCawley dismissed this request, however, when he delivered the meatworkers' award on 12 March 1918. He argued that the court should not interfere lightly with a system in vogue since 1911. Clearly influenced by the prosperity of the meat industry, McCawley also raised the existing wage rates by 5%.⁵

Superficially, the award protected the employees' position very well - but it represented a tactical victory for the employers. The latter had manoeuvred the union into the arbitration system where the maintenance of existing conditions - especially union preference - was held to be conditional upon "responsible" behaviour by the workers and the elimination of sectional militancy.⁶ But the northern meatworkers lost little time in reaffirming their faith in direct action. On 27 March they rejected the award, resolving to ". . . resume work this season as in previous years, under existing conditions".⁷

The rejection of arbitration by North Queensland meatworkers involved practical considerations of industrial bargaining strength, as well as aspirations for local autonomy - both powerfully reinforced by ideology. Northern meatworkers believed that a system of direct negotiation would advance their wages and conditions more rapidly than arbitration. They had already won a 5% wage rise from the employers before the court proceedings began; the court's

4 Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, Meat Export Award, 1918, pp.32-33.

5 *QIG*, III, 4 (10 April 1918), pp.223-225. McCawley commented: "The prosperity of the pastoral industry at the present time is notorious; so also is that of the meat exporting industry. . . . The disclosed profits of [the Queensland Meat Export Company (Ross River)] last year were £77,560. The dividend of 10% absorbed £65,497. The shares increased in value from 15s. to 25s. in twelve months - an accretion of capital of the shareholders aggregating £300,000".

6 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.88.

7 AMIEU, northern district general meeting minutes, 27 March 1918.

concession of a similar wage rise effectively benefited central and southern Queensland workers only. Moreover, to accept arbitration as a *fait accompli*, as the rest of the state AMIEU had, implied the increased centralisation of authority in the branch executive in Brisbane. Indeed, McCawley specifically warned against "arbitrary" sectional action.⁸ Northern unionists were traditionally proud of their independence; the AMIEU boards of control at Ross River and Alligator Creek resented any move which threatened their local autonomy. Consequently, there were frequent disagreements between the state executive and the northern district members of the union during 1918.⁹

Ideologically, the northern meatworks were strongholds of radical and syndicalist influence within the labour movement. The IWW was defunct, but many itinerant meatworkers still espoused its credo of aggressive direct action and industrial unionism. Following the Russian revolution, many of these workers embraced the Bolshevik stance of social and political upheaval: visitors to the Townsville meatworks were outraged to find several men wearing red jerseys emblazoned with the word "Revolution" in white letters.¹⁰ To many northern meatworkers, arbitration was merely an instrument of working-class oppression fostered by a compromised Labor Party. The northern district of the union rejoiced in its role and reputation as a militant wage pace-setter and promoter of "job control". It maintained an uncompromisingly hostile stance against the meat companies, especially Swift's, of the American Meat Trust, which owned the Alligator Creek works.

It is not very surprising therefore, that 1918 saw an increase in industrial disputes in the meat industry in North Queensland.

8 *QIG*, III, 3 (10 April 1918), p.224.

9 AMIEU, northern district council minutes, 17 May 1918; northern district general meeting minutes, 25 May 1918; state executive minutes, 30 May 1918.

10 Lt-Col. J. Walker, report to the Adjutant-General, 13 December 1918, item SC 5[1]: "Bolshevism in Queensland", CP 447/3, AA(C).

From the beginning of the export killing season the Townsville meatworks were continually held up by "go-slow" and "lightning" strikes, as employees pursued better conditions, higher wages and shorter hours. Strikes occurred every month from May to September.¹¹ At each opportunity the union leaders voiced their hostility to arbitration and industrial discipline: "We have broken every agreement so far and we will break every other as it suits us".¹² The Ross River works manager, William Howell, described the board of control's response to an offer to submit a dispute to arbitration:

They told us they would not arbitrate on anything. They told us they would not recognise the Arbitration Court at all.¹³

The perishable nature of the product and the imperative of meeting overseas contracts made the meat export industry particularly vulnerable to direct action by a strong, belligerent union. Despite the companies' intention of abiding strictly by the award, both Townsville works were forced by "go-slow" tactics and the selective withdrawal of key labour to grant a general wage increase of 7% in September 1918. Howell explained:

11 Ross River was held up by industrial action on 13-18 May, 5 June, 28 July, 15 August and 14-18 September 1918. Alligator Creek was similarly hindered on 11 June-8 July, 29 August and 26 September 1918. AMIEU, northern district council minutes, 4 July, 8 July, 28 July, 4 August, 29 August, 18 September, 26 September 1918; Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, Meat Export Award, re deletion of preference, January 1919, pp.3:4-7:4.

12 *Ibid.*, p.3:4.

13 *Ibid.*, p.8:2.

. . .we got orders from Brisbane to concede the seven per cent as we had about 8 or 9000 cattle coming forward. There was nothing else for us to do. While the men were on strike the cattle would be wasting and they were also subject to redwater. It was our only hope to get these cattle killed to concede to the demands.¹⁴

By the end of the 1918 season the employers evidently judged that the chaotic state of industrial relations stemmed largely from the AMIEU's firm hold on the provision and selection of meatworks labour. The managers therefore decided that the arbitration court must be persuaded to delete preference to unionists from the award.¹⁵ An opportunity to do this came in November 1918 when strikes broke out again at Ross River and Alligator Creek.

The export killing season finished in early October, and the meatworks as usual began reducing their work-force from five or six hundred men each to the off-season complement of about one hundred. Workers were already disgruntled because of a season cut short by drought, and the retrenchments aroused considerable suspicion about the motives of the meat companies. Trouble occurred first at Alligator Creek when two union delegates were paid off, leading to

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- 14 *Ibid.*, p.3:6. Cf. the works superintendent of Alligator Creek, *ibid.*, p.7:2: "With reference to the slow strike, from my experience in the North I find that the men can enforce any demand they wish. If the Companies wish to continue in business and to operate their works then they have got to give way on every demand otherwise they cannot carry on". The term "redwater" refers to redwater fever, which is transmitted by ticks and is, therefore, likely to spread rapidly through cattle held for long periods in yards.
- 15 Superintendent, Alligator Creek, to Australian Meat Export Company, Brisbane, 4 November 1918: "It is unanimously agreed by the Northern Meat Works Managers that we must get the Preference Clause deleted from the present Award, not with a view to carrying on wholesale victimisation, but there is a certain section of men now engaged in this industry that have no intention of doing any work themselves, but, apparently, have the power to enforce their pernicious doctrine on their fellow workers". *Cit.* Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.89.

a charge of victimisation, since under the old agreements - but not under the new award - union officials were the last off each year. A go-slow strike beginning on 11 November blossomed into a full-scale strike on 21 November, when, without warning, "nobody turned up to work".¹⁶ Meanwhile, at Ross River a strike began on 17 November when a foreman replaced the union butcher who was employed to cut up the meat sold to employees at special rates. Although this was customary in the off season, the AMIEU now claimed - with some irony, considering its oft-stated scorn for arbitration - that it was a breach of the preference clause of the award.¹⁷

With both meatworks idle, the companies filed a claim in the arbitration court for the deletion of the preference clause of the meat export award. McCawley ordered a compulsory conference to solve the existing disputes, but the northern union delegates refused to attend. In the weeks that followed the Townsville ORU and WWF placed a black ban on the handling of frozen meat from the works, and the TIC promised its support to the meatworkers. Subsequently, shipowners refused to send boats to Townsville without an assurance that meat would be loaded.¹⁸

In the New Year, economic conditions in Townsville deteriorated and class conflict intensified. All over Australia steeply rising prices and considerable unemployment characterised the last year of the war and the immediate post-war years. In Queensland the cost of living rose by 6% in 1918 and by more than 15% in 1919. Estimated unemployment among Queensland trade unionists averaged 9.3% during 1918 and 11.1% in 1919, much higher than the national figures of 5.8% and 6% respectively.¹⁹ Unemployment was highest in the North of

16 Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, January 1919, n.p.

17 *QIG* IV, 1 (10 January 1919), p.3.

18 *Brisbane Courier*, 6, 27 January 1919; O. Cox, chairman Overseas Shipowners' Central Committee, to Theodore, 30 January 1919, Pre/A627, QSA.

19 *CYB*, 14, 1920, p.1028; *Labour Report*, 10 (1919).

the state, where drought and the closing of western copper mines aggravated the habitual annual effects of the close of the sugar harvest and meatworks season. The meat strike, the subsequent curtailment of shipping, the tendency of the unemployed to drift to the larger cities, all compounded the unemployment problem in Townsville. In January and February 1919 there were at least one thousand men out of work in the city. Many of these formed camps on the Strand and on the banks of Ross Creek in South Townsville.²⁰

Early in January 1919 the Townsville jobless took to the streets to voice their grievances against the meat companies over the existing "lock-out", and against the state and local authorities for not providing employment. Speakers at meetings under the "Tree of Knowledge" in Denham Street condemned the Labor government, stating among other things that, under the control of capitalists, it was trying to starve the unemployed into "scabbing" on the meatworkers.²¹ Meatworkers were prominent among the unemployed, and the general issue of scarcity of work thus merged with the question of arbitration which was at the root of the strike:

What was the good of a Labour Government if they could not do anything? . . . To hell with arbitration! It was no use to the working man.²²

Later radical leaders of the unemployed were to clash with local trade union officials in a bid for leadership of the Townsville labour movement. For the moment, however, the ongoing meatworks

20 *QIG*, IV, 2 (10 February 1919), pp.110-111.

21 Thus E. Thompson, secretary of the unemployed committee: "They had a large army of unemployed in Townsville, and this was a menace to the men who were on strike. A hostile Government could actually starve the unemployed to the extent of scabbing, and it looked to him as if the so-called Labour Government was trying to force them into committing an act of scabbery". *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 February 1919.

22 *Ibid.*; also Captain Wills to Captain Wood, Brisbane, 20 January 1919, "re unemployed agitation in North Queensland", 66/5/115, BP4/1, AA(C).

strike blurred any distinction between unemployed and unionists.²³

The Labor state government was uneasy in the face of criticism from the Left. This was a time when the government was under intense bombardment from the Right over industrial unrest and for its supposed tendencies to "Bolshevism". Therefore, in order to answer the charges of the Nationalists and simultaneously quell criticism from within the labour movement, it suited Labor ministers, scarcely less than the conservatives, to equate direct action with foreign influences. Theodore condemned the agitation by unemployed at Townsville, and also at Bundaberg and Cairns:

I note a few men, a few I.W.W. men who are always bitter antagonists of the Government, are abusing us in consequence of the unemployed situation. I think it is time the workers of this State awakened and booted the loud-mouthed disturbers out of the Labor [*sic*] movement.²⁴

High unemployment in Queensland was a specific issue on which radical disaffection with the moderate reformism of the Labor Party could focus. Some more moderate unionists were also disillusioned with government policies. At the annual AWU delegate meeting in January 1919, for instance, Lane won some support with his claim that the Labor government was approaching the problem of unemployment in the same way as previous Liberal governments; therefore, "Labor as a Government here was a farce and a fraud". P.J. Cahill, a northern district organiser, added that despite nearly four years of Labor rule in Queensland, the workers did not appear to have gained materially. The government was defended only by Riordan, who claimed that the scarcity of work was caused by the great influx of labour

23 During the depression there was little rapport between trade unions and the unemployed organisations. See L.J. Louis, *Trade Unions and the Depression: a Study of Victoria, 1930-1932* (Canberra, 1968), pp.155-192; R. Broomhill, 'Political Consciousness and Dissent: the Unemployed in Adelaide during the Depression', *Labour History*, 34 (May 1978), pp.58-67.

24 *Federal*, 17 January 1919.

from southern states. Whilst the government must do what was right for the workers, Riordan said, "it was not a fair thing to indiscriminately slang-wallop it when it was to some extent the victim of circumstances".²⁵

Two days later, Theodore as acting premier attended the delegate meeting in order to answer the government's critics. High unemployment, he said, was due largely to drought, an abnormal influx of southern labour, and the slackening of seasonal industries. Despite a serious shortage of funds, the government was combatting the problem by placing as many men as possible on the construction of public works; rations to unemployed had also been substantially increased. But when Theodore went on to castigate the Townsville unemployed "orators" as ignorant liars, he provoked a clash with Kelly, president of the TIC, which revealed a fundamental difference of opinion about the nature of the labour movement in Australia:

Kelly: Surely it was not right that, merely because men attacked the Government, Mr Theodore should talk of "booting" them out of the Labor Movement?

Theodore: My complaint is against men who pretend to be unionists, and yet are seeking to undermine the Labor Movement.

Kelly: They may be attacking the Parliamentary Labor Party.

Theodore: They are attacking the Labor Movement.

Kelly: Mr Theodore confuses the Labor Party with the Labor Movement. There are men in the Labor Movement who do not believe in political action.

Theodore: But the Labor Movement here stands for political action right through.²⁶

25 *Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1919*, pp.10-12.

26 *Ibid.*, pp.32-35. In fact, 1100 extra men were placed on railway construction work in Queensland from December 1918 to January 1919. In February 1919 the ration list was increased from 7s. per week to 10s. for single men, a rise of 42%. *QPP 1919-20, IV*, pp.571-576.

Such a clash was merely one symptom of the increasing conflict over power and ideology within the labour movement. At the QCE meeting on 18 February 1919 Theodore continued his attack on the "disruptionists". On McCormack's motion a committee was established to prepare an official statement urging Laborites to close ranks.²⁷ On 11 March the resulting manifesto was sent to all party branches, affiliated trade unions and the press. Entitled "Solidarity - or Disruption?" the manifesto declared war on any element which deflected the movement from its "true aim", undermined its authority and discipline, or endangered Labor solidarity by unfair criticism. The QCE condemned the "avowed or covert supporters" of the IWW, whose doctrines were wholly at variance with Labor principles, and called for closer unity between the political and industrial sections of the labour movement.²⁸ But, in the meantime, events in North Queensland were approaching a climax which would have a directly opposite result.

On 20 January 1919 McCawley commenced hearing the meat companies' application for the deletion of union preference from the meat export award. The companies argued that the AMIEU in the North was dominated by radical extremists who intimidated their fellow workers and capriciously instigated strikes. Consequently, if the meat industry was to continue at all in that part of the state, employers must have control of the internal operation of the works and greater power over the selection of labour. The northern meatworkers refused to take any part in the court proceedings; the AMIEU was represented by its state secretary, C.A. Boulton, who also appeared for the ASE (which had members among the skilled meatworks' mechanics) and for the FEDFA (which had some members at Alligator Creek but none at Ross River). Boulton's defence, however, seemed to be aimed chiefly at preserving preference in the southern meatworks, emphasising

27 QCE minutes, 18 February 1919. The committee consisted of W.H. Demaine (QCE president); L. McDonald (QCE secretary); E. Theodore; G. Lawson (small unions' delegate); J. Heeney (QRU delegate); J.S. Collings (convention representative); and E.H. Lane. All members of the QCE subsequently signed the manifesto.

28 *Ibid.*, 11 March 1919.

their relatively low incidence of industrial strife compared to the North.²⁹

In delivering his judgment on 31 January 1919, McCawley abolished preference from all meatworks in the northern division, and also from the Gladstone works. The judge found that most strikes in the North stemmed from a desire to punish the employers for their departure from collective bargaining, and that:

. . .the operations of the largest works of the North, Ross River and Alligator Creek, are carried on, retarded, or stopped at the whim of the mob, led or followed, as it suits their purpose, by officials whose avowed policy, in the words of the Northern District Secretary [*sic*], is not to suppress, but to excite discontent. This policy is dictated by a spirit of revenge against the employers, who, impelled by the disregard paid to agreements by this very same section of employees, had invoked the jurisdiction of the Court of Industrial Arbitration.³⁰

In Australian labour lore, the abolition of union preference from the northern meatworks in 1919 resulted from a concerted attack on militant unionism by the arbitration court, the meat companies, and the state government.³¹ There is little evidence of collusion between these bodies, but clearly they all desired the smooth working of the meat industry and agreed that the chief obstacle to this end was the influence of militant direct-actionists.

With the end of the war, the meat companies no longer profited

29 Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, January 1919, pp.7:1-8:3, 12:3-4, and *passim*.

30 *QIG*, IV, 3 (10 March 1919, p.89. In fact, Carney, the official referred to, was northern district organiser. The more moderate Ogden was secretary.

31 See *International Socialist*, 7 February 1920; *Meat Industry Journal of Queensland*, September 1955; Davis, 'In Quest of the Millenium', *ibid.*, June 1944, April 1945; W.J. Harris, *The Bitter Fight*, pp.279-280; Sherwood, History of the AMIEU in N.Q.

from lucrative guaranteed contracts with the British government. The consequent need to operate on the highly competitive open market, combined with the effects of drought in western Queensland, meant that production of meat during 1919 would be very uncertain. These circumstances strengthened the resolution of the employers, because they had little room for economic manoeuvre. They were determined to refuse any above-award concessions to employees; they would also eliminate the "extremists" from their works. The abolition of the preference clause was the means by which the companies would achieve these aims.

The state government was also very alarmed at the prevalence of industrial unrest in North Queensland during 1918 and 1919. Frequent strikes at the meatworks were not only a source of Opposition criticism and potential electoral embarrassment for the Labor Party; they also directly challenged the government's faith in arbitration as the mechanism to settle disputes. The meat export industry adhered to collective bargaining until 1918, and the government was clearly displeased that such an important industry lay outside the arbitration system. There is considerable evidence, indeed, that the meat companies decided to invoke the jurisdiction of the arbitration court upon the advice of some cabinet ministers, notably Theodore.³²

32 This was a common claim among Townsville unionists: see those cited *ibid.* Davis names Theodore; this seems logical since he was minister in charge of labour matters and had already (in 1917) suggested to the unions that they might consider approaching the court: AMIEU, state executive minutes, 12 July 1917. Consider also the following evidence of Philp, the Alligator Creek superintendent, at the arbitration hearings in January 1919:

"The meat companies came to the conclusion that they could never get anywhere at these conferences. . . , and, at the suggestion of probably some of the State Minister, they decided to go to the Arbitration Court."

Philp was later questioned by Boulton:

"You stated that the companies went to arbitration largely at the suggestion of some of the State Ministers. Will you name them?"

"I don't know their names."

"What authority have you for saying that?" - "I have heard the statement made."

"Who by?" - "Several people."

"Will you name them?" - "No."

Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, January 1919, pp.7:3, 7:5.

The government's attitude was put forcefully by Theodore a few days before McCawley delivered his judgment. Without referring to the actual court proceedings, Theodore - easily the most consistent Labor critic of direct industrial action - implicitly condemned the Townsville meat strike:

A serious menace was insidiously creeping into the movement. An exotic growth of foreign element threatened to eat into the movement like a deadly poison if it was not checked. . . .Direct action and revolution, such as the IWW troglodytes preached, was an anachronism. [I am] not ashamed to admit that [I] organised the most militant union in Queensland, and assisted in many strikes in Northern Queensland, but now, under the advanced arbitration laws in Queensland particularly, the workers could obtain redress, avoid the suffering of strikes, and realise their aims, without resorting to direct action.³³

As for the arbitration court, an institution established to promote industrial peace, it saw no justification for compelling employers to give preference to men whose express aim was to foster industrial turmoil.³⁴

33 *Worker*, 30 January 1919. Ryan expressed similar sentiments a few months earlier:

'The Government has provided complete machinery for [the settlement of industrial disputes] by means of conciliation and arbitration. That machinery should be resorted to, and it is to the interests of the workers that they should. No one has more to lose than the workers in ignoring the existence of that machinery. They should discriminate with regard to advisers who would have them do otherwise. They must beware lest there should be enemies within their gates. . . .It is the duty of the employers to avoid precipitating a crisis, while, on the other hand, it is the duty of the employees to stand for the platform of their party, namely, conciliation and arbitration. . . . If they should depart from the platform they are throwing away the palladium of their rights.'

Brisbane Courier, 2 November 1918.

34 *QIG*, IV, 3 (10 March 1919), p.189.

Nevertheless, it was highly improbable that the removal of union preference would ease tension in industrial relations at the Townsville meatworks. In fact, the reverse was the case, as Boulton warned:

The northern men have had preference by industrial action since 1910, and in allowing them preference under the last award, *the Government* merely ratified something they had already enjoyed. The North Queensland workers acknowledge no concession in the matter of preference from the Arbitration Court. [I] fear, knowing the psychology of the Northern workers, that the effect would be to promote industrial turmoil, rather than to check it, in which case the intention of the Court would be defeated.³⁵

Reference to "the Government" rather than the arbitration court, however inadvertent, underlined the fact that many unionists regarded the government as the real culprit in removing union preference from the meatworks.

On 3 February 1919, four days after the court's decision, a meeting of over 700 AMIEU, ASE and FEDFA meatworkers in Townsville resolved to continue their strike, declaring both meatworks black. The ban was sanctioned by the northern district council of the QRU and by the Townsville branch of the WWF, which, against the instructions of the WWF federal council, refused to handle any goods from the local meatworks.³⁶ On the other hand, some trade unions such as the LEFCA and the Railway Guards' Association, accepting the authority of the arbitration court, decided not to acknowledge the meatworks black bans, while the AWU's attitude was made apparent by its repeated refusal to lend financial support to the AMIEU.

35 *Worker*, 6 February 1919. [my emphasis]

36 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 February 1919; H.M. Adams, secretary Commonwealth Steamship Owners' Association, to J. Morris, 7 February 1919; Morris to P.F. Donovan, secretary Townsville WWF, 10 February 1919, T62/8/15 (i), RSSS-ANUA.

The divisive effect which McCawley's preference decision had on northern unionists was illustrated further by the incongruous situation within the FEDFA, whose meatworks members were on strike yet whose railway members raised no obstacle to the transport of goods from the meatworks.³⁷ In the following months, such internal divisions had deep and bitter repercussions on the northern labour movement.

Free now to select their own labour regardless of union wishes, the meat companies pressed their advantage and established an employment bureau in the city centre, thereby engaging a number of non-union returned soldiers. In response the unions posted pickets on the roads leading to the meatworks. The intense hostility between the two groups resulted in frequent - and sometimes armed - clashes between unionists and returned soldiers, as well as other "scabs" employed by the companies.³⁸

Perhaps the most notorious incident was the "Horatio Holland" affair on 28 February 1919, when union pickets at the Ross River bridge prevented two returned soldiers from proceeding to work. That afternoon Lieutenant Revenall Holland, employed at the Alligator Creek works, arrived at the bridge armed with a rifle and revolvers. Firing a few shots into the air, he chased away the pickets, then shouldered his rifle and paced up and down the bridge, having erected a notice warning "all Bolsheviks and molesters of returned soldiers" that he would "shoot to kill".³⁹

37 Minutes of meetings of the Executive Council of the Queensland Locomotive Enginemen, Firemen and Cleaners' Association. [LEFCA minutes], 2 March 1919, E212, RSSS-ANUA; AWU Branch executive minutes, 17 January 1919; *Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1919*, p.48; *Brisbane Courier*, 5 February 1919.

38 Inspector King to Commissioner Urquhart, 5 February 1919, 1479/1919, Hom/J289, QSA; W.S. Munro, reporter and confidential clerk, to Captain S.S. Wills, 9 February 1919, 66/5/115, BP4/1, AA(B); Davis, in *Meat Industry Journal of Queensland*, January, 1945.

39 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 February 1919; cf. Douman, *Townsville, 1914-1919*, p.74; Davis, *loc.cit.*

Holland was subsequently charged with disturbing the peace, and fined a nominal amount. The police magistrate, H.M. Morris, clearly approved of Holland's actions:

. . .all respect was due to Holland for protesting against these ridiculous attempts on men going to work. It was fortunate for Townsville and for Australia that there was a man like the defendant to take action himself.⁴⁰

Thereafter the returned soldiers became more militant, declaring their intention of fighting Bolshevism, "punishing" disloyalists, and assisting the local police.⁴¹

Already indignant at what they considered to be persecution of strikers by the police, Townsville unionists were incensed by the magistrate's remarks. Clashes between returned soldiers and unionists echoed those earlier disturbances at Hughenden (October 1918), and in Merivale Street, Brisbane (March 1919), when groups of returned soldiers clashed with unionists and Russian emigres. There was indeed ample evidence that many people on the conservative side of politics, fearful of imminent "Bolshevism", were taking an increasingly aggressive stance against any left-wing movements. Certainly, many unionists believed that the employers, returned soldiers, police and judiciary were united in an effort to crush unionism in Australia.⁴² Later violent events in Townsville at the end of June 1919 must be seen in the light of this highly tense situation of class and political conflict. Clearly groups other than the working class played an equally active role in bringing social tensions to breaking point.

40 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 March 1919.

41 *Ibid.*, 29 March 1919; King to Commissioner Urquhart, 31 March 1919, 4202/1919, Hom/J294, QSA.

42 For the Hughenden incidents, when pastoralists, returned soldiers and others disrupted unionists' meetings while the police looked on, see above, Ch. IX; for descriptions of the Brisbane riots, see Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, pp.420-421; and Phillips, *The Townsville meatworkers' Strike*, pp.34-35.

Civil disruption was brought closer by Townsville's isolation from the rest of Australia, especially when the "Spanish" influenza pandemic swept the country early in 1919. Shipping had already fallen off because of the meatworks strike; strict quarantine regulations now forced a further reduction in the number of ships calling at northern ports. Some optimistic radicals like Edward Thompson, the secretary of the unemployed committee, discerned possibilities for revolutionary upheaval in the Townsville situation:

It had been said in the southern press that revolution might possibly take place in Townsville. They could imagine the absurd reports that appeared in the south, and the scare headlines about the agitation in the North. . . .But there might be more truth in those statements than the writers imagined. . . .A revolution could easily take place in the North. They had only communication by lines of boats, and many of them did not come now owing to the Quarantine situation. This was an ideal place for a revolt.⁴³

By March 1919 it was clear that the employers were winning the latest industrial battle at the meatworks. Union strike funds were running low; the meatworks now had enough "scab" labour to carry out their pre-season operations. Not only non-unionists and returned soldiers, but also some waterside labourers (lacking work on the wharves), and members of the AMIEU itself were working at the meatworks.⁴⁴ Taking stock of this situation, the strike committee declared the strike off on 19 March 1919. It had lasted for four months. According to Carney, the main reason for the unionists' defeat was "lack of class consciousness".⁴⁵ In view of the evident willingness with which many workers ignored or defied the black ban on the meatworks, this seemed a reasonable assessment.

43 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 19 February 1919; King to Urquhart, 26 February 1919; 2464/1919, Hom/J289, QSA.

44 AMIEU, northern district council minutes, 16 March 1919; Donovan to Morris, 17 April 1919, T62/8/15, RSSS-ANUA.

45 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 March 1919.

The companies continued the offensive when killing operations were expanded for the export market at Alligator Creek (in April) and Ross River (in May). With a fair proportion of non-union labour firmly entrenched at the two plants, many known militants were refused employment.⁴⁶ There followed an uneasy armistice between the unionists on one side and the meat companies and "scabs" on the other. Tensions were exacerbated by a move on the part of the "scabs" to join the AWU. The Queensland branch executive of the AWU officially expressed its "astonishment" and refused to acknowledge this move, but did little to discourage meatworkers from buying AWU tickets.⁴⁷

"No industrial disturbances occurred during the month, which is something new for Townsville", a government labour agent wrote in his April report.⁴⁸ This relative industrial harmony was shattered in May, however, when further trouble flared at the meatworks and when the Townsville branch of the Federated Seamen's Union joined their southern confreres in a national strike. A brief but bitter dispute occurred at the Alligator Creek meatworks when the management, refusing to acknowledge any conditions outside the award, attempted to reduce the previous year's above-award rates in the casing department. After a strike of five days (from 14 to 18 May), however, the company gave in: this was the first victory for the union since September 1918.⁴⁹

Having made no wages claim during the war, Australian seamen felt entitled to a substantial increase when hostilities ceased. In

46 Carney estimated that about 25% of those who went on strike were not re-employed. The companies admitted that they had excluded "undesirables". Queensland Industrial Court, Transcript of Proceedings, Meat Export Award, February 1920, pp.7, 190.

47 Contrary to Cutler's statement that "the AWU. . . readily gave official recognition to the men": 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.91; AWU Queensland Branch executive minutes, 1 April 1919, 23 April 1919.

48 *QIG*, IV, 5 (10 May 1919), p.276.

49 *Ibid.*, 6 (10 June 1919), p.349; *Brisbane Courier*, 19 May 1919.

December 1918 the Commonwealth Arbitration Court awarded them an 11% wage rise, but the FSU had asked for 50%, which they claimed was justified by the high profits of the shipping companies. The 'flu epidemic aggravated pay grievances, since if a seaman fell sick at sea he was put ashore at the first port, to find his way home at his own expense. In April 1919 the FSU, the Shipowners' Federation, and the Commonwealth government (itself a large shipowner), met in conference, but the union's claims were rejected outright, and the men went on strike.⁵⁰ Shipping to North Queensland, severely disrupted for some months by the meatworks dispute and then by the 'flu epidemic, ground to a virtual halt.

On 30 May over 1500 Townsville unionists marched to the harbour wharves to protest against the berthing of the steamship "Morialta", which, with several cases of influenza aboard, had not undergone the required seven days' quarantine. The unionists intended to cast the offending ship adrift, but found it anchored fifty yards from the jetty, with the gunboat HMAS "Una" standing at "action stations" close by. Undaunted, the workers held a meeting on the wharf, declaring their support for the stand of the waterside workers in refusing to handle any cargo while the "Morialta" was in port. Carney was loudly applauded when he took the opportunity to call for support for the AMIEU in its fight to rid the meatworks of the "scabs". The next day the "Morialta" moved to the quarantine anchorage in Cleveland Bay.⁵¹

These apparent victories at Alligator Creek and in the "Morialta" affair strengthened the resolve of the Townsville labour movement. A week later a military intelligence officer reported - prophetically, as events would show:

50 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.195; "Seamen's Strike" broadsheet, 1919. [Mitchell Library]

51 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 31 May 1919; *QIG*, IV, 6 (10 June 1919), p.349.

The labour position here during the past three weeks has been of a very alarming nature and the power of the Industrial Council appears to have grown enormously since their victory in the late Meat Strike. Momentary gusts of passion amongst sections are comprehensible; they occur in most democratic societies, but this general burst of passion at such times when there is so much stress and unemployment amongst the workers here will only lead to violence, which in the event of it breaking out the police will be impotent to check owing to their small numbers.⁵²

The impression of union strength and solidarity given by such incidents as the "Morialta" demonstration, however, was complicated by ideological disagreements within the labour movement. Early in May 1919 the TIC formally adopted the preamble of the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia [WIUA], generally known as the "official" One Big Union. A programme of future action rather than an actual organisation, the OBU movement was launched at trade union congresses in Sydney and Brisbane in August 1918. Its inspiration was syndicalist, though it advocated revolutionary political as well as industrial action to replace capitalism with social ownership of the means of production. The first step towards this goal was the "scientific" organisation of the working class into a confederation of six great industrial unions.

The OBU was led by officials of existing trade unions, however, and was sufficiently lax in ideology to include Labor Party radicals. The WIUA ran into stiff opposition from radical socialists and syndicalists on the left, and from politicians, craft unionists and the AWU bureaucracy on the right. Nevertheless, in the immediate post-war years the scheme attracted considerable popular support -

52 Wills' report on "Industrial Unrest in Townsville", 9 June 1919, 66/5/115, BP 4/1, AA(B).

if generating little practical action - from the Australian union movement.⁵³

These developments towards closer unionism in the southern capitals were reflected in Townsville, but with an added element of contention because of the long-standing meatworks dispute. Those most prominent in the official OBU were Mick Kelly, chairman of the TIC, Jock Cameron, president of the local WWF, Otto Lewis, an AWU organiser, Pierce Carney, the AMIEU organiser, and George Rymer and Ernie Sampson of the QRU. This group also comprised the militant core of the official meatworks strike committee. Functioning as the Townsville OBU, its main object was educative. Under its auspices, regular and well-attended Sunday evening meetings at the Tree of Knowledge heard lectures on a wide range of subjects, depending on the particular speaker: industrial unionism, socialism, the Russian revolution, even Esperanto.⁵⁴

On the right the official OBU was opposed by craft union representatives who had ignored the recent meat strike, and also, more tacitly, by Jack Dash of the AWU and Anthony Ogden, the moderate northern district secretary of the AMIEU. Much more vocal criticism came from the left, in the form of a local organisation of the "unofficial" OBU, sponsored by the Melbourne-based Australian

53 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.182-194, cf. I. Bedford, 'The One Big Union, 1918-1923', in *Sydney Studies in Politics*, 3: *Initiative and Organisation* (Melbourne, 1963), p.21: "As the syndicalist knows, political resolution is much less real than industrial action. So long as their support is just nominal, a matter of parliamentary politics, of making recommendations or amending the party platform, men will extend it willingly who would never commit themselves to deeds". See also Childe, *How Labour Governs*, pp.173-194, and I. Young, 'The New South Wales One Big Union, 1918-1919', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, VI, 3 (November 1964).

54 "One Big Union Activities in Townsville", 23 May 1919, 66/5/115, BP4/1, AA(B). Also *e relatione* Rymer, 10 January 1976. Esperanto was not such a discrete topic as may be imagined. It was promoted by many socialists as a means of breaking down national language barriers and thus enabling closer international working-class co-operation.

administration of the Workers' International Industrial Union [WIIU]. This body, the successor to the banned IWW, condemned the WIUA for including politics in its methods and for attempting to graft the OBU on to the existing trade unions. In contrast, the WIIU advocated a rank and file movement to build industrial unionism - and thus the socialist society - from the bottom; its favoured structural base was the shop committee. Consequently, it hailed the "job control" held until recently by the boards of control at the northern meatworks.⁵⁵

In Townsville, the unofficial OBU was supported by a section of the more extreme militants disaffected with the executives of the AMIEU and TIC. This group had opposed calling-off the most recent meatworks strike in March 1919. They were led by the unemployed spokesmen and by AMIEU board of control members who had been deliberately refused work after the strike. Like the official OBU, the "unofficial" One Big Unionists held regular street meetings. However, ideological propaganda was less vociferous than criticism of the officials of the northern district of the AMIEU and the TIC for their "passive" approach to the meatworks dispute.⁵⁶ While the anarcho-syndicalist philosophy of the WIIU was particularly prone to condemnation of labour officials and politicians as parasites on the working class, in Townsville ideological differences between the rival OBUs took second place to other conflicts - those between the rank and file and union leadership generally, for instance, or between the boards of control and the northern district office of the AMIEU.

But supporters of both OBUs agreed on the need to get rid of the scabs at the meatworks and regain union preference. On 22 June, as foreshadowed by Carney's remarks during the "Morialta" affair,

55 Turner, *loc.cit.*; Bedford, *loc.cit.*; *One Big Union Herald* (Melbourne), 30 September 1919.

56 Reports on "Formation of the One Big Union (Opposition)", 27 May 1919, and "The I.I.W. [*sic*] Townsville", 17 June 1919, 66/5/115, BP4/1, AA(B).

the northern district council of the AMIEU asked the meatworks managements for an undertaking

that no member of the AMIEU now working on the plants shall be dismissed while any non-unionists or men who took the places of union members during the last two disputes remain at the works.⁵⁷

This demand was refused outright, and a strike commenced at both plants on 23 June 1919. But a possible portent for the outcome of the dispute was evident in the disagreement among meatworkers about the desirability of strike; some unionists argued that the best way of ejecting the scabs was to apply moral pressure on the job.⁵⁸ Within the broader labour movement, internal divisions were intensified when ASE and FEDFA members voted to continue working at the meatworks. This pattern was repeated by transport workers: the WWF and the QRU supported the AMIEU's black ban on meatworks goods, but most other railway unions did not.⁵⁹

On the other hand, the meat companies almost welcomed the resumption of hostilities.⁶⁰ Meat production was very uncertain, and storage capacity virtually full because of the shipping troubles; in these circumstances the companies' bargaining position was virtually unassailable.

The state government made no official comment on the strike, but there is little doubt that it was concerned about renewed industrial trouble at the northern meatworks. The continual disruption to shipping resulted in serious food shortages in North Queensland; as at the time of the 1917 maritime strike, the daily

57 *Worker*, 26 June 1919.

58 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 23 June 1919; evidence of Carney, in Roy/102, QSA.

59 *Brisbane Courier*, 25 June 1919.

60 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.92.

press managed to blame the Labor Party for the industrial trouble and therefore for the food shortages. The meatworks strike also swelled the ranks of the Townsville unemployed, who were very hostile to the state Labor government.

Union officials such as Ogden attempted to ease tension by stressing the basically moderate and defensive stand of the union: the AMIEU was not asking that the scabs be sacked at once; what they wanted was that as the work slackened towards the end of the season, the non-unionists should be dispensed with before members of the union. The AMIEU claimed that the reverse in fact was occurring at the works: unionists were being dismissed and non-unionists kept on.⁶¹ But the vocal and aggressive behaviour of a section of the rank and file and the sensationalist reporting of the local press seemed to cast doubts on Ogden's claims of moderation.

The militant rank and file quickly took the conduct of the strike into their own hands. In the early hours of Saturday morning, 28 June 1919, a mob of three hundred raided the railway cattle yards at Stuart, tearing down the gates and releasing five hundred head of cattle owned by the Queensland Meat Export Company. A stockman and a cattle buyer were threatened with a bashing, saddles were destroyed and the drinking water poisoned. Powerless to prevent the raid, policemen on duty at the yards reported that the mob was led by Mick Kelly and Pierce Carney. On Sunday afternoon these two were arrested and placed in the Townsville lock-up. Bail was refused.⁶²

Inflamed by an incident reminiscent of the gaoling of union leaders in order to break a strike, a crowd of about three thousand assembled at the Tree of Knowledge on Sunday evening. Fiery speeches expressed support for the strike and hostility to the police;

61 *Brisbane Courier*, 25 June 1919; *Worker*, 26 June 1919.

62 See the evidence of police constables Mairs, Kerr and Smith, in *R v. Carney*, copied in Roy/102, QSA; Hawkes to CIB, Brisbane, 28 June 1919, S560/1920. Pre/A663, QSA; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 30 June 1919. Carney and Kelly were charged with intimidating a stockman into leaving his lawful place of employment.

some-one suggested a protest march to the lock-up to give three cheers for Carney and Kelly. Notwithstanding Rymer's advice to refrain from violence and accept the situation calmly, the crowd moved *en masse* to the lock-up, singing the "Red Flag". There they were confronted by four armed and nervous police. Sections of the crowd demanded the release of the prisoners (unbeknown to them, Kelly had been removed to the hospital with 'flu); others urged a forceful break-in. A scuffle ensued at the lock-up gates, the police sergeant in charge was knocked to the ground, and a shot was fired.⁶³ The police then fired at random into the crowd, a section of which returned fire. The mob quickly dispersed, leaving nine men wounded; amazingly, no-one was killed.⁶⁴

Next morning Carney was again refused bail, at the request of counsel for the meat companies.⁶⁵ Simultaneously the unionists held another meeting at the Tree of Knowledge. Surveillance by a group of armed police further inflamed the excited crowd, some of whom rushed the nearby hardware stores of Rooneys and Alfred Shaw, seizing rifles, ammunition, knives and razors.⁶⁶ Shots were fired at the police, who wisely retreated. Sherwood describes the subsequent scene:

63 As Cutler says, "true to tradition", the first shot was disavowed by both sides: 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.94. Cutler states that there were thirteen police on duty at the lock-up: this is clearly an error. 'Report of the Royal Commission appointed to Inquire into the Circumstances surrounding the Incidents which took place at the Lock-up at Townsville on the Night of Sunday, the Twenty-ninth day of June, 1919, more particularly into the Alleged Use of Firearms, and any matters connected therewith', *QFP* 1919-1920, II, p.592.

64 *Ibid.*, pp.589-597; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1 July 1919; Ogden to Ryan, 11 July 1919; sub-inspector Kenny to Urquhart, 30 June 1919, Roy/102, QSA: "Townsville Disturbance", item SC 26 [2], CP447/3, AA(C). See also Cutler, *op.cit.*, p.94; Douman, *Townsville, 1914-1919*, pp.81-82; Phillips, *The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike*, pp.87-92.

65 Kenny to Urquhart, 2 July 1919, Roy/102, QSA.

66 Alfred Shaw Ltd, and Rooneys Ltd to T.J. Ryan, 18 August 1919, 9574/1919, Pre/A663, QSA.

The main shopping centre became a ghost town. . . .The main street of Townsville was in the possession of the meaties and their allies, and they disported themselves by shooting pigeons off the Post Office roof.⁶⁷

But, with some of their followers openly engaged in civil revolt, the official strike committee retreated from the verge of constitutional defiance. They advised all unionists to return to work, and on Monday afternoon "business proceeded much as usual".⁶⁸ The police and the police magistrate took the unusual step of declaring that Carney would be released on bail if the stolen rifles were returned. The strike committee denied any connection with the riots, and that evening Carney was released unconditionally.⁶⁹

The state government reacted swiftly to quell lawlessness in the North. Hotels in Townsville were closed and all available police rushed to the city. Ryan issued a proclamation calling on citizens to refrain from unlawful assembly, and authorised the acquisition by the state of all firearms and ammunition in the Townsville district.⁷⁰ Very few stolen guns were recovered, but the police arrested the two "ringleaders" of the Monday morning riot. One, a railway worker, was later sentenced to three years hard labour; the other, a fourteen-year-old boy, was convicted but committed to the custody of the Anglican Bishop.⁷¹

The sending of police reinforcements to Townsville indicated the wide divergence of attitudes to the riots held by the northern unionists on the one hand and the Labor government on the other. Ryan claimed that the government was merely fulfilling its paramount

67 Sherwood, mss., also *cit.* Douman, *op.cit.*, p.82. Cf. *Federal*, 4 July 1919.

68 "Townsville Disturbance", *loc.cit.* AA(C).

69 The police were subsequently rebuked for the "most improper stipulation" regarding bail. Urquhart to the Officer in Charge, Townsville, 1 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA.

70 Ryan to Melrose, mayor, Townsville, 30 June 1919, *ibid.*

71 King to Urquhart, 10 August 1919, *ibid.*

function of maintaining public order: "the authority of the executive must be upheld".⁷² But unionists argued that the police were being sent to intimidate workers and thereby break the meat strike. They feared that the Labor government was following the non-Labor precedent of forceful intervention in industrial disputes. As for the rioting, that was caused largely by the rash action of the police themselves; an influx of more armed police would only inflame matters further.⁷³ To back up their interpretation of events, the strike committee counselled all workers to act strictly within the law. On 2 July Ogden wired Ryan:

Held big mass meeting this morning
committee urged members absolute
necessity for good order which was
accepted. Committee feel sure situation
absolutely safe urge you call back
police.⁷⁴

Understandably, in view of the reports he was receiving from the Townsville authorities, Ryan sent the reinforcements on. He did, however, shelve plans for a further consignment of southern police to the North. In all, the Townsville police force - normally numbering about 50 - was augmented by about 130 men.⁷⁵

72 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 July 1919.

73 J. Durkin (AWU), Lange (QRU), Bartholomew (ASE) to Ryan, 3 July 1919; Ogden to Ryan, 2 July 1919, *loc.cit.* QSA. The Brisbane Industrial Council expressed its "disgust and apprehension [at] the dastardly outrage by the Townsville police in shooting defenceless workers and deprecate[d] the action of the Government in sending additional police to Townsville to bludgeon the workers into submission". *Daily Standard*, 4 July 1919.

74 Ogden to Ryan, 2 July 1919, *loc.cit.* QSA.

75 An early telegram from the police magistrate stated: "General situation very serious quiet now but outbreak liable any moment. 500 armed men urgently required to ensure protection from violence. Leaders unable to control strikers". Morris to Ryan, 1 July 1919; cf. Ryan to Ogden, 3 July 1919, *ibid.*

North Queensland's isolation from the south meant that police from Brisbane and Rockhampton travelled west to Longreach by train, then by motor vehicle 110 miles to Winton, where they boarded a train once again to travel the remaining 400 miles to Townsville via Hughenden and Charters Towers. In normal circumstances, this took fully three days. There was a delay at Hughenden, however, as railway workers met to decide whether they should work the police train. They agreed to do so by a majority of one, but their colleagues at Charters Towers voted 83-4 against taking the 81 police any further. The train was eventually manned by very senior railway department officials, and arrived in Townsville late on Thursday, 3 July.⁷⁶ Those employees who had refused duty at Charters Towers were suspended. This action, involving railway workers in a direct confrontation with the government, added a new dimension to an already tense situation in North Queensland.

There were no further incidents of crowd violence in Townsville, though the situation remained extremely strained for months after the riots of 29 and 30 June. Strikers and unemployed continued to hold public meetings, and the constant patrolling of armed police could not prevent many clashes - including the occasional gunfight - between individual strikers and "scabs". The labour movement's feelings against the police were very bitter; frequent complaints were made of widespread police brutality. Blame for the presence of the police was sheeted home squarely to the state government, and by implication to the Labor Party itself. As Carney declaimed:

Now they had beaten the Huns, they had
some of them brought home to them, and put
them in Labour Party uniform, to shoot the
workers down.⁷⁷

Similar hostility to the Labor government was expressed at a

76 King to Urquhart, 4 July 1919, *ibid.*; "Townsville Disturbance", *loc.cit.* AA(C).

77 *Cit. Douman, op.cit.*, p.85. See also King to Urquhart, 2 August 1919, *loc.cit.* QSA.

meeting of the AMIEU, which congratulated the Charters Towers railwaymen for:

. . .refusing to convey the Labour Party's Police to reinforce the murderers in Townsville, when we are standing for our rights as Unionists in demanding Preference to Unionists at Alligator Creek and Ross River.⁷⁸

The continued shipping strike, the 'flu epidemic and the presence of armed police combined to lend Townsville "the air of a beleaguered city".⁷⁹ Industry and commerce were practically paralysed. Serious shortages of food, especially flour, milk, and butter, alarmed the community, and matters were made worse when merchants increased the prices of other goods by up to 100%. During July there were angry demonstrations outside bakeries; on one occasion the police had to restrain a crowd which broke down the fence of one baker's shop.⁸⁰ When the Commonwealth repeated its 1917 action of refusing to charter strike-bound ships to the state, the Queensland government sent its own steamers to relieve the food shortage. A month later, however, the situation was still bad. An AWU organiser complained:

We still have a large police force present, who are eating up a lot of the food which is so badly needed in the North. The Government was very much quicker in sending us police than it was in sending us flour.⁸¹

The outcome of various judicial proceedings associated with the disturbances heightened the unionists' sense of indignation.

78 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 July 1919.

79 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.314.

80 King to Ryan, 18 July 1919, Roy/102, QSA; *QIG*, IV, 3 (11 August 1919), p.432; *Worker*, 24 July 1919.

81 *Worker*, 21 August 1919. Cf. *Daily Standard*, 15 August 1919; D. Ryan (Townsville) in *QPD CXXXII* (26 August 1919), pp.372-374.

On 7 July 1919 Carney's trial in connection with the raid on the Stuart cattle yards began, with the court house guarded by police armed with fixed bayonets. After three days the case was dismissed, the defence having argued that Carney and Kelly tried to prevent the raid.⁸²

In August the government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into "Bloody Sunday"⁸³ - the lock-up fracas of 29 June. The unions were forbidden the right of counsel, and the sole Commissioner, Brisbane police magistrate William Harris, gave no credence to claims that a policeman had fired the first shot. He concluded that the police were amply justified in defending themselves against an "unlawful and unprovoked assault", and accordingly had acted correctly in suppressing a riot.⁸⁴ As far as the Townsville labour movement was concerned, the entire Royal Commission was an attempt by the government to white-wash the police.⁸⁵

Disillusionment with the Labor administration deepened when the strike committee publicised their knowledge of an earlier plan to enrol special constables in Townsville. Early in June the police and officials of the North Queensland Employers' Association had co-operated in drawing up a list of citizens willing to act as special constables if called upon. It seems that the government quashed these plans following complaints from Townsville union

82 Morris to Ryan, 9 July 1919, Roy/102, QSA.

83 The phrase "Bloody Sunday" to describe the lock-up incident was in popular use very quickly. On 11 July 1919 Charles O'Malley addressed a crowd: "You all remember the Bloody Sunday night the 29th June last when the Police dealt out a ration of lead to the people. . .", King to Urquhart, 14 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA. A military intelligence officer commented on similar meetings: "The speakers by their utterances work the militant section up to such a pitch that it will take very little to start a repetition of what is known as 'bloody sunday'." Wills to Captain Wood, Melbourne, 29 July 1919, SC 26 [2], CP447/3, AA(C).

84 'Report of the Royal Commission. . .', *QPP* 1919-1920, II, pp.596-597.

85 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 August 1919; cf. Douman, *op.cit.*, p.87; Cutler, *op.cit.*, p.97.

leaders, but neglected to tell the unionists.⁸⁶ In the atmosphere of alarm, tension and exaggerated rumour following "Bloody Sunday", the special constables affair acquired a new, sinister significance for some workers, casting further doubts on the Labor government's credibility.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, serious disagreement about the tactics to be followed in resolving the actual industrial dispute at the meatworks divided the labour movement. The more militant rank and file - those who supported the unofficial OBU - held angry meetings at which the government, police and union officials were denounced in the most rancorous terms.⁸⁸ But such statements were little more than a frustrated call to anarchy; they embodied no concrete proposals about the conduct of the strike.

On the official strike committee there were differences between moderates like Dash and Ogden on the one hand, and militants like Carney and Kelly on the other. All agreed, however, on the necessity of confining contention to the industrial dispute itself and thereby to dissipate the atmosphere of intense social conflict. In this respect, one hopeful sign was the AMIEU's state-wide ballot on the question of arbitration, which was held in mid-July. Throughout Queensland meatworkers narrowly endorsed arbitration, but in the northern district there was a majority of twenty-five against. After a warm debate the northern district council of the AMIEU voted 4-3

86 King to Urquhart, 2 June 1919; Kelly, Dash and Carney to Huxham, 3 June 1919; Urquhart to King, 5 June 1919, 7 June 1919, 8986/1919, Hom/J308, QSA.

87 Kelly, Sampson and Carney to Ryan, 28 August 1919, 9184/1919, Pre/A663, QSA; *Daily Standard*, 18 July 1919; PLP minutes, 31 July 1919.

88 King to Urquhart, 14 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 July 1919.

to abide by the branch result, but rejected arbitration as a means of solving the existing strike.⁸⁹

Instead, the northern district council sought a private conference with the meat companies as a means of negotiating an end to the strike. Complacent in the knowledge that they held the upper hand, and that export operations could not re-commence until the shipping strike ended, the local managers refused, adding that any future negotiations would be conducted on an industry basis in Brisbane.⁹⁰ At this stage the arbitration court took official cognisance of the chaotic conditions in the northern meat industry for the first time since the deletion of preference in January. McCawley called a compulsory conference, but this too proved abortive when both sides remained intransigent: the companies refused to give way on the question of the dismissal of non-unionists; the union - or rather its northern members - noisily refused to give an undertaking that there would be no strikes if preference were restored.⁹¹ So matters stood at the beginning of August 1919.

Efforts to end the meat strike were complicated by the issue of the railway employees who had been suspended for refusing to handle the police special train. The railway department disrated these employees, who thereby lost their rights of accumulated leave

89 AMIEU, northern district council minutes, 15 July 1919. The vote was as follows:

	In favour	Against
South	432	357
Central	244	88
North	305	330
Darwin	53	165
Queensland	1034	940

Worker, 31 July 1919. Dissidents claimed that the vote against arbitration in the North would have been much higher if those erstwhile meatworkers victimised in 1918 had been allowed to participate.

90 *Worker*, 24 July 1919; R.D. Kennedy to T.J. Ryan, 17 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA.

91 *Worker*, 31 July 1919; Report on "Townsville Disturbance", 2 August 1919, 66/5/115, BP4/1, AA(B).

and concessional travel; moreover their re-employment was made conditional upon a formal declaration of future good conduct. Representations from the railway unions to the Minister for Railways, J.A. Fihelly, fell on deaf ears. Fihelly was adamant that the men concerned would be punished, because:

If the Labour Government decides to send a train or a wheelbarrow somewhere, it must get out office if it is not going to have it sent there.

Ryan backed up his junior Minister, stating that "the Government must govern".⁹²

Railway workers were incensed by what they considered to be victimisation of unionists who had merely stuck to labour principles. Indeed, as a divisive issue between the Labor government and the union movement, the disratment of the northern railway workers was at least as serious as the sending of extra police to Townsville. According to the QRU, the government's treatment of the railwaymen was "a damnable outrage upon solidarity and upon Labour. . .the most scandalous action any Government could be guilty of".⁹³ Protests from Labor Party branches and union organisations drew comparisons with the treatment of unionists during the Brisbane general strike in 1912 - which occurred while an anti-Labor government was in office.⁹⁴

For some time the railway unions' dispute with the government bedevilled attempts to confine the issues in the meat strike, for the northern district council of the AMIEU resolved not to entertain

92 *Militant*, 1 September 1919.

93 *Ibid.*

94 Ogden, strike committee, Townsville, to Ryan, 17 July 1919; Combined Railway Unions, Townsville, to Ryan, 25 July 1919; Cairns Trades and Labour Council to Ryan, 11 August 1919; McSherry, Townsville WPOs, to Ryan, 21 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA; PLP minutes, 31 July 1919; QCE minutes, 8 August 1919.

any proposal to end the strike which did not safeguard the interests of the railway workers.⁹⁵ Late in August, however, the government accepted a delegation from the railway unions to discuss the matter. Despite Fihelly's intransigence, the disgraced employees were eventually reinstated to their former positions as part of the peace celebrations. But the government exacted an admission of guilt from the unions and made it clear that the concession was an act of clemency.⁹⁶ To the militant QRU, this was far from satisfactory:

The logic of the QRU position was absolutely unassailable. The Northern men, from a Labour point of view, did no wrong; and the Government, being a Labour Government, should not punish men for refusing to scab on their mates.⁹⁷

The QRU blamed the craft union delegates for sabotaging its efforts to win speedy and complete exoneration for the railwaymen.⁹⁸ This augured ill for later inter-union relationships in the Queensland railways, when a bitter war of words separated the industrial unionism of the QRU from the moderate craft unions.

Meanwhile, on 13 August 1919 the Townsville strike committee urged Theodore (acting Premier during Ryan's absence interstate), to convene a round-table conference of unions, employers and the government to settle the meat industry dispute, as well as to discuss industrial unrest generally in North Queensland. But Theodore ignored this plea for the Labor government to acknowledge its responsibility for a social and political situation which in fact transcended the level of industrial relations. He replied that

95 AMIEU, northern district council minutes, 1 August 1919.

96 Report, 1 September 1919, *loc.cit.* AA(B). As if to rub in the point, a number of convicts was released from gaol at the same time, also as part of the peace celebrations. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, p.440.

97 *Militant*, 1 September 1919.

98 *Ibid.*

"no good purpose" would be served by such a conference, and suggested that the unions approach the arbitration court.⁹⁹ Since the arbitration court had already been tried and found wanting, this was unrealistic, if not cynical; it underlined the state government's determined aloofness from the protracted dispute at the northern meatworks.

By this time the unions' defeat was inevitable. When the strike had begun on 23 June, only about 80 "scabs" remained at the meatworks. By the middle of August there were 300 men working - including many AMIEU members who had drifted back to work notwithstanding their union.¹⁰⁰ Strike funds were almost exhausted, and the crucial support of other unions was waning. The WWF, for example, feared that its impending case before Mr Justice Higgins would be jeopardised by Townsville wharfies' refusal to load meatworks products.¹⁰¹

Unemployment in the North declined substantially when the seamen's strike finally ended on 25 August 1919. In the west, some Cloncurry copper mines re-opened, attracting a number of erstwhile meatworks' labourers. In these circumstances the meatworkers' union admitted defeat. On 7 September 1919 the meatworks strike was declared off at a mass meeting of members belonging to the AMIEU, AWU, QRU, WWF and smaller unions.¹⁰²

As the tension and excitement of the previous three months gave way to frustration and disillusion, the collapse of the meatworks strike left the labour movement in North Queensland bitter and alienated. But the myth-making process had already begun. To the *Daily Standard* the strike was:

99 Ogden to Theodore, 13, 15 August 1919; Theodore to Ogden, 15 August 1919, Pre/A663, QSA.

100 Report, 20 August 1919, *loc.cit.* AA(B).

101 Morris to Donovan, 4 August 1919, T62/8/15, RSSS-ANUA.

102 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 8 September 1919.

. . .the greatest demonstration of solidarity ever seen in Townsville. There had been splendid cohesion between the different unionists. . .it is to be hoped that such a spirit will continue to prevail.¹⁰³

Such a statement completely ignored the realities of the situation. McCawley's comment was rather more appropriate:

Recent events have shown what has so often been shown - that if the employers choose to make a stand strikes do not pay and that the policy of direct action, pushed to its logical conclusion, leads to conflict with the law, and frequently brings in its train reaction and disruption within the union itself.¹⁰⁴

Soundly defeated in the strike, the northern AMIEU lost both its envied measure of job control and union preference as well. Moreover, the union was racked by internal dissension. Continuing conflict between "strikers" and "scabs" - many of them former AMIEU members - was only one facet of this dissension. The division between unionists like Carney, who maintained a strong verbal commitment to direct action, and Ogden, who like state president Gilday accepted arbitration as "the line of least resistance",¹⁰⁵ was more clear-cut after 1919. Further, both moderate and militant rank and file unionists tended - as union members frequently did - to blame the officials for the defeat of the strike. Rank and file militants vociferously opposed the decision to call off the strike, declaring that "the officials had scabbed on their fellow unionists".¹⁰⁶

103 *Daily Standard*, 8 September 1919.

104 *QIG*, V, 3 (10 March 1920), p.221. The strike thereby confirmed McCawley's belief, expressed in delivering the first meat export award, that: "The employers. . .are a very powerful group of corporations, who if at any time they chose to put forth their full strength, would emerge successfully from an industrial conflict". *Ibid.*, III, 3 (10 March 1918), p.224.

105 *Official Report of the Fourteenth Interstate Conference of the AMIEU, Brisbane, 13-22 October 1919* (Brisbane, 1919), p.3.

106 Intelligence Report, 8 September 1919, *loc.cit.* AA(B).

The 1919 strike also embittered relations between the state executive and the northern district council of the AMIEU. Northerners resented the fact that the Queensland branch officials gave no organisational support and little financial assistance to the Townsville meatworkers.¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, the weakened industrial position of the northern district facilitated a trend towards the centralisation of union authority in Brisbane. Against this trend, however, a tradition of local autonomy and independent direct action at the individual meatworks persisted. These circumstances produced frequent conflict between the state executive and sections of the AMIEU membership.

In the North, the meatworkers' union gradually rebuilt its organisation and regained varying degrees of influence over the internal operation of some meatworks. But economic conditions were for some time not favourable to the recovery of union strength. The meat export industry was barely profitable during much of the period from 1919 to 1939. Not until the period during and after the second world war did full prosperity return to the industry. It was only then that the union's industrial muscle matched that of the days before 1919.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, the meat export industry continued to be susceptible to isolated, usually brief, strikes and stoppages after 1919. The AMIEU remained a militant industrial union, belligerent towards employers, scornful of the results of arbitration, and firmly on the left of the Australian labour movement. This militant attitude was particularly strong in the northern district: in November 1920 a general meeting of northern AMIEU members included in their resolutions for a forthcoming state conference:

107 *Fourteenth Interstate Conference of the AMIEU*, p.14. Carney: "The appeal to be made to the Southern States for financial assistance for the strikers had been left in the hands of the State officials, and nothing had been done in the matter".

108 Walker, *Australian Industrial Relations Systems*, ch. VIII, *passim*.

That seeing that the State Arbitration Court under the Presidency of Judge McCawley functions wholly and solely in the interests of the Meat Companies, conference decide to ignore the Court in future and revert to the system of negotiating directly with the Companies in round-table conferences.¹⁰⁹

For all that, industrial relations were conducted generally within the ambit of the arbitration system. In 1920 the court restored a modified form of union preference to the northern meatworks, while still protecting the jobs of those who had worked during the 1918 and 1919 strikes, and upholding the companies' right to select and control their own labour. This limited preference was conditional upon industrial harmony. Thus in 1924 union preference in the northern district was again deleted to counter a wildcat strike at the Biboohra meatworks near Cairns.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the history of the arbitration court's direction of industrial relations in the meat industry is in large measure a story of unofficial strikes punished by the temporary withdrawal of preference to unionists.¹¹¹

For some time, resentment against the government's actions in sending extra police to Townsville rankled in the minds of many unionists. In June 1920 the issue arose at the Labor-in-Politics convention, held in Townsville. Kelly moved a motion from the northern district AMIEU censuring the Labor Party for allowing armed police to be sent to subdue striking workers. This motion lapsed in favour of a milder amendment instructing future Labor governments to seek reports from union representatives before "accepting Press reports and acceding to Tory appeals for police reinforcements".¹¹²

109 AMIEU, northern district general meeting minutes, 14 November 1920.

110 *QIG*, XI, 1 (January 1925), pp.16-17.

111 Walker, *op.cit.*, p.262.

112 *Official Report of Proceedings of the Tenth State Labor-in-Politics Convention, Townsville, June 1920* (Brisbane, 1920), pp.64-65.

But in some respects at least, it seemed that the damage was done. A few weeks later, a local Labor campaign appeal for financial assistance was rejected by a general meeting of the northern AMIEU, because, as the minutes recorded, "nothing good can come of supporting the Labor Party".¹¹³

The events of 1919 did not create, but certainly intensified, conflicts and rivalries within the Queensland labour movement. The rift was not simply between the Labor government and the trade unions, but also within the union movement itself. The main line of schism could be generally defined as between the militant industrial unions (the AMIEU, QRU, and WWF), on the one hand, and, on the other, the moderate and conservative craft unions led by the mass Australian Workers' Union - in other words, between those unions which supported the Townsville strike and those which did not. Subsequent inter-union relations were often bitter, especially in Townsville, where demarcation and jurisdictional disputes increased, and AMIEU spokesmen roundly condemned the AWU, FEDFA and ASE as "scabs' unions".¹¹⁴

This militant-moderate division was far from rigid, however. It was complicated by other factors, including the continued co-operation of various unions against particular employers; internal ideological and sectional disagreements within individual unions; even "North versus South" parochial feelings. Any strict classification of entire unions as "moderate" or "militant" is confounded, for example, by the fact that rank and file AWU members were among the most class-conscious workers in North Queensland.

Nevertheless, the broad groupings apparent in 1919 set the pattern for internal relations within the Queensland labour movement for the 1920s and 1930s, with vestigial influences still evident up to the 1950s. The general picture is one of dominance by the

113 AMIEU, northern district general meeting minutes, 14 November 1920.

114 *Ross River Scab List* (Townsville, 1919). [Trades and Labour Council Office, Townsville].

largest trade union in the state -- the pro-arbitration, Labor Party-oriented AWU -- challenged by militants and radicals in the industrial unions, who grew increasingly disillusioned with the efficacy of political action, and more and more antagonistic to the Labor government.

Therefore, from the perspective of subsequent developments in the labour movement, the most significant aspect of the Townsville meatworkers' strike consists, almost paradoxically, not in the AMIEU industrial dispute, but in the clash between the government and the QRU over the police train. On 1 September 1919, the QRU launched its official journal, the *Militant*. It was indicative of later relationships between the QRU and the Labor government that the very first issue contained a stinging attack on the government. Rymer stated that Fihelly's and Ryan's actions had shaken the confidence of thousands in the Labor Party. He declared:

We say deliberately that the government has added no lustre to its name through its bungling of the Northern position. That no matter what the future holds, no matter what action the Government may take that will justify the confidence reposed in it by many, the stain of its betrayal of the Northern men will never be eradicated. This blot will besmear its escutcheon for all time.¹¹⁵

Significant differences of emphasis emerge from the historiography of the Townsville meatworkers' strike. Writings by unionists fall into two categories: those which mistakenly treat the strike as a victory for union solidarity¹¹⁶ and those which lament the strike as a glorious defeat, while lauding the violent incidents surrounding Bloody Sunday.¹¹⁷ Of the accounts by academic

115 *Militant*, 1 September 1919.

116 E.g., Daddow, *Puffing Pioneers*, p.135: "The meatworkers returned to work believing they had, to some extent at least, clipped the wings of the union-hating meat companies by the union movement's show of oneness in their defence".

117 Sherwood, ms.; Harris, *The Bitter Fight*, pp.279-280.

historians, many contain plain errors of fact which sometimes lead to errors of interpretation. Bolton, Kennedy and Murphy, for example, all state that the strike was settled at the compulsory conference called by McCawley on 17 July 1919. Murphy even claims that "the meatworkers returned to work on favourable terms".¹¹⁸

Interpretations naturally reflect the approach of the writer. Thus A.A. Morrison, accepting with scant reservation the statements by Opposition parliamentarians and the report of the Royal Commission, emphasises the seemingly mindless lawlessness of the workers.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, a recent thesis by Jane Phillips places the strike in a theoretical context which stresses "the use of physical force by ruling institutions and groups in order to maintain the status quo".¹²⁰ This approach has the merit of recognising the active role of non-working class groups in provoking industrial and social conflict. Phillips' preoccupation with theory, however, leads to the impression that *all* violence during the strike was instigated by the state and the establishment - in the form of employers, returned soldiers, police and judiciary.

Perhaps the most interesting question about the strike is the role of the state government. In this respect, Cutler concludes that:

Ryan's readiness to use the full coercive powers of the state against the strikers, while successful in resisting the challenge from the AMIEU and the Queensland Railway Union, only intensified the subsequent conflict between the parliamentary Party and the trade unions.¹²¹

118 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.314; Murphy, *T.J. Ryan*, p.437; Kennedy, McCormack, p.139.

119 A.A. Morrison, 'Militant Labour in Queensland, 1912-1927', in *JRAHS*, XXXVIII, 5 (1952-53).

120 Phillips, *The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike*, p.7.

121 Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', p.100.

Cutler is correct in stating that the government's actions aggravated internal conflict in the labour movement. His reference to "the full coercive powers of the state", however, must be placed in context beside the behaviour of other governments during prolonged industrial disputes. Compared with the hard-headed attitudes and authoritarian actions of later Labor administrations led by McCormack, Hanlon and Gair,¹²² who dangerously alienated the union movement, Ryan followed a cautious, pragmatic, even detached policy towards the strike.

Clearly the government wished an end to the industrial troubles which had plagued the northern meatworks for the previous three years; it also wanted to silence criticism from labour radicals. It is probable that Labor ministers advised the meat companies in 1917 to try arbitration as a means to industrial peace. Apart from this tenuous connection, however, the government remained determinedly aloof from the actual industrial dispute. No anti-strike legislation or state-of-emergency powers were invoked, and - notwithstanding Theodore's repeated criticism of revolutionaries and "disruptionists" in general - no public denunciations of the strike or of the unions emanated from the government.

On the other hand, the government rejected all union appeals that it convene a round-table conference to solve the dispute. Theodore especially seems to have held the view that the government's liability in industrial matters virtually ended with the establishment of the Court of Industrial Arbitration under McCawley. The government intervened only when civil disorder broke out in Townsville on 29 and 30 June. Having restored law and order, the government acknowledged no further responsibility in the tense political and industrial situation which persisted. Indeed, rather than a "readiness to use

122 See Kennedy, 'The South Johnstone Strike and Railway Lockout, 1927'; Cribb, 'State in Emergency'; and J. Guyatt, 'The Labor Government and the Queensland Shearers' Strike of 1956', *Labour History*, 33 (November 1977), pp.53-64.

the full coercive powers of the state", Douman's description of Labor policy as one of "masterly inactivity" seems more apt.¹²³

This policy back-fired, however, when unionists looked on the sending of police reinforcements to Townsville as an *industrial* measure reminiscent of the strike-breaking tactics of non-Labor governments. In other words, the government had intervened only on the side of the employers against the unions. Unionists were encouraged in this belief by the truculent police attitude to strikers and union pickets before Bloody Sunday. The arrest of Kelly and Carney, and especially the refusal to grant bail, were needlessly provocative actions - of which, however, the government almost certainly disapproved.¹²⁴

Despite its sustained pose of detachment, and clearly against its own wishes, the Labor government was drawn into conflict not only with meatworkers but, even more significantly, with railway workers. The subsequent refusal of the government to mediate confirmed the belief of many unionists that the Labor government had abnegated its responsibilities to the labour movement.

One final aspect of the Townsville meatworkers' strike must be mentioned: its place in the militant tradition of labour in North Queensland. Against a background of political tension, isolation, and even food shortages, the incidents of larrikinism and crowd violence confirmed the belief of many observers that workers in the North had a peculiar tendency towards industrial militancy and political radicalism. The startling events of 1919 form a critical focal point in any discussion of labour militancy in North Queensland. Indeed, by any criteria, the prolonged dispute must be judged one of the bloodiest and most bitterly-fought industrial battles in Australia's history.

123 Douman, Townsville, 1914-1919, p.92. This echoes Turner's brief comment that the AMIEU's measure of job control in the North Queensland meatworks was destroyed "by the introduction of non-union labour and the defeat of the subsequent bitter strike, while a Labor government stood by and watched". *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.188.

124 Urquhart to the Officer in Charge, Townsville, 1 and 2 July 1919, Pre/A663, QSA.

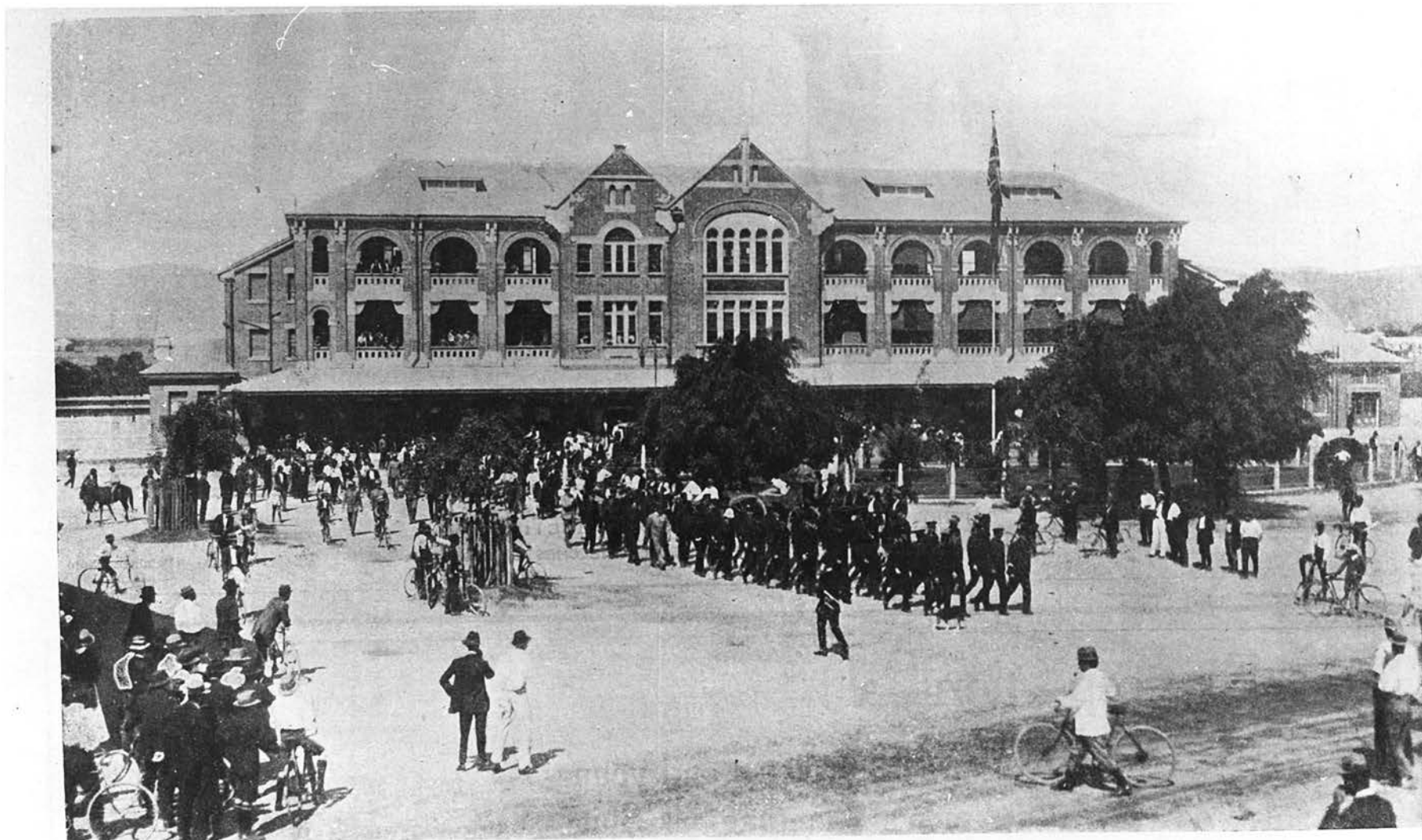


Plate 19. Arrival of the southern police reinforcements at Townsville. [*North Queensland Register*, 28 July 1919].

C H A P T E R X I

LABOUR IN 1920

The Economy and the Labour Movement

The meat export industry provided the arena for the most spectacular clash between capital and labour in post-war North Queensland. The other major northern industries - sugar, mining and transport - were also exceptionally prone to strikes. Indeed, throughout Australia and throughout much of the world, the years 1919 and 1920 were marked by intense class bitterness and by extraordinary turmoil in industrial relations.¹

In Queensland non-Labor politicians blamed government weakness, vacillation and encouragement of radicalism for industrial unrest in that state. Thus at the height of the 1919 shipping and meatworks strikes, the parliamentary Opposition vehemently attacked Labor's handling of industrial matters. The member for the near-Mackay electorate of Mirani, E.B. Swayne, censured railway unionists:

. . .the employees in the railway service
virtually arrogate to themselves the right
to refuse duty whenever they feel inclined
. . .it is through the action of this
Government whereby a small, truculent
minority are able to tyrannise the whole
of the Government service.²

1 Miriam Dixon argues that the combative industrial temper of the times was highlighted not so much by strikes by traditionally class-conscious meatworkers, miners, seamen and wharfies, but by direct action involving more diffident groups of workers: Sydney coal lumpers, marine cooks and stewards, musicians, civil servants and school teachers (in Western Australia), and even chorus girls. M. Dixon, *Greater than Lenin? Lang and Labor, 1916-1932* (Melbourne, 1977), p.150. The point is well taken, but the interesting fact about North Queensland is that strikes remained the preserve of those groups of workers traditionally prone to militancy. Possible exceptions, though none so dramatic as Dixon's examples, were strikes by Townsville and Cairns gasworks maintenance men in November 1918, and by AEU engineers at Cairns and Innisfail sugar mills at the end of the 1920 crushing season. Inspector King, Cairns, to Commissioner of Police, 5 November 1918 and Inspector Quinn, Townsville, to Commissioner, 7 November 1918, items 9855 and 9759/1918, Hom/J275, QSA: *QIG*, VI, 2 (10 February 1921), p.88.

2 *QPD CXXXII* (6 August 1919), p.39.

Other speakers commented on the seemingly peculiar situation in the North. The leader of the Opposition, E.H. McCartney, insisted that:

Quite apart from the shipping strike we have in North Queensland nothing but turmoil. Mob rule seems to be the order. The unions have taken possession of North Queensland.

H.E. Sizer agreed:

The whole of North Queensland is in the hands of a few tyrannical union secretaries, and the Government have not had the courage to deal with those men as they should be dealt with.³

Labor spokesmen were sensitive to these attacks and tried to combat them. In answer to criticism by rank and file unionists that their handling of industrial matters was inept, they blamed "turmoil" on an ideologically-motivated minority in the unions. On the other hand, in answer to the particular allegations of their parliamentary opponents in 1919, they blamed world-wide industrial unrest and claimed that there was in any case more disruption in southern states than in Queensland - the only one with a Labor government. According to T.J. Ryan, the evident unpopularity of the arbitration system largely arose because wage increases were constantly out-paced by arbitrary price rises.⁴ The Labor member for Townsville, Dan Ryan, defended the reputation of his constituents:

3 *Ibid.*, pp.47, 49.

4 *Ibid.*, p.52. Cf. M.J. Kirwan (Labor, Brisbane), *ibid.*, p.157: ". . .the difficulty in the Arbitration Court today is this: even when the workers, under the most favourable circumstances, are able to approach the Arbitration Court without delay, an award is no sooner made than the cost of living goes up to rob the worker of the increase".

We hear a very great deal about the North - its affairs, its people and its troubles. It is quite a fashionable subject to discussion down here, particularly Townsville. 'What is wrong with Townsville?' people are asking. It is not a position of what is wrong with Townsville but 'what is wrong with the world'.⁵

As Ryan (the premier) suggested, labour militancy had its economic roots in the rapid inflation which followed the end of the first world war. The cost of living in Australia rose by 11.6% in 1919 and 18.2% in 1920; in Queensland the respective figures were 15.3% and 14.1%. Prices for food and groceries alone in Queensland increased by 21% in the last three months of 1919.⁶ The threat to living standards posed by these price increases was indeed partly responsible for much of the industrial unrest.⁷

Turner has argued that trade union industrial action was frequent - and very often successful - from 1919 to late 1920 because sharply rising prices coincided with a period of "relatively stable employment".⁸ In North Queensland inflation obviously stimulated wage grievances, but employment at this time was both scarce and very unstable. From 1919 to 1921 unemployment in Queensland was the highest of all the Australian states. In 1919 Queensland trade unions reported 11.1% of their members out of work; this rose to 13.3% in 1920 and 15.5% in 1921. The corresponding estimates for the nation as a whole were 6% (1919), 6.5% (1920) and 11.2% (1921).⁹ These figures suggest that the post-war economic boom which lasted in Australia generally until late 1920, when it

5 *Ibid.*, (26 August 1919), p.374.

6 *CYB* 1920, pp.1028-1036; *QIG*, V, 3 (10 March 1920), p.213.

7 Cf. McCawley, in *QIG*, V, 3 (10 March 1920), p.213, and in 'Industrial Arbitration in Queensland', *International Labour Review*, V (March 1922), reprinted in *QIG*, VII (May 1922), pp.287-295.

8 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp.194-195.

9 *Labour Reports*, 10 (1919), 11 (1920), 12 (1921).

was truncated by a short, sharp recession,¹⁰ was, at best, limited in Queensland. Unemployment may not be the sole indicator of recession, but it was an important, and certainly the most distressing, symptom of maladjustments in the economy.

The predominance of unskilled labour in seasonal industries meant that unemployment in North Queensland was significantly higher than in the south of the state. The Commonwealth census of 4 April 1921 records 18.1% of the male workforce in North Queensland as being unemployed; the corresponding figure for the state as a whole was 11.9%, and for Australia, 6.8%.¹¹ The unsettled state of the main northern industries exacerbated the level of unemployment, casting further doubt on the notion of a substantial post-war boom in North Queensland.

We have seen how the return to peace-time conditions affected the meat export industry: the companies' attempt to adjust their industrial relations to the straitened economic circumstances resulted in the tumultuous Townsville strike. After 1919, drought and unfavourable market conditions kept both the pastoral industry and the meat export industry in the doldrums. During 1920 a steady fall in beef prices eroded profitability; market values took a further dive early in 1921. The reasons for this collapse, as listed by F.H. Bauer, included:

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- 10 Turner, *op.cit.*, pp.195, 202; H. Radi, '1920-21', in Crowley, *A New History of Australia*, p.368; Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers*, p.296. More cautiously, Lewis describes a period of "recovery" from 1918 to 1920-21, following a war-time "slump" of 1914-1917: *Ports of Queensland*, pp.134, 190.
- 11 *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1921, II, pp.892-897. Australian unemployment statistics - being simply the trade union estimates published in *Labour Reports* - are unreliable until the 1930s. Census figures are clearly much more accurate, but they represent one day only, every ten years. Turner suggests (*op.cit.*, p.253) that the large discrepancy between the *Labour Report's* national unemployment figure of 11.2% and the census' 6.8% may be because the census was taken at a good time of the year. In North Queensland, however, the census was taken at one of the *worst* times of the year.

The near-collapse of the United Kingdom market due to higher ocean freights, a severe drop in purchasing power of English labour, inability of the continental market to pay for the beef it normally took, large hold-overs of frozen meat by speculators and keen competition from South American beef.¹²

A reduction in the meat industry workforce, shorter killing seasons and widespread unemployment among meatworkers ensued. In 1921 the Merinda (Bowen) plant worked for only 19 days.¹³ Following the loss of union preference and job control in 1919, these bad economic conditions further curtailed the AMIEU's collective bargaining power. Largely as a result, the union's influence within the labour movement also declined.

The pastoral and meat export industries thus experienced a relatively steady downturn from the prosperous high of 1918 to the nadir of recession in 1921. Conditions in the northern mining industry, on the other hand, fluctuated widely over the same period; mining was even more dependent than the meat industry on international market forces. The advent of peace in Europe, signifying the end of the demand for metals for munitions, therefore led to the virtual cessation of industrial metal mining in North Queensland. Prices rose again towards the end of 1919, however, and the industry recovered briefly. Early in 1920 the price for copper on the London market reached £122 per ton (having sunk below £80 immediately after the war); tin, silver and lead also fetched high prices. In the far North the Chillagoe state smelters started operations in January 1920, spurring local mining activity and employment opportunities.¹⁴

12. Bauer, *Historical Geographic Survey of Part of Northern Australia*, pt. 1, pp.61-62. Cf. 'Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock', *QPP* 1921, I, p.1073; Duncan, 'The Australian Export Trade with the U.K. in Refrigerated Beef, 1880-1940', pp.108-109, 111.

13. *QIG*, VI, 5 (10 May 1921), pp.252, 268; *ibid.*, 9 (10 September 1921), p.635; *QPP* 1920, II, p.14.

14. The labour movement placed great hopes (soon to be disappointed) on this enterprise, for it was initially responsible for over 1500 extra jobs in the region. *QPP* 1921, II, p.679; *Worker*, 1 July 1920. See also ch. IX.

But late in 1920 the bottom fell out of the mineral market: copper fell to £74 per ton in London and other metal prices dropped similarly. By Christmas the remaining copper mining concerns at Cloncurry had closed down. At the end of 1921 copper was priced at £65 per ton - far below the local cost of production. In such circumstances private companies could hardly operate; even the state smelters at Chillagoe worked only intermittently in 1921.¹⁵

Unable to find work in their usual occupations, many erstwhile meatworkers, miners and labourers sought employment in the sugar industry. Sugar was a more stable industry than either meat or mining, but it too was subject to unsatisfactory marketing arrangements and poor seasons. In 1919 the price for raw sugar still stood at the figure set by the federal government in 1915 - £21 per ton - despite the considerable rise in costs during the war. The sugar harvest in 1918 was diminished by drought in southern Queensland and cyclone damage in the North. The 1919 and 1920 southern yields were also reduced by drought. Although production - and therefore employment - was scarcely affected in the districts north of Townsville, the short harvesting seasons in the South sent many workers further north. This naturally swelled the ranks of the region's jobless.¹⁶

However, the sugar industry picked up considerably in 1920-21. Following agitation by sugar interests and an investigation by a royal commission, the federal government raised the price of raw sugar to £30 6s. 8d. per ton in June 1920. This substantial increase stimulated production, presaging enhanced prosperity for farmers and millers. New land in the Tully, Proserpine and Sarina areas was subsequently opened up for cane growing.¹⁷ The following

15 *QPP* 1922, II, p.567; *Worker*, 10 March 1921, 30 March 1922.

16 *QPP* 1920, II, p.17; *Seventh Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1920*, pp.12-13; *Worker*, 16 December 1920.

17 *QIG*, V, 7 (10 July 1920), p.577; *QPP* 1921, I, pp.1021, 1199; 'Report of the Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry', *CPP* 1920-21, IV, p.945; Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry*, pp.60, 144-145.

decade was a period of sustained growth for the Queensland sugar industry, especially in the North.

Uncertainty was the salient feature of the North Queensland economy from 1918 to 1921. The pastoral and meat industries dwindled steadily into recession; mining slumped immediately after the war, recovered from late 1919 to late 1920, then collapsed; sugar, increasingly the economic staple of the region, suffered from bad seasons and (for a time) low prices, yet at the beginning of 1921 was poised for expansion and renewed prosperity.

Thus inflation, industrial dislocation and, above all, rising unemployment produced a restive working class in post-war North Queensland. Economic tensions were compounded by the political and social aftermath of war, intensifying discord in the labour movement. Conflicts and contradictions between political reformists and radicals, on the one hand, and between trade union moderates and militants, on the other, were sharply highlighted. Features of these same conflicts recurred in North Queensland throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The AWU: bureaucracy and rank and file

Within the AWU the over-riding preoccupation in 1920 was antagonism between the moderate union hierarchy and a militant rank and file minority. Throughout Queensland, AWU militancy was entrenched among shearers and pastoral labourers in the West, but even more firmly among sugar workers in the North. As their behaviour during the war indicated, sugar workers as a group were traditionally prone to direct action regardless of the official union policy of strict adherence to arbitration. After the war, frequent local disputes in the sugar industry confirmed this pattern of rank and file activism in the face of official discouragement.

Industrial action by AWU members was most frequent in the Proserpine, Innisfail and Cairns districts. A particular grievance of Proserpine workers was their inclusion in the Mackay section of the arbitration award rather than in the northern section - where

wages were higher - which began at Bowen. Early in the 1919 season mill workers forced the local state sugar mill to grant them the northern rates. This encouraged cane cutters to demand the higher wages also; on 22 September 1919 they went on strike in support of their claim. When the mill hands came out in sympathy the cutters' demand was granted after only one day's strike.¹⁸ Early in November 1919 mill hands themselves refused to crush cane grown in the Bowen district unless they were paid still higher wages. Since the Bowen portion of the Proserpine mill's total harvest was very small, the management felt that it could safely reject this request; after a few days the employees returned to work.¹⁹

Less than a week later, however, the Proserpine mill was idle again - this time over a matter unrelated to the sugar industry. A dispute over the wages and working conditions of the female employees of the town's two hotels had led to their being declared "black" by local unionists. When eight mill hands defied the pickets and drank "black" beer, the local AWU demanded their immediate dismissal. The mill manager refused, and a strike began on 10 November 1919. However, in an action reminiscent of the Hughenden beer strike fracas of 1918, an angry meeting of "farmers and citizens" on 12 November 1919 decided that about a dozen militant men and women should be "deported" from Proserpine. Local unionists threatened retaliatory action, but the trouble ended when most of the "undesirables" in fact left town, and when the AWU district secretary, Jack Dash, counselled restraint upon his members.²⁰

18 *QIG*, V, 7 (10 July 1920), p.579.

19 *Bowen Independent*, 9 November 1919.

20 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 November 1919; *Worker*, 25 November 1919; *Australian Sugar Journal*, 5 December 1919. Cf. Captain Wills to Captain Wood, Brisbane, 5 January 1920, 367 of 66/5/115, BP 4/1, AA(B): "The cause of the trouble at Proserpine was one of the most frivolous in the annals of Industrial strife in the North and would make a most interesting comic sketch for the stage. It may be explained here that a good number of men of the old I.W.W. persuasion have drifted to this sugar district from Townsville and of course trouble was only to be expected".

Seemingly as a result of the 1919 agitation, the sugar workers' award of June 1920 granted Proserpine an intermediate position on the wage scale between the northern and Mackay districts.²¹ This did not eliminate industrial disputes, for in November 1920 mill hands again struck unsuccessfully - yet without the sanction of the AWU - for full parity with northern workers.²² During 1921 militants in control of the AWU local centre at Proserpine clashed repeatedly with the union hierarchy, until in August the northern district committee closed the centre, thereby withdrawing its authority to issue tickets, hold official meetings and generally act as a mouthpiece of discontent.²³

Labour disputes - and hence intra-union conflict - were more acrimonious in the far North, especially in the sugar-growing areas from Innisfail north to the Mulgrave River. In fact, each season saw a series of short but sharp unofficial strikes within a context of continual struggle and abuse between rank and file militants and the AWU district officials. During the 1919 harvest there were stoppages in August by Babinda cane cutters and mill hands; in September by Mulgrave cutters; in October and November by Babinda and Mourilyan mill hands.²⁴ Industrial unrest was less obvious in 1920, though there was a lengthy strike by South Johnstone cane cutters and stoppages by Babinda and Mourilyan mill workers. Early in 1921 a strike by ASE fitters at the Mossman, Mulgrave and all three Innisfail mills prevented the annual machinery overhaul until the wages of these skilled workers were raised to the level of those paid during the harvest season.²⁵

21 *QIG*, V, 7 (10 July 1920), p.578.

22 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 5 November 1920, 3 December 1920.

23 AWU northern district committee minutes, 19 August 1921.

24 Inspector Ryan, Cairns, to Commissioner of Police, 18 August 1919, 9216/1919, Hom/J309, QSA: *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 October 1919; *QIG*, IV, 11 (10 November 1919), p.652.

25 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 December 1920, 4 March 1921; *QIG*, V, 9 (10 September 1920), p.750, 12 (10 December 1920), p.1055, and VI, 4 (11 April 1921), p.180.

Many observers blamed the strikes on the influence of "Bolshevist" extremists. For some, there was little distinction between radicalism and criminality:

North Queensland is particularly unfortunate in the influx, especially during the cane harvest, of a class of men utterly without regard for the rights of others, and who habitually set the law at defiance.²⁶

On occasion, Labor Party moderates also fostered an explicitly ideological explanation for conflict in the sugar industry. Thus Theodore drew approval from the conservative press in December 1919 when at Babinda - "the heart of Bolshevism in the North"²⁷ - he denounced "the insidious influence of the revolutionary, direct action and sabotage minority".²⁸

AWU officials themselves attributed rank and file unrest to a malign mixture of ideology and sheer perversity. At the annual delegate meeting of the union in January 1920 the far northern district secretary, Morrissey, thus complained of the attacks made on the AWU, the Labor government, and the movement generally:

Those vicious attacks were continued throughout the year on every pretext, and certain individuals whose only stock in trade seemed to be an unlimited supply of cheek and a few high-flown phrases about solidarity, etc., were ever active in causing dissension and distrust in the minds of members and openly advising them not to renew their tickets, decrying the union's efforts for the betterment of its members, openly flouting the union's constitution and policy. . . and dragging its fair name in the gutter by their utter disregard of agreements made on their behalf.

26 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 October 1919. Dorothy Jones makes a similar observation about "undesirables" drifting north to evade southern police, in *Trinity Phoenix: a history of Cairns and District* (Cairns, 1976), p. 461.

27 *Mackay Mercury*, 9 December 1919.

28 *Cairns Post*, 4 December 1919.

Similar complaints were made by other delegates.²⁹ In the following year the new northern district secretary, M.P. Hynes, reported that "malicious attacks were made on our organisation by alleged 'militants' whose only manner of expressing their militancy was by traducing, disparaging and obstructing the AWU and its officials".³⁰

Conflict between moderates and militants within the AWU clearly contained ideological ingredients, though the chief expression of militancy - local strikes by sugar workers - owed little to radical doctrine. Industrial disputes stemmed basically from genuine grievances over wages and conditions. Thus at Proserpine, unionists felt that receiving lower wages than workers forty miles north was both anomalous and unfair. In far North Queensland, cane cutters' complaints typically related to differing wage rates for crops of varying quality, while mill workers often rebelled against other working conditions - for example, manning rules, authoritarian supervision and unfair dismissals.

Discontent arising from the actual work situation was aggravated when union organisers and the district secretary either seemed uninterested³¹ or argued that the dispute must be solved by arbitration procedures. Wary of the likely official response, the

29 *Seventh Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1920*, p.14. Cf. the remarks of the branch secretary, Dunstan, *ibid.*, p.7: "Criticism is certainly healthy, and moreover it is necessary, and no fair-minded person can object to it; but under the guise of a bogus militancy many insidious attempts have been made within the last twelve months to strike a blow at the very foundation of the AWU".

30 *Official Report of the Eighth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland Branch, January 1921 (Brisbane, 1921)*, p.20.

31 A possibly atypical case of bureaucratic insensitivity occurred in September 1921 when a delegation of Townsville sanitary carters attended a meeting of the AWU northern district committee. They were told that "they were lucky to be working at all" and to leave union matters in the hands of the district committee. AWU northern district committee minutes, 8 September 1921.

rank and file in turn tended to act without informing the union.³² It was in such circumstances that unofficial strikes broke out and that local militant leaders bitterly condemned the AWU, often in the language of revolutionary theory.

The clash over practical methods of improving the workers' lot *was* accordingly intensified - *but not caused* - by a wider ideological and political debate. In the climate of working-class radicalism prevailing at the time, left-wingers looked on the AWU with considerable suspicion, if not dismay. Revolutionary socialists and supporters of syndicalist OBU schemes regarded the moderate, pro-arbitration and politically-minded AWU as a major obstacle to both industrial unionism and the radical transformation of society. For its part, the AWU re-affirmed its commitment to Labor reformism, promoted itself as the true Australian OBU, and vigorously attacked its critics. The annual delegate meeting in 1920 thus declared the union's intention to

strike hard at direct action methods and will have no truck with these methods at all, preferring to adopt the methods of conciliation and arbitration which, it is contended, bring better and more lasting results to the workers.³³

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- 32 Many strikes in the far northern district seemed to take the AWU officials by surprise. Cf. AWU far northern district committee minutes, 2 November 1919; *Eighth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1921*, p.22.
- 33 *Daily Standard*, 30 January 1920. During the conference a militant from western Queensland, James Durkin, in classic socialist rhetoric moved "That Convention consider the urgent necessity of discarding the policy of Arbitration, owing to its stultifying and cramping effect on all militant action on the part of unionists. Arbitration sidetracked the class struggle and handed over their destiny to a Judge biased against the working class. Arbitration camouflaged the class struggle and hampered all forward efforts by the militants in the movement". Predictably, this motion was overwhelmingly defeated, the general attitude as expressed by a central district organiser, being that, "If they were going to depend on the direct actionists to lead the working classes to emancipation they were going to wander in the wilderness for a long time". *Seventh Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1920*, p.31.

Apart from defiance of the official policy of the union, however, direct action by rank and file sugar workers represented a practical challenge to the authority of the local and state officials. More than that, independent and unauthorised strikes posed a potential threat to the efficiency of the AWU as an organisation. Thus in 1919 and again in 1920 the arbitration court refused to give the AWU absolute preference of employment in the sugar industry expressly because of the militant section's propensity to strike.³⁴

To sanction its moderate industrial policy and confute its militant opponents, the AWU held another ballot on the question of arbitration in December 1920 (a previous vote was taken in 1918). Only about 20% of the Queensland membership voted, yet 33% of those favoured the abandonment of arbitration. The most significant results were in North Queensland: in the far northern district the vote was 40% against arbitration; in the northern district it was 46%.³⁵ Nevertheless, the AWU leaders claimed that the vote was an overwhelming vindication of their policies, especially since

34 In 1919 McCawley praised the AWU head officials for consistently endeavouring "to keep the members to the policy of arbitration"; he rejected their claim for a preference clause, however, because "while even a minority of the workers preach a negation of the principle of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, preference may be made an instrument of oppression". *QIG*, IV, 8 (11 August 1919), p.519. Macnaughton concurred with this judgment in 1920. *Ibid.*, V, 7 (10 July 1920), p.580.

35 The result of the ballot, by districts, was:

District	% Membership Voting	In favour	Against
Southern	19	1055	228 (18%)
South-western	20	717	309 (30%)
Central	26	992	435 (31%)
Western	31	1015	505 (33%)
Northern	16	667	509 (46%)
Far Northern	21	747	503 (40%)
Total Queensland	21	5193	2549 (33%)

From *Eighth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1921*, p.5. Membership is taken as at 31 May 1920, from AWU, *Queensland Branch Secretary's Annual Report and Balance Sheets*, 31 May 1920.

OBU organisers had campaigned throughout the state urging members to reject arbitration.³⁶

Notwithstanding the conspicuous minority expressing dissatisfaction with arbitration in North Queensland, even at the local level the AWU hierarchy retained the upper hand in the struggle against the militants. In fact, as the ballot suggested, in general political and industrial outlook the officials were much closer to the great majority of members than were the rebellious activists. This meant that although the militant critics gained support during strikes, once a strike was over the established union leaders took control. Moreover, the union officials could employ some very effective sanctions in order to contain local disputes. First, and most consistently, they counselled moderation, extolling the benefits of arbitration as a method of improving conditions without the stress of strikes. Second, they refused to authorise direct action when it took place: official non-recognition of a strike was a powerful force against rank and file solidarity. Third, where local activism grew particularly disruptive, the AWU exercised its authority to close the local centres of the union - as it did at Babinda in November 1919, South Johnstone in July 1921, Proserpine in August 1921 and Ayr in May 1922.³⁷ Finally, in an extreme case, militant rebels were expelled from the union: thus the three leaders of a lengthy strike by cane cutters at South Johnstone in 1921 were expelled by the far northern district committee.³⁸

36 Cf. W.J. Riordan's presidential remarks to the 1921 conference: "We had Donald Grant and another disciple of the IWW travelling Queensland, advocating the Trautman scheme to smash the AWU and establish the OBU. . . . Fortunately their influence is slight, as shown by the recent AWU ballot on the question of the union's policy. Despite Grant's several months of active propaganda in this State against arbitration, the members decided in favour of it by an overwhelming majority". *Eighth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1921*, pp. 6-7.

37 AWU far northern district committee minutes, 27 July 1921; northern district committee minutes, 19 August 1921, 18 May 1922; *QIG*, V, 7 (10 July 1920), p.580.

38 AWU far northern district committee minutes, 14 September 1921.

Such measures against militant agitators were successful only because most AWU members either firmly supported the official leadership or were generally uninterested in union affairs. In practice the militant critics of the AWU therefore remained a permanently protesting minority with no prospect of success. Indeed, there were some indications that the measure of influence which they commanded in the immediate post-war years was diminishing by the end of 1920. At any rate, the AWU officials recognised that by then they had clearly won the main battle against the militants. Delegates to the union conference of January 1921 thus agreed that the "high-water mark of destructiveness" of the union "wreckers" had passed.³⁹ The following year the southern district secretary, Fred Martyn, effectively summed up the situation for the whole state when he reported:

The disruptive wave of advanced extremism that has been flooding the district for the past three years is now receding, and had not done much harm. It is being followed by a wave of apathy, caused by the economic tide. . . .⁴⁰

Labor and the Limitations of Capitalism

Intra-union conflict in the AWU partly reflected the wider dissension affecting the labour movement in Queensland. The central aspect of this disharmony was the rift between the Labor government and militant trade unionism. However, the dispute was not simply one of party versus unions. It was rather a case of the government and Labor machine, supported by the AWU and various craft unions, against the radicals of the BIC, QRU, AMIEU and WWF. Even this is an oversimplification, for struggle among the rival groups over power and ideology was complicated by several factors: jurisdictional disputes (such as the bitter conflict between the QRU and other

39 *Eighth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1921*, p.23.

40 *Official Report of the Ninth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Queensland Branch, January 1922* (Brisbane, 1922), p.23.

railway unions); factions within individual unions (as in the AWU); regional sectionalism; and the fact that the AWU itself occasionally clashed with the government.⁴¹

Nevertheless, conflict did occur on the broad lines suggested. The AWU was closely identified with the Labor Party. By far the largest trade union in the state,⁴² it dominated Labor electoral organisation in many areas of the West and North, and exerted a strong influence on both the QCE and the PLP. The militant industrial unions, especially the QRU, resented AWU dominance of Labor politics - which they saw as subservience to the parliamentary wing - and were highly critical of its moderate industrial policy. The ascendancy of the AWU became more firmly entrenched, however, in October 1919 when Ryan resigned the premiership to enter federal politics. Theodore then became Premier, while in a previous cabinet re-shuffle on 9 September McCormack had gained the important portfolio of Home Secretary. Murphy assessed the significance of these changes:

It was now a solid AWU cabinet, where the virtues of the practical man were to rate most highly, where rural values were to dominate, and where the concept of democracy was to be based heavily on "having the numbers".⁴³

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- 41 For instance, in 1919 there was sharp disagreement between the AWU and state Treasurer Theodore regarding measures to alleviate unemployment. *Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting of the AWU, Q, 1919*, pp.10-12, 32-35.
- 42 The membership of the Queensland branch of the AWU on 31 May 1920 was reported to be 36386. Figures for the membership of most other Queensland unions are not available. However, the QRU, the second largest trade union in the state, had a membership of 9616 in 1920. *AWU, Queensland Branch Secretary's Report*, 31 May 1920. QRU Council minutes, 15-17 January 1921; *Militant*, 7 May 1921.
- 43 Murphy, 'Queensland', p.208. The cabinet of nine included four strong AWU men in Theodore, McCormack, Coyne and Mullan. However, of the other ministers, Fihelly, Gillies and Jones also had close links with the AWU.

The optimism - and to some extent the idealism - of the new government of 1915 had been superseded by the exigencies of practical politics and mundane administration. Traditional reformist aims were gradually proceeded with: closer rural settlement; assistance to small farmers; continued regulation of fair working conditions by arbitration; marginal redistribution of wealth by increased taxation on high incomes; unemployment insurance for workers; the abolition of the Legislative Council (in 1922). The greatest difficulty facing the Theodore ministry, however, was the deteriorating economic situation. Widespread unemployment, an increasing budgetary deficit, declining world prices for primary produce, and general economic uncertainty were problems not only in themselves; they also limited Labor's ability to initiate reform, and gave substance to criticisms from both the Right and the Left.⁴⁴

In 1919 and 1920 financial constraints thus forced the government to curtail its programme of state enterprises and public works, especially railway construction. This aggravated the already rising level of unemployment and brought complaints from trade unions, local authorities and the jobless themselves.⁴⁵ However, unemployment in itself was only one source of militant unionist disillusionment with the Labor government. Broadly, discontent centred on the alleged failure of the party to protect and promote the conditions of unionists during a period of economic hardship. To socialists this demonstrated the need for radical action to abolish capitalism, but many workers simply felt that the Labor Party should pay more attention to the interests and

44 See Kennedy, McCormack, pp.150-152, and D.J. Murphy, 'Edward Granville Theodore: ideal and reality', in Murphy and Joyce, *Queensland Political Portraits*, pp.316-320.

45 H. Caplain, Innisfail, to Theodore, 20 January 1920; J.A. Fihelly to Theodore, 4 February 1920, Pre/A651; town clerk, Bowen, to Theodore, 5 March 1920, Pre/A653; J. Welsh, Hughenden, to Theodore, 9 February 1920, Pre/A654; Police magistrate, Mackay, to under-secretary, Premier's Department, 31 March 1920, 17 May 1920, and chairman, Proserpine shire council to Theodore, 13 February 1920, Pre/A661, QSA.

aspirations of trade unionists than to those of the general community.⁴⁶

A closely-linked source of militant discontent was the Labor government's manifest lack of sympathy with unionists during industrial disputes: the insistence of government ministers on arbitration as the only legitimate method of solving industrial disputes clashed with the evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with arbitration awards as shown by strikes. Working-class indignation with Labor on these grounds seemed strongest in North Queensland, the scene of the most disruptive industrial action during the war and post-war years. An important legacy of the northern railway strike of 1917, the Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1918-1919, and the frequent disputes in the mining and sugar industries was the increasing number of unionists disillusioned with arbitration and suspicious, to say the least, of government motives in industrial relations generally.

The state government was perhaps more concerned that the frequency of strikes in the North might alienate many moderate working-class and middle-class voters. Conservatives certainly hoped that this would be the case. A central issue of the Nationalist Party's Australia-wide campaign for the federal elections of 13 December 1919 was industrial law and order; in North Queensland the issue was accorded special emphasis by the recent meatworks strike (notably the events of Bloody Sunday) and the prevalence of strikes in the sugar industry. Nationalist Party propagandists stressed the need for "a period of industrial peace and prosperity"; they claimed that a vote for Bolshevist-leaning Labor would "simply mean

46 Cf. D.W. Rawson, 'Politics and "Responsibility" in Australian Trade Unions', *AJPH*, IV, 2 (November 1958), p.233: "Not that most of the unionists, nor for that matter most of Labour's opponents, drew any clear line between socialism and legislation to benefit unionists".

the continuance of the industrial lunacy of which this year has seen so much".⁴⁷

The anti-Labor forces won the 1919 federal election convincingly, though the Labor Party increased its parliamentary representation from 22 to 26 seats. Labor fared badly in Queensland, however: it lost the seat of Brisbane and again failed to defeat the renegade Bamford in Herbert. Greeting this result, the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* claimed that electors had rejected Labor as too much under the influence of "extremist agitators, Direct Actionists and others"; it proffered as an additional reason for Bamford's victory that Townsville had "suffered from more extreme industrialism than any centre in the Commonwealth except Broken Hill".⁴⁸ The extent to which people actually voted against Labor because they identified the party with union militancy and industrial unrest is problematical. Certainly the Labor Party itself was at pains to demonstrate its opposition to revolutionary socialism and direct action. Rawson notes, however, that Australian electors have tended to blame governments, especially Labor ones, for industrial disputes.⁴⁹

The QRU increasingly formed the organisational centre of unionist opposition to the Labor government. Signs of conflict had appeared earlier, notably in the northern railway strike of 1917 and during the 1919 meatworks trouble. The clash between the government and the railway union continued

47 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 30 October 1919, 13 December 1919. In his policy speech, Hughes, the Nationalist Prime Minister, promised to solve the problems of inflation, profiteering and industrial unrest *via* Royal Commissions on prices and wages, and the creation of a more powerful Commonwealth industrial court: *ibid.*, 1 November 1919. To facilitate these moves, a referendum to extend federal powers was held on the same day as the election, but it narrowly failed. Cf. Sawyer, *Federal Politics and Law*, pp.184-185.

48 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 19 December 1919. Results of the 1919 federal election, in North Queensland, were:

	Herbert %	Kennedy %
Nationalist	Bamford 50.97	Suter 38.27
Labor	McKenna 46.30	McDonald 61.73

From Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the House of Representatives*, p.79. See also Hunt, *Federal Politics in the Herbert Electorate*, pp.83-93.

49 D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia* (Hornsby, 1978), p.104.

during 1920, presaging what became a persistent, internally-damaging conflict in the politics of the labour movement in Queensland.

The antagonism between the QRU and the Labor government was worsened by a bitter dispute over membership coverage and industrial policy between the QRU and the railway sectional unions. Personalities were also significant. Moroney and Rymer were astute, though often abrasive union officials; committed to socialism of a syndicalist type, they aggressively promoted industrial unionism and loudly proclaimed their distaste for both the craft unions (and their officials) and piecemeal Labor reformism. On the other hand, Labor ministers such as Theodore, the Premier, and Fihelly, Minister for Railways, were proud, capable men who refused to brook opposition from within the labour movement.

An angry inter-union altercation broke out early in January 1920 when several ASE members in Rockhampton and Townsville resigned to join the all-grades union. The ASE, whose railway coverage comprised mainly skilled fitters and mechanics in the workshops, consequently threatened industrial action to prevent their members being thus enticed away. In response, Fihelly ordered that preference in engineering work should be given to the ASE. This inspired the "running-grades" union, the LEFCA, which had similar complaints against the QRU, to seek a similar order. The QRU reacted strongly, and though the dispute was later settled without the order being put into effect, Moroney subsequently described it as "part of a carefully planned conspiracy in some quarters to cripple the ARU".⁵⁰

The depth of feeling between the QRU and the Labor government, especially Fihelly, was further revealed at the annual conference of the QRU in March 1920. Moroney cited the northern meatworks trouble, the ASE dispute and the alleged victimisation of a Russian employee at the Ipswich workshops as proof of his claim that "workers

50 *Railway Advocate*, September 1966; *Militant*, 6 March 1920; LEFCA minutes, 11 January 1920; CPE minutes, 15 January 1920. In February 1921 the QRU joined with "all-grades" unions in other states to form the Australian Railways Union [ARU]. *Militant*, 7 April 1921.

in the Railway Service have just as much need for strong industrial organisation under a Labour Government as they have under any other kind". He subsequently moved

That in view of the hostile attitude adopted by the Cabinet of the P.L.P. towards this organisation Conference consider whether this organisation can remain affiliated to the Party, which that Cabinet represents, without prejudicing our policy and standing as an industrial organisation.⁵¹

The issue, said Moroney, was not confined to a quarrel between the QRU and the government; it was "between the industrial organisation as against the political organisation in the working out of our emancipation. . . whether we can go any further along this track by administering the capitalist system". However, after a lengthy debate the conference decided to stay with the Labor Party. Most delegates agreed with the sentiments of the motion but were not ready to take such a radical step as disaffiliation. Such action, they argued, would create further dissension in the labour movement, and more importantly, within the QRU itself; indeed the majority of the rank and file would be against the move.⁵²

This last assertion was proved correct in December 1920, following the expulsion from the Labor Party of Albert Welsby, a radical QRU delegate to the QCE, for opposing the official Labor

51 *Militant*, 7 May 1920.

52 *Ibid.* McHugh, a southern delegate thus stated: "Personally, I agree with the sentiments expressed, but as a delegate here I must not consider my personal opinion. I must be guided by what is best for the welfare of the QRU. I am quite satisfied that action, such as is mooted in this motion, would mean that the QRU would be practically non-existent within the next 12 months. I am quite sure that you would lose at least 50 per cent of your members if such action were taken. At the present time all the members of the Council are industrially educated, but the rank and file are not".

candidate for Bremer in the recent state elections.⁵³ The state council of the QRU ordered a membership ballot on the question "Are you in favour of this organisation withdrawing its affiliation from the QCE?" Despite the council recommendation of an affirmative vote, the question was defeated overwhelmingly.⁵⁴ The whole affair nevertheless provided a portent for the conflict which jeopardised the stability of the Labor Party and thus of the state government in the late 1920s.⁵⁵

The result of the QRU ballot on political affiliation pointed to the Queensland labour movement's general attitude towards the Labor government in 1920. Despite the damaging internal conflicts and disagreements, most unionists supported the Labor Party. True, many were highly critical of aspects of Labor policy and practice - especially the performance of the PLP - but only a small minority were convinced of the viability of either an industrial or political alternative. Socialists and radical militants disaffected with Labor usually preferred to remain in the party and try to influence it from within. Contention in the movement reflected widespread disillusionment with the capacity of the Labor government to achieve

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- 53 QCE minutes, 19 November 1920. The QRU had had a running battle with the QCE throughout 1920. On 9 January 1920 Moroney resigned as one of the union's delegates to the QCE in protest at the affiliation to that body of the Returned Soldiers' Labor League. The QCE seemed to have little alternative but to expel Welsby, for a cardinal Labor Party rule forbids any member opposing endorsed candidates in elections. Nevertheless, upon his expulsion, the QRU withdrew their other QCE delegate, Beatson, sending two new delegates, Rymer and Weir, only on 15 April 1921; QRU Council minutes, 30-31 October 1920, 27-28 November 1920.
- 54 Full voting figures are not available, though it was reported that the majority for "No" was 1134, in a ballot of less than 25% of the membership (that is, about 2000). QRU Council minutes, 16-17 October 1920, 15-17 January 1921; *Militant*, 7 May 1921.
- 55 See M.B. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict in the Queensland Labour Movement*, and Kennedy, 'The South Johnstone Strike and Railway Lockout, 1927'. The Queensland branch of the ARU disaffiliated from the Labor Party in 1926, following intense strife not only between the organisations themselves, but more especially between Moroney and Rymer, and McCormack, Premier from 1925 to 1929. The ARU reaffiliated with the QCE in 1957, following the Labor Party split of that year.

radical reform in the current economic situation; it did not indicate extensive antipathy to the principle of Labor politics *per se*.

Orthodox Labor Party moderates were perhaps most aware of the limitations of governmental power. At the Labor-in-Politics convention in June 1920, Demaine, the state president, defended the government thus:

Here in Queensland we have had a Labor government in power for five years, and, while it has committed sins of both commission and omission and made mistakes, it has at the same time done wonderful work and especially so considering the obstacles and forces it has had to contend against. . . .The difficulties of a Socialist Labor Government functioning in a capitalist state of society are very great.⁵⁶

The convention, held in Townsville, indicated well the relative strength of the moderates *vis-à-vis* the socialists in the Labor Party. Amid heated clashes several radical motions emanating mainly from North Queensland unions were either defeated or simply lapsed. These included resolutions from the Townsville QRU urging workers' control of government enterprises;⁵⁷ the Ayr AWU advocating the amendment of the *Industrial Arbitration Act* to provide for arbitrators with practical experience; the AMIEU stating that employment on public works should be arranged through local union committees, and that all Labor candidates must be workers, and "give some demonstration of the Socialistic beliefs".⁵⁸ It was even less remarkable

56 *Official Report of the Seventh State Labor-in-Politics Convention, Townsville, 28 June 1920* (Brisbane, 1920), pp.13-14.

57 The motion read: "In all Government enterprises the employees shall form committees for the carrying on of same, until such time as the present social system is changed to one of production for use instead of profit". In an amended, much milder form - all words after "committees" were replaced by "such committees shall be officially recognised in the working of the enterprise" - the motion was defeated by 23 votes to 17. *Ibid.*, p.49.

58 *Ibid.*, p.64.

that sweeping motions in favour of revolutionary socialism from the AMIEU and the Townsville QRU lapsed without debate.⁵⁹

Labor ministers were, as we have seen, more concerned with the practical difficulties of piecemeal reform than with exploring theories of doctrinal socialism. In fact, while the convention was meeting in Townsville, Theodore was in England seeking a further loan on the London market to finance the state's public works and railway construction. In London he found that a delegation of Queensland conservatives⁶⁰ had advised British investors against assisting the proposed loan. The financiers refused to offer Theodore a loan unless his government repealed various recent legislation, especially the *Land Act Amendment Act* of 1920, which would increase rental on the British companies' leased pastoral properties.⁶¹ At the same time the British government denied Theodore's request to appoint an Australian governor for Queensland.

59 AMIEU: "That the Queensland Labor Movement join the Third International, thereby becoming part of the world-wide Socialistic movement for the overthrow of Capitalism. That all efforts be made towards international sentiments to break down imaginary boundaries". *Ibid.* QRU: "That this Party, recognising the present social system has outlived its usefulness, declares for the absolute overthrow of same, and substituting therefore a Socialist regime wherein production shall be for use and not for profit". *Ibid.*, p.67. The QRU state council subsequently expressed its strong disapproval of the convention for refusing to discuss a number of items sent by affiliated unions. The QRU noted that the majority of delegates were members of the PLP, and stated that until delegates are elected solely from the ranks of workers "the aspirations and views of the unions of Queensland will continue to receive such shameful treatment at the hands of politicians and Cabinet ministers". QRU Council minutes, 28 August 1920.

60 Sir Robert Philp, the businessman and former Premier, Sir Alfred Cowley, a banker, sugar farmer and former Speaker, and John Walsh, a Brisbane solicitor, comprised the delegation; it was described by Laborites as "the stinking fish delegation". *Worker*, 3 June 1920.

61 Theodore claimed that the conditions demanded of him were (1) withdrawal of the *Land Act* amendment; (2) abandonment of the Unemployed Workers' Bill; (3) modification of the *Brisbane Tramway Purchase Act* to suit the Brisbane Tramway Company; (4) modification of insurance legislation; (5) amendment of the *Succession Duties Act* to oblige English companies. *Worker*, 26 August 1920. See also Kennedy, McCormack, pp.150-160, and B. Schedvin, 'E.G. Theodore and the London Pastoral Lobby', *Politics*, VI, 1 (May 1971), pp.26-41.

Rejecting the capitalists' terms, Theodore returned to Australia on 10 September 1920. The day before his arrival Fihelly, the acting Premier, announced that a state election would take place on 9 October. Theodore delivered his policy speech almost immediately after disembarking at Brisbane. He concentrated on the issues of "self-government" and "no dictation by foreign interests", while promising an additional tax on wealth and the raising of local loans. Notwithstanding the financial problems, Theodore promised an iron and steel works at Bowen and child endowment.⁶² The issue of the London loan failure was expected not only to swing dissident unionists behind the government but also to appeal widely to electors in general. Some success attended the former aim, but, as Kennedy remarks ". . .the issue failed to arouse public excitement: what might have been expected to be a dramatic hard-fought contest was in fact oddly dull".⁶³

The election produced a sharp swing away from the government to the non-Labor parties. Labor held power by only four seats, winning 47.7% of the primary vote and 38 electorates. A feature of the election was the emergence of a well-organised Country Party (formed in July 1920 by parliamentary members of the National Party) which won 18 seats, including four from Labor in rural areas of south-east Queensland. The Nationalists themselves won 13 seats, including 3 former Labor electorates in Brisbane. In North Queensland the government lost Townsville and Kennedy to the Northern Country Party, which also retained Mirani. The election seemed a surprise for the Labor Party, though a confidential QCE report had in fact classified exactly 38 seats as certain for Labor.⁶⁴

62 *Daily Standard*, 11 September 1920.

63 Kennedy, McCormack, p.160.

64 Hughes and Graham, *Australian Government and Politics*, p.518, and *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.119-126. Notwithstanding its name, the Northern Country Party was more closely aligned with the National Party than with the break-away Country Party. The QCE organising committee's report classified state electorates as "sure", "doubtful", and "impossible"; in the event it erred in only eight seats. QCE minutes, 20 August 1920.

Theodore claimed that the election demonstrated public confidence in Labor's performance over the past five years. But Labor's problems were far from solved, especially since the narrow victory encouraged many parliamentarians to tread the path of reform even more cautiously. Financial constraints were still stringent. Despite the raising of a local loan and the floating of loans on the New York market, the government was soon forced to make economies, including cuts in expenditure on public works and retrenchments in the public service. By putting more men out of work at a time when unemployment was already high, this economy campaign intensified the rift between the government and the militant unions, especially the Australian Railways Union.

Between 1 January 1921 and 30 June 1922, the Queensland government retrenched 1120 employees, thereby saving £240,872. In the railways, 785 permanent employees were retrenched and a further 4247 affected by work pooling schemes.⁶⁵ Yet these figures do not include casual construction workers, nor those workers dismissed for disciplinary reasons or who resigned or retired and were not replaced. The magnitude of the government's cost-cutting plan is properly shown by the overall decline in the railway workforce (including construction workers) from 21046 on 30 June 1920 to 17122 a year later.⁶⁶

Predictably, relations between the QRU and the government were even more strained as a result of the redundancies. Under Rymer's vigorous editorship, the *Militant* maintained a barrage of criticism of the government and the Labor Party generally. Increasingly, these attacks showed an amalgam of syndicalist and revolutionary socialist ideology:

65 *QPP* 1922, I, p.105.

66 *CYB*, 18, 1925, p.308; PLP minutes, 29 November 1920; QRU Council minutes, 27-28 November 1920.

Let it be clearly understood that the worker who votes for any form of government to administer the capitalist system is voting for his own enslavement. There is no Labour government in Australia, there never has been nor ever will be until the workers attain economic power by scientific organisation on industrial lines. . . .The A.L.P. does not represent the best interests of the working class. . . its platform is a futile effort to patch up the fabric of the capitalist society.⁶⁷

Such comments indicated the most extreme direction taken by minority radical leftists in the period following the first world war. The victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 provided a model for socialists throughout the world, while unsettled social conditions increased their enthusiasm for revolutionary doctrine. In Australia, amid considerable factionalism and theoretical confusion, various socialist sects each claimed to be the only true disciple of Lenin. By late 1920 two rival Communist Parties, both based in Sydney, existed: one had little connection with the mass labour movement, seeing itself as an intellectual elite; the more significant group, which in 1922 secured the official Soviet imprimatur, was led by radical trade unionists.⁶⁸

In Queensland, a Brisbane branch of the "trade union" Communist Party was formed by J.B. Miles in early 1921. Despite its union connections (in 1922 Miles became Brisbane branch secretary of the AMIEU), the party devoted most of its energy to discussing theory and spreading propaganda about Russia.⁶⁹ The same could be said about

67 *Militant*, 7 January 1921.

68 The events surrounding the struggles by the various groups to become the legitimate Communist Party of Australia have been described in detail by Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, ch.9: "Socialism and Communism"; A Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: a short history* (Stanford, 1969), pp.6-34. See also Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, pp.1-11.

69 The party branch published a newspaper, which it inherited from the Queensland Socialist League: *Knowledge and Unity*, 26 March 1921. Earlier, a "Queensland Communist Group" published three issues - August, October and November 1920 - of a journal called the *Communist*.

the Townsville communist "study circle", comprising mainly railwaymen, waterside workers and meatworkers, which met weekly in the AMIEU offices from March 1921.⁷⁰ The deliberations of this group were reported in the *Militant* - not so much because Rymer and Moroney embraced the ideology expressed, but because any radical critique was a useful weapon in the ARU's battle against the Labor government:

. . .the present Labor Party is no longer of any use to the working class as a means of giving emancipation. We believe that as long as capitalism lasts, just so long will the conditions of the men, women and children of the working class become more intolerable. We claim that only a revolutionary party aiming at the complete overthrow of the present system can be of any use to the working class.⁷¹

Yet at this time the Townsville communists appeared to have little influence on their fellow workers. The Communist Party achieved a substantial, even extraordinary measure of support in North Queensland in the 1930s and the second world war: it was in this period that the aphorism "the Red North" was coined.⁷² Communists were influential not only in the trade unions; they also enjoyed significant electoral support, exemplified by the election in 1944 as state MLA for Bowen of the talented lawyer, Fred Paterson.⁷³ In the early 1920s, however, there was scant suggestion of this later success: the incipient Communist organisation resembled more a Marxist club than a revolutionary party.

70 *Militant*, 7 March 1921; AMIEU northern district general meeting minutes, 13 March 1921.

71 *Militant*, 7 September 1921.

72 *Workers Weekly* (Sydney), 1 February 1935; *North Queensland Guardian* (Townsville), 22 May 1937; *Advocate*, 15 February 1938.

73 A.E. Jones, Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland: a study of F.W. Paterson's victory in Bowen, 1944, B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1972.

"A high point in the history of the movement"?

Ian Turner concluded his authoritative history of the labour movement in eastern Australia in 1921. "To end here", he wrote, "is to end at a high point in the history of the movement."⁷⁴ This assessment is based in part on the belief that the last years of the war and immediate post-war period saw both a resurgence of mass union influence and a revival of socialism in the Labor Party.⁷⁵ Such a judgment, however apposite to the situation in other states, seems inappropriate to Queensland. Economic and political factors undoubtedly produced an increase in union bellicosity; there was also a renewed fervour in ideological debate about various forms of socialism in the labour movement. But this debate scarcely touched the centre of power in the Labor Party: as the government, Labor in Queensland in 1921 was, if anything, less interested in radical social reconstruction than at any time in the past. Further, direct trade union influence on the Labor Party was increasingly confined to the conservative and politically complaisant AWU.

Turner's opinion that 1921 can be regarded as a high point for labour chiefly in relation to the disappointments which followed seems more pertinent:

The 44-hour week was lost, not to be regained for many years. Unemployment persisted and for a time real wages were driven down. The One Big Union disintegrated in the struggle for position and power, and the socialist objective was sacrificed to the presumed prerequisites for electoral success.⁷⁶

74 Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p.234.

75 *Ibid.*, p.231.

76 *Ibid.*, p.234.

In North Queensland, however, workers could be forgiven for seeing the whole period 1918-1921 as one of substantial frustration, if not outright adversity. Unsettled economic conditions caused a steady rise in unemployment; working-class discontent was indicated further by widespread industrial conflict on the waterfront, in the sugar fields and at the meatworks. In these circumstances, the rift between union moderates and militants grew wider. Factionalism in the labour movement frequently assumed ideological overtones not only because of the radicalism (actual, alleged or suspected) of the militants, but also because they were identified as the chief critics of the Labor Government.

After the war, Labor's attempts to improve the living conditions of workers suffered a setback under the force of straitened finances and electoral expediency. Consequently, the ranks of those workers disillusioned with Laborism grew. Some preached a return to independent industrial action and the promotion of the OBU; others asserted that only the creation of a revolutionary political party could hasten the downfall of capitalism. Yet notwithstanding the extent of disaffection with Labor, there was in fact no viable alternative. The great majority of the movement still accepted moderate, parliamentary gradualism as the legitimate method of political activity. Despite their theoretical appeal, neither the syndicalists nor the communists attracted anything more than minimal support in the labour movement.

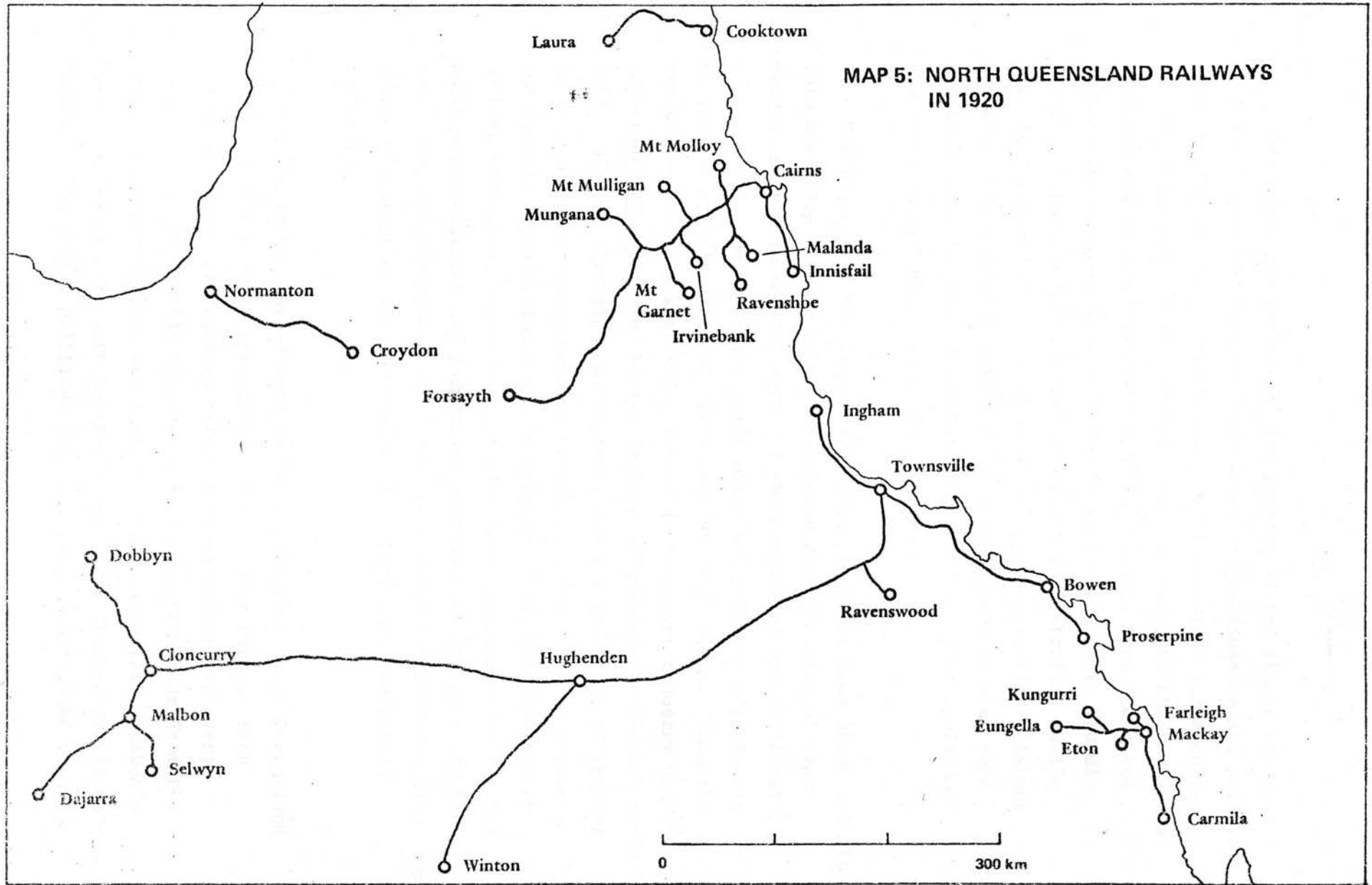
The outlook for the labour movement in North Queensland in 1920-1921 was not, however, one of complete pessimism. If class consciousness be the criterion, the period surely was a high point in the history of labour. The militancy, the increased radicalism - indeed, the very factionalism - evident among the northern unions clearly indicated vitality and assertiveness on an unprecedented and extraordinary scale.

Even on a materialistic level, the working class of North Queensland had come a long way since 1900. If not entirely united, the labour movement was nevertheless in a relatively strong position. Wage-earners in Queensland generally were now the most

highly-unionised in Australia; real wages were also highest in the northern state. Whatever its perceived faults, the state arbitration court provided a fair measure of protection of working conditions and labour standards. Politically, the Labor government still had much to offer the workers: it was at least thought to be far superior to the alternative of non-Labor rule. Despite the slight inroads made by the conservatives in 1920, the North was recognised universally as a particularly safe Labor area. As such, the region was accorded a special significance in the politics of Queensland.

C O N C L U S I O N

MAP 5: NORTH QUEENSLAND RAILWAYS
IN 1920



This study has traced the development of the labour movement in North Queensland from the industrial disorganisation and political inertia of 1900-1904, through a period of sustained trade union growth, political activism and electoral success, to the industrial conflict and internal dissension of 1919-1920. Over these two decades the story of labour in the North was therefore broadly typical of that of the movement generally in Australia. While clearly forming part of the Queensland - and Australian - labour movement, the northern working class nevertheless evinced some distinctive characteristics relating primarily to the isolation and the economic structure of the region.

The history of the Queensland labour movement from about 1904 to 1915 was characterised by the growth and consolidation of trade unions and the increasing unity of the industrial and political wings. Developments in the North often had a decisive influence on the overall direction of the state labour movement. Thus the transition from black to white labour in the sugar industry was an important ingredient in the renaissance of Queensland unionism after 1905. Of more significance, however, was the formation of the AWA in the mining districts west of Cairns in 1907. This assertive and dynamic organisation not only stimulated the unionisation of workers throughout Queensland but also laid the foundation for the subsequent political and industrial dominance of the AWU. At the same time, other northern unionists, especially meatworkers, also earned a reputation for the vigour with which they confronted employers.

It was in the period leading up to 1915 that North Queensland became an acknowledged stronghold for the Labor Party. Both northern federal electorates returned Labor members in every election from 1901 until 1917 (when Bamford, a renegade from the party over conscription, won Herbert as a Nationalist). Labor's hold on the North was also marked in the state sphere, partly as a result of the active political involvement of unions like the AWA.

In 1915, the year Labor gained office in Queensland, the party won thirteen, and in 1918 fourteen, of the fifteen northern seats. In fact, in every state election from 1909 until the Labor split of 1957, a majority of North Queensland electorates returned Labor members.¹ Perhaps even more indicative of the significance of the region to Labor was that it provided Queensland with four premiers - Theodore, Gillies, McCormack and Forgan Smith - and a whole host of cabinet ministers.

After 1915, the basic unity of labour in Queensland was increasingly strained and weakened by the social, political and economic tensions brought about in Australia during the war. Simultaneously, the experience of Labor in government showed that it could not satisfy all the demands of its supporters. The workers themselves became less and less disposed towards accepting either the war or the election of a Labor government as an excuse for a possible decline in living standards. Consequently, working-class militancy was augmented, support for socialism was enhanced, and the inherent conflicts and contradictions within the labour movement rose to the surface. Developments in the state as a whole seemed to occur with greater intensity in the North, demonstrating once again that region's significance in the industrial and political life of the state. The bitter controversy over conscription in 1916, for example, was exacerbated in North Queensland by recurring industrial disputes, including an angry wrangle over the Dickson award - an industrial court award for sugar workers which many employers refused to accept.

It was, of course, the frequency of strikes which earned the North considerable notoriety for union militancy during the war. Strikes by waterside workers, miners, sugar workers, general labourers, railway workers and, above all, meatworkers, seemingly confirmed the image of the region previously established by the AWA.

1 The dominance of the Labor Party over electoral politics in the North probably reached its apex during the 1930s, when in three successive elections - 1932, 1935 and 1938 - Labor won a clean sweep of northern seats.

Industrial action by significant sections of northern workers increasingly placed them at odds with both the government and moderate trade unionists. The northern rail strike of 1917 thus represented something of a watershed: arising out of dissatisfaction with an arbitration award, the dispute seriously disrupted industry in the North; its unsuccessful conclusion left a substantial residue of resentment against the Labor government among many unionists. In succeeding years, Labor ministers were increasingly less sympathetic to industrial action, insisting instead on rigid adherence to arbitration decisions. For their part, a significant section of unionists became more disillusioned with both the arbitration system and the Labor government. Certainly they rejected any notion that arbitration limited their right to strike.

Although railway workers, miners, sugar workers and wharf labourers showed an increasing willingness to strike during the war, the most aggressive section of the northern labour movement was the AMIEU. Eschewing state arbitration in favour of their established system of direct negotiation with employers, northern meatworkers took advantage of a favourable bargaining position to continually press for higher wages, better working conditions and shorter hours. Indeed, Alligator Creek and Ross River meatworkers acquired an Australia-wide reputation for militancy, enhanced by the welcome which many of them gave to the attentions of travelling IWW propagandists.

In late 1918 and during 1919 a high level of unemployment and post-war economic dislocation, aggravated by a shortage of shipping and Australia-wide maritime strikes, produced widespread social disorder in North Queensland. In this context, the long, bitter and violent Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1919, and especially its riotous culmination in "Bloody Sunday", seemed to represent the epitome of northern labour radicalism.

The North's reputation for trade union militancy and left-wing radicalism, however, rested on diverse grounds, depending on the attitude of the observer. Indeed, it was often the whole state, and not merely the North, which was depicted as the "breeding ground of

Bolsheviks" or "a Bolshevik corner of the British Empire"² - descriptions based largely on the mere fact that Queensland had a Labor government. From the time of the conscription controversies of 1916 and 1917 it suited conservatives to portray Queensland generally as a haven for revolutionaries, governed by disloyalists. The much-publicised Hughenden "beer strike" fracas and the Townsville sanitary workers' strike in late 1918, the Merivale street riots in Brisbane in March 1919 and "Bloody Sunday" in June 1919 confirmed this picture. Although right-wing elements were largely responsible for the Hughenden and Merivale street violence, the incidents were seized upon as convincing proof of the dangers of Labor government.

However, it was the North which was accorded a special place on the scale of labour militancy in Queensland. Indeed, the public image of industrial turbulence and union extremism in the region led some observers to claim that North Queensland was quite different from the rest of the state.³ Within the labour movement itself, the popular identification of the region with robust unionism was very influential. Historians too have argued that there developed in the North from at least the days of the AWA and the 1911 sugar strike a peculiar regional tendency towards industrial militancy and political radicalism which had, by 1919-1920, acquired

2 "Secret Service", *Queer Queensland - Breeding Ground of Bolsheviks* (Brisbane, 1918); J. Edmund, 'A Bolshevik Corner of the British Empire', *National Review*, CXXX (September 1925).

3 In a confidential report for the Commonwealth government early in 1919, the state censor, J.J. Stable, thus stated:

"In considering any question, political or otherwise, with reference to Queensland, it is essential to bear in mind, that, unlike the other Australian States, the capital of this State, the political centre, is representative of Southern Queensland only. The conditions existing in the North are widely different to those in the South, and the normal development of these two sections of Queensland has been showing, during the past two years, an ever increasing divergency."

Item S.C.[5]1 : "Bolshevism in Queensland", CP 447/3, AA(C).

the force of tradition.⁴

Certainly the incidence of industrial disputes in major industries indicates the militancy, the propensity to take strike action, of many northern workers. However, the evidence for any widespread or special support for radical socialism in the North between 1900 and 1920 is much less substantial. This study of the labour movement suggests that there are other significant elements of working-class industrial and political behaviour which require emphasis, and that the radical or militant legend of the North should be modified accordingly. In particular, attention should be focussed on the consistently pragmatic approach to industrial and political matters evinced by most northern workers, and the strength of their commitment to the moderate policies of orthodox Laborism.

Thus the dynamic assertiveness of the AWA did not, as has been sometimes alleged, stem from syndicalist sentiments. Rather, the militancy of "the fighting AWA" was most often defensive - a reaction against the employers' refusal to recognise the union. In fact, many of the union's early strikes resulted from employers' attempts to cut wages or to lower standards of working conditions. The AWA generally explored every avenue of negotiation before authorising a stoppage; yet where a strike seemed inevitable, the union entered the dispute wholeheartedly. These tactics were also followed in the 1911 sugar strike: the strike was not provoked, but neither was it avoided; it was a legitimate measure to adopt when others had failed to protect and improve working conditions. Once the AWA's bargaining strength was recognised and employers became more willing to negotiate, so the union used the strike weapon less frequently. Moreover, the AWA leadership always favoured a system of state arbitration for the settlement of industrial disputes. Later

4 Jones, *Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland*, p.76; Moles, *A Majority of One*, p.16. See also Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.313, 336-337; Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict*, pp.19-20; Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday', pp.81-82.

criticism of strike action by Theodore and McCormack as Labor ministers therefore did not indicate apostasy on their part; they simply believed that the dissabilities under which unionism had previously operated had been removed by Labor legislation.

The growing frequency of strikes not only by the AWA but also by other northern unions in the period 1907-1911 was a consequence simply of the organisation of large numbers of hitherto unorganised, unskilled workers in labour-intensive occupations such as mining, railway construction and meat-slaughtering. These unions also followed a practical approach to problems of industrial relations. Their leadership was not guided by theoretical considerations or socialist principles; rather, they adopted an expedient, almost *ad hoc* policy of protecting the members' interests by whatever means possible, including direct action. Advocates of the more radical brands of socialism and syndicalism had only a small following and little influence in North Queensland. Socialist ideology in its many forms provided an inspiration and a seldom-defined goal for some unionists, but their immediate objectives remained materialistic and reformist. Labour was essentially united in pursuit of improved industrial organisation (and thus better working conditions) and the electoral success of the Labor Party.

In the economic, political and social circumstances prevailing after 1915 the labour movement in North Queensland, as throughout Australia, became both more militant and more susceptible to the influences of socialism. Nevertheless, ideology had only a peripheral connection with labour unrest in North Queensland. Certainly many union militants who advocated - and led - strikes were avowed socialists and syndicalists. But industrial disputes themselves stemmed largely from economic discontent arising out of grievances over wages and working conditions, and from the frequent failure of arbitration to match unionists' aspirations. Despite the oft-stated beliefs of both middle-class conservatives and Labor politicians, it is doubtful whether radical or revolutionary socialism made any contribution to strikes in North Queensland, and it is certain that it did not cause any. Strikes were not inspired

by theory, nor, in most cases, instigated by radical agitators; they occurred when a group of workers felt sufficiently strongly about immediate grievances to stop work, believing in that particular instance that a strike would be the surest and swiftest method of remedying the matter.

It is nevertheless true that the economic unrest which caused strikes also enhanced support for socialism among many northern workers during the war. But it is also clear that internal ideological divisions such as those apparent in the AWU and AMIEU in 1919-1920 revolved around a conflict over trade union tactics in industrial disputes. In other words, the ideological ingredients of disharmony in the labour movement largely stemmed from, and took second place to, disagreements about practical methods of improving the workers' lot.

The Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1919 was perhaps the only significant instance of considerations of an ideological kind prevailing over working-class pragmatism. It is important, however, to note the peculiar circumstances of that dispute: an Australia-wide political situation of substantial class antagonisms; shipping disruption which caused intermittent food shortages; and a determined move by the meat companies to crush the power of the union, leading many workers to react vehemently and impetuously. Further, the strike ended in a crushing defeat for the militants, leaving a legacy of bitter recriminations and intensified factionalism.

Thus one result of the meatworkers' strike was that its defeat magnified unionist disillusionment with the Labor government. Discontent centred broadly not only on the government's manifest lack of sympathy with striking workers, but also on its alleged failure to protect the living standards of unionists at a time of high unemployment and inflation. To some workers, this demonstrated the need for radical action to abolish capitalism, but for many, a call for greater "socialism" simply meant that the Labor Party should pay more attention to the aspirations of trade unionists. Only a very small minority, feeling that Labor had lost its credibility entirely, moved to set up a new revolutionary socialist party. In

1920 the great majority of northern unionists retained their general commitment to the Labor Party. Despite factional acrimony, internal conflict in the labour movement was not as damaging as it was to become in the late 1920s, when Labor's estrangement from militant unionism contributed significantly to the defeat of the McCormack government in 1929.

This study of the labour movement suggests that some of the historiographical emphasis on working-class extremism in North Queensland is misplaced; but not all. On the one hand, it is clear that support for radical socialism in the North was not unique; rather as in other parts of Australia, radical socialism was the credo of a small, vocal minority. On the other hand, the frequency of strikes indicates that the evidence for northern union militancy - though of a pragmatic rather than ideological kind - remains essentially intact. The reasons for the apparently high incidence (and public notoriety) of strikes in the North, compared with the South of the state, were to be found historically in the economic structure and geography of the region.

First, the northern workforce was predominantly unskilled and itinerant, characteristics which seem generally to foster militancy, especially when seasonal employment was compounded by difficult or unpleasant work, and by geographical or social isolation.⁵ The nature of work in the mines, meatworks and sugar fields, and on the wharves and in railway construction in North Queensland thus generated tough and combative industrial relations.

5 In an international comparison of the "interindustry propensity to strike", two American sociologists commented on the militancy of the seasonal, unskilled worker. They stated further that working groups which were geographically or socially isolated from the wider society participated in strikes which were "a kind of colonial revolt against far-removed authority, an outlet for accumulated tensions, and a substitute for occupational and social mobility." Kerr and Siegel, 'The Interindustry Propensity to Strike', p.193.

Secondly, the militancy of the itinerant worker was very often facilitated by the regional orientation of the labour movement in North Queensland. Factors of distance and isolation created intense local loyalties among northern workers. From the beginnings of labour organisation in the region, northern unionists fought to retain as much local autonomy as possible. As a result, relations between union headquarters and northern unionists were often bitter and strained; "southern" instructions were frequently ignored. Waterside workers thus persistently refused to acknowledge the WWF executive's right to control industrial policy; as the Mackay wharfies said in 1916, "nobody in the South has any right to make arrangements for local unions."⁶

Regionalism was also strong among the northern railway workers; indeed it was encouraged by the physical separation of the state's railway systems. The northern "all-grades" railway union did not merge with its southern counterpart until 1912; the Townsville section broke away in 1914, following the rail strike of July-August that year, and did not re-join until 1916. The northern rail strike of 1917, which was launched without any consultation with the QRU's head office, further exacerbated sectional tensions, especially when northerners claimed that southern union officials had jeopardised its chances of success.

The northern district of the AMIEU had for many years complete *de facto* control over their industrial policy. Setting the pace for wages and job regulation throughout the state, northern meatworkers rejected and despised the state executive's more conciliatory approach to employers and its half-hearted effects to exercise jurisdiction over the North. Even after the 1919 meatworkers' strike had seemingly crushed the militancy of the Townsville unionists, the northern district retained its spirit of rebelliousness. As Jack Crampton declared in exasperation in 1924:

6 See above, p.302.

North Queensland wanted to govern themselves in their own way and do as they liked; he did not know what the Central district wanted. The Southern district was all right.⁷

Of course, what northern unionists regarded as a necessary and commendable independence, southern officials saw as an irritating and divisive sectionalism. Local industrial action might prevent the presentation of a united front and a concerted policy towards employers, the government and the arbitration court. This feeling was most apparent in - though not confined to - the hierarchy of the AWU. Rank-and-file strikes by northern sugar workers, for example, seen by AWU officials as pernicious, even anti-union agitation, were regarded by the northern workers themselves as the result of the failure of southern bureaucracy to recognise and adequately protect local interests.

The intensity of industrial conflict in North Queensland was therefore often exacerbated by an internal conflict of interests on North-South lines. Regional loyalties, parochialism, and their concomitant, resentment of southern authority, thus reinforced and magnified the militancy of the labour movement in North Queensland. Contrary to the views both of contemporaries and many later observers, however, northern militancy was not inspired by socialist beliefs; northern labour was radical only in the strength of its determination to retain some measure of pragmatic control over its own industrial and political destiny.

7 AMIEU, Queensland Branch, *Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting held at the Trades Hall, Rockhampton, from Monday, 26th to Saturday, 31st May, 1924* (Brisbane, 1924), p.9.

A P P E N D I C E S

A P P E N D I C E S

- I Regional Population, Queensland, 1901-1921
- II The Workforce
- III Trade Union Statistics
- IV Unemployment
- V Electoral Statistics
- VI Industrial Disputes in Queensland, 1913-1920

APPENDIX I: REGIONAL POPULATION, QUEENSLAND, 1901-1921

Censal Year	South	Centre	North	Queensland
1901	328,390	63,919	110,957	503,266
1911	427,620	62,911	111,414	601,945
1921	526,669	88,638	137,373	752,680

Source: *QPP* 1902, II, pp.953-954; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1911, I, p.430; *ibid.*, 1921, II, pp.375-378.

APPENDIX II: THE WORKFORCE

(i) Occupational Categories, North Queensland Workforce, 1901-1921.

	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>	<u>1921</u>
I Professional	4.5%	5.3%	6.2%
II Domestic	10.9%	10.3%	8.5%
III Commercial	10.0%	11.0%	10.8%
IV Transport	8.7%	8.3%	9.8%
V Industrial	16.4%	20.0%	26.6%
VI Primary Production	48.9%	44.4%	37.7%
VII Independent Means	.5%	.7%	.5%

(ii) Comparative Occupational Categories, North Queensland, Queensland, and Australia, 1901-1921.

<u>1901</u>	<u>North Queensland</u>	<u>Queensland</u>	<u>Australia</u>
I Professional	4.5%	6.2%	6.8%
II Domestic	10.9%	11.1%	12.3%
III Commercial	10.0%	12.2%	13.6%
IV Transport	8.7%	8.3%	7.5%
V Industrial	16.4%	23.6%	26.0%
VI Primary Production	48.9%	37.9%	32.5%
VII Independent Means	.5%	.7%	1.4%
<u>1911</u>			
I Professional	5.3%	6.4%	7.4%
II Domestic	10.3%	9.7%	10.3%
III Commercial	11.0%	12.6%	14.6%
IV Transport	8.3%	8.4%	8.0%
V Industrial	20.0%	24.8%	28.7%
VI Primary Production	44.4%	37.1%	29.9%
VII Independent Means	.7%	.9%	1.2%
<u>1921</u>			
I Professional	6.2%	8.0%	8.7%
II Domestic	8.5%	8.9%	9.1%
III Commercial	10.8%	13.3%	15.3%
IV Transport	9.8%	9.2%	9.0%
V Industrial	26.6%	26.3%	31.2%
VI Primary Production	37.7%	33.8%	25.8%
VII Independent Means	.5%	.6%	.9%

Source: QPP 1902, II; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1911, II; *ibid.*, 1921, II.

APPENDIX III: TRADE UNION STATISTICS

(i) Trade Unions in Queensland, 1900-1921.

A	<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Unions</u>	<u>Membership</u>
	1900	13	4,740
	1901	14	4,590
	1902	15	4,582
	1903	16	4,901
	1904	16	5,278
	1905	17	6,297
	1906	20	6,398
	1907	26	11,236
	1908	28	12,256
	1909	30	16,423
	1910	34	18,522
	1911	29	20,000*
<hr/>			
B	1912	67	44,768
	1913	94	51,683
	1914	86	55,580
	1915	89	58,310
	1916	93	66,807
	1917	96	75,393
	1918	102	87,737
	1919	106	97,378
	1920	115	103,784
	1921	118	103,786

A: Figures for 1900-1911 are those presented in the Annual Reports of the Registrar of Trade Unions in *QPP*.

* In 1911, some unions, including the two largest - the AWA and AWU - withdrew from registration. Consequently, the 1911 figure is a considerable underestimate, being calculated from the number of registered unionists plus the 1910 figures for the AWA and AWU.

B: Figures from 1912 are those presented in the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Labour Reports*; they are more reliable than those of the Queensland Registrar of Trade Unions.

(ii) Rate of Unionisation, 1912-1921.*

Year	Queensland %	Australia %
1912	33.4	43.9
1913	37.2	49.2
1914	38.7	51.2
1915	40.7	52.2
1916	45.8	55.0
1917	51.3	55.9
1918	60.0	56.0
1919	61.7	55.6
1920	63.0	58.6
1921	60.0	57.9

* Ratio of Trade Unionists: Male Workforce

Source: *Labour Reports*

APPENDIX IV: UNEMPLOYMENT

(i) Male Unemployment figures, North Queensland, Queensland and Australia, Censal Years 1911 and 1921.

	<u>North Queensland</u>	<u>Queensland</u>	<u>Australia</u>
1911	5.5%	3.7%	4.5%
1921	18.1%	11.9%	6.8%

Source: *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1911, III, pp.1818-1820; *ibid.*, 1921, II, pp.902-904.

(ii) Quarterly Rate of Unemployment among Queensland Trade Unionists, 1913-1921.

Year	Quarter	Queensland %	Qld Yearly Average %	Australian Yearly Average %
1913	1	6.5		
	2	6.6		
	3	5.1	5.65	6.5
	4	4.4		
1914	1	5.7		
	2	4.3		
	3	14.3	10.5	8.3
	4	17.7		
1915	1	17.9		
	2	9.6		
	3	15.6	13.3	9.3
	4	10.0		
1916	1	7.5		
	2	4.9		
	3	4.2	5.8	5.8
	4	6.7		
1917	1	10.6		
	2	5.1		
	3	4.9	7.0	7.1
	4	7.5		
1918	1	8.0		
	2	10.4		
	3	7.0	9.3	5.8
	4	11.6		
1919	1	12.4		
	2	14.2		
	3	9.3	11.1	6.0
	4	8.5		
1920	1	10.5		
	2	13.0		
	3	13.4	13.3	6.5
	4	16.3		
1921	1	15.5		
	2	21.8		
	3	13.5	15.5	11.2
	4	11.3		

Source: *Labour Reports*

APPENDIX V: ELECTORAL STATISTICS

(i) State Elections: Labor Vote, North Queensland Electorates, 1899-1909.

Electorate	1899%	1902%	1904%	1907%	1908%	1909%
Bowen	-	55.94*	*	19.10	-	37.31* (51.93) ^a
Burke	55.40*	62.54*	*	35.08	-	64.76*
Cairns	53.74*	46.49	55.49*	15.91	-	-
Carpentaria	-	43.96	-	52.13*	63.64*	62.29*
Charters Towers 1	79.78*	53.86*	74.46*	48.44	52.26*	50.98*
Charters Towers 2	77.44*	51.12*	71.50*	48.10	51.70*	50.50*
Cook	34.85	48.45	49.80	30.34	-	-
Croydon	63.79*	74.00*	*	-	-	-
Flinders	54.68*	57.77*	*	46.49* (58.94) ^a	*	*
Herbert	-	42.57	43.87	51.68*	56.55*	52.52*
Kennedy	72.20*	*	*	29.59	23.44	54.72*
Mackay 1	-	45.24	51.94*	39.28	48.96	42.58
Mackay 2	-	-	-	-	-	42.08
Townsville 1	29.66	41.36	47.60	37.36	48.78	51.46*
Townsville 2	22.76	40.50	46.88	34.52	47.04	48.26
Woothakata	42.91	68.15*	72.68*	19.84	39.70	42.97* (51.35) ^a
Queensland Vote ¹	30	35		25	28	39
Total Seats won by Labor	21	25	34	18	22	27

- No Labor candidate

* Labor win [where no figure is given, this signifies an uncontested Labor victory]

a Percentage after distribution of contingent votes.

1 Because of the mixture of single-member and double-member constituencies, "it is impossible to attribute a total vote polled by a party in that election" (Hughes and Graham, *Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, p.xiv.) The percentages indicated are the approximate figures given in Hughes, 'Labour in the Electorates', pp.77-81. No estimate was made for 1904.Source: Hughes and Graham, *Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp.506-514.Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, pp.25-86.

(ii) State Elections: Labor Vote, North Queensland Electorates, 1912-1920.

Electorate	1912%	1915%	1918%	1920%
Bowen	44.85	57.48*	59.42*	57.60*
Burke	46.49	48.22	58.95*	66.58*
Cairns	51.27*	70.38*	61.37*	54.68*
Charters Towers	46.69	58.25*	56.69*	54.72*
Chillagoe	75.10*	79.70*	72.82*	77.84*
Cook	41.69	53.91*	60.59*	55.85*
Eacham	52.36*	66.53*	54.82*	55.31*
Flinders	*	*	75.68*	64.54*
Herbert	56.70*	64.56*	63.35*	54.58*
Kennedy	57.45*	67.83*	61.08*	47.97
Mackay	37.89	54.42*	56.01*	53.15*
Mirani	31.21	43.75	46.41	44.25
Mundingburra	61.69*	70.22*	70.13*	60.03*
Queenton	58.64*	70.16*	63.46*	65.01*
Townsville	45.67	52.23*	54.64*	45.02
Queensland %	46.69	52.06	53.68	47.77
Seats won	25	45	48	38

* Labor win

1 *The Electoral Districts Act of 1910* (I Geo. V No. 3), abolished double-member constituencies, dividing the state into 72 single-member districts.

(iii) Federal Elections: Labor Vote, North Queensland Electorates, 1901-1919.

	1901%	1903%	1906%	1910%	1913%	1914%	1917%	1919%
Herbert	51.64*	57.79*	52.91*	60.97*	58.04*	64.37*	48.69	46.30
Kennedy	62.86*	69.69*	57.83*	64.79*	74.38*	*	62.84*	61.73*
Queensland %	34.81	56.69	42.95	47.64	54.77	55.65	48.65	46.83
National %	18.72	30.95	36.64	49.97	48.47	50.89	43.95	42.49

* Labor win

Source: Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the House of Representatives*, pp.8-79.

Hughes and Graham, *Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp.288-323.

APPENDIX VI: INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN QUEENSLAND, 1913-1920

	<u>Disputes</u>	<u>Workers Involved</u>		<u>Working Days</u>	<u>Wages Lost</u>
		<u>Directly</u>	<u>Indirectly</u>	<u>Lost</u>	<u>£</u>
1913	17	1781	225	55288	28374
1914	18	1280	406	25703	11747
1915	17	1477	589	19934	9505
1916	64	17367	2951	170690	96976
1917	39	12074	971	317699	178125
1918	84	8803	1875	183883	131142
1919	69	9078	6336	586651	327537
1920	55	3775	2033	68298	44943

Source: *Labour Reports*

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ORAL HISTORY

Interviews were conducted with a number of former North Queensland labour officials and activists. Few, however, were able to recall events before 1920 with any clarity. Indeed, most interviewees came into prominence in the labour movement only after 1930. Nevertheless, they proved useful sources, especially in conveying a sense of the left "tradition" or labour ethos in North Queensland. Those most valuable for the period of this thesis are marked with an asterisk; of these, George Rymer and Bill Morrow were outstanding. Recordings of these interviews are lodged in the History Department, James Cook University.

*AIKENS, Tom, 16 December 1974

Born Charters Towers 1900; railway engine cleaner, fireman and driver 1917-1944. Member QRU/ARU. Alderman Cloncurry Shire Council 1924-1930; Alderman Townsville City Council 1936-1949; Deputy Mayor 1939-1944. Expelled from ALP 1940, helped form break-away "Hermit Park Labour Party", subsequently "North Queensland Labour Party" (1949) and "North Queensland Party" (1974). MLA Mundingburra 1944-1977. 20 Soule Street, Hermit Park, Townsville.

- BEARE, Jack, 17 February 1975.
Born Innisfail; cane cutter and labourer (Mourilyan Mill), during 1930s. 16 The Corso, Innisfail.
- BOYD, Vic, 17 February 1975.
Former waterside worker, Innisfail, c. 1930-1960.
WWF Hall, Innisfail (caretaker).
- *BROPHY, Leo, 12 February 1975.
Born Gympie; cane cutter North Queensland, and waterside worker Cairns, c. 1919-. WWF Secretary, Cairns, 1927-1950.
4 Hodel Street, Cairns.
- COCHRANE, George, 24 October 1974.
Born 1907, Townsville. Railway worker, member ARU, Townsville, 1930s and 1940s.
- CONNORS, Howard, 18 November 1974.
Secretary Bowen TLC and WWF. Former waterside worker Brisbane, moved to Bowen in 1942.
- CUMMINGS, Dave, 17 February 1975.
Former waterside worker, Innisfail, 1930s-. President WWF Innisfail, c. 1950-1960.
- HENDERSON, Jim, 3 September 1974.
Former Collinsville school teacher, member Communist Party 1932-. Alderman Wangaratta Shire Council (Bowen), 1939-1944. At time of interview, Secretary Brisbane Branch Socialist Party of Australia.
- HENRY, Jack, 1 February 1976.
Sugar worker, Innisfail, 1930s. Prominent Communist and "rank and file" activist against AWU.
215 Days Road, The Grange, Q.
- LOCKE, Les, 14 February 1975.
Sugar worker, construction labourer, North Queensland late 1920s-c.1950. Active in "Weil's disease" strikes, 1935.
- MATZKOWS, Fred, 9 December 1974.
North Queensland Resident since 1935. Former Railway engine driver; ARU and Communist Party member. Alderman Townsville City Council, 1944-1947. 63 Roberts Street, Hermit Park, Townsville.
- *MORROW, Bill, 20 January 1976.
Born Chillagoe, 1891. Railway engine-driver Chillagoe, Charters Towers and Townsville. Northern District Committee QRU 1916-1920, secretary 1920-1926. State Secretary Tasmanian ARU, 1934-1946. ALP Senator (Tasmania), 1946-1953. 28 Towers Street, Ascot, Q.

MURGATROYD, Arthur, 4 March 1976.

Former Secretary Federated Clerks' Union, Townsville;
Alderman Townsville City Council, 1940-1947. Secretary
Hermit Park Branch of ALP; formed break-away branch with
Aikens, 1940. 53 Armstrong Street, Hermit Park, Townsville.

*O'BRIEN, Ernest Patrick ("Pooger").

Born Townsville 1898. Joined Railways 1916; former
President and Secretary Northern District Committee of
ARU. 20 Doorey Street, South Townsville.

O'BRIEN, Jack, 6 March 1975.

Waterside worker, Mackay, 1923-. Mentioned by V. Williams,
The Years of Big Jim, pp.4, 6.

*ROBINSON, Albert, 22 January 1976.

Former meatworker, railway construction labourer, North
Queensland c. 1920-1940; poultry farmer Townsville, c. 1932.
Prominent Communist, active in "Membership Rights Committee"
in AWU in 1930s. Wife, Eva (née Julius), also active in
labour movement. 329 Riding Road, Bulimba, Q.

*RYMER, George Walter, 6, 10 January 1976.

Born 1886, Birmingham, England. Arrived Townsville February
1914; wagon carpenter railway workshops; Northern District
Secretary QRU 1917-1920; Assistant General Secretary 1920-
1922; State President ARU, 1922-1930. Editor of the
Advocate 1920-1930. 9 Eddington Street, Sunnybank, Q.

TALBOT, F.B. ("Doc"), 18 November 1974.

Former Railway worker, ARU member and Communist, Bowen,
late 1930s and 1940s.