

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

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The Brisbane Labour History Association



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See inside back cover for *Editorial Policy* and *Notes for Contributors*.

Front Cover Photo:

Tannery workers outside a tanning shed at Kelvin Grove, c1890. Workers employed in Brisbane's growing industrial, construction and transport sectors were the GLU's main source of members in the urban area.

Photo: Courtesy, State Library of Queensland, Image 16234
[see article on Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union]

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Editorial

Dale Lorna Jacobsen

Welcome to the 7th edition of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

This edition features the stories of two unions. Both began life in the late 1800s but while one has gone on to celebrate its 150th anniversary, the other has faded from history.

Building Unity: an abridged history of the Queensland building trades unions grew out of research undertaken by Jason Stein when, in 2007, he was commissioned to produce a film history of the CFMEU in Queensland. He drew on in-house journals and other publications in the CFMEU collection and interviews with former officials and others, such as Manfred Cross. This article represents three parts of a four-part history Jason prepared for the union's journal, *The Construction Worker*, and we will publish the fourth — from the 1970s to the present day — in a later edition of this Journal.

The second union enjoyed only brief success. While undertaking research on the life and times of Ernie Lane, Jeff Rickertt came across the General Labourers Union, one of the pioneers of labour movement radicalism in

Queensland that is basically absent from labour movement historiography, despite it being the first attempt at mass unionism in Brisbane. In *The Short Eventful Life of the Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union*, Jeff illustrates how the history of the GLU represents a more complex picture of the great strikes of the 1890s than legend would have us believe.

Three interesting books are reviewed: *C.L.R. James: Cricket's Philosopher King* by Dave Renton; and *The Coalminers of Queensland, Volume 2: A narrative history of the Queensland Colliery Employees Union: The Pete Thomas Essays*, co-authored by Pete Thomas and Greg Mallory (President of the BLHA); and the very timely *The Hungry Mile and other poems* by Ernest Anthony.

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth Branch, is hosting the Eleventh National Labour History Conference, *Labour History in the New Century*, in 2009 and is calling for papers. Details can be found in the Noticeboard.

As a long-time member of the folk movement, I join with others in

lamenting the passing of a remarkable folklorist and oral historian, Edgar Waters.

This is your journal. We welcome contributions from members and anyone else who wishes to document the history of Labour and other social movements in Queensland.

I particularly wish to thank each contributor to this issue, for their professionalism in their writing and in adhering to my strict cut-off dates. You have made my job as editor a pleasure.

The BLHA committee would also like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Search Foundation for their support in the publication of this issue of the Journal.

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BLHA

President's Column

Greg Mallory

It is with great pleasure, after over two years of negotiations, I can announce that the Incorporation issue has been resolved. The federal executive of the ASSLH conducted a teleconference at the end of June and passed the following motion:

That the federal executive supports the move towards a national membership for the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Branches will collect the national membership fee as part of their branch subscription and forward \$1.00 per member with a list of members to the Federal Secretary by 30 September to ensure voting rights at the Federal AGM and full voting rights of branch representatives on the Federal Executive. The rate for the *Labour History* subscription will remain separate.

When BLHA members renew their subscription they will automatically become members of ASSLH. In the past, members wishing to join the

ASSLH subscribed to the journal, *Labour History*. I would encourage members to subscribe to the national journal, if they do not already do so. (Details are included in this journal.) The situation of people wishing to join other branches, or subscribe to other branch publications, was also discussed at the meeting, and it was resolved that they should contact the relevant branch secretary. The federal meeting decided that a list of branch secretary contacts and publications would be distributed to all members of branches. It was also decided that the Federal body will invest some money in its web page with branches being able to streamline their links.

BLHA Future Events

The BLHA will be conducting two events before the end of the year. A Brisbane book launch in October by ex-ironworker, CPA official, barrister and wine-grower, Mick Tubbs, will follow launches in Sydney and Melbourne. (The BLHA is honoured to be hosting this launch.) The second activity will

be the BLHA AGM in November (date to be advised). We intend to make this a social occasion, with the group *Absolutely Scandalous* performing political satire following our formal meeting. And I am delighted to be able to report that two concerts on the theme “Rekindling the Flames of Discontent” will be staged at this year’s Woodford Folk Festival. [see Noticeboard – Ed.]

Thanks

Once again, I would like to thank the executive for their work during the year and particularly Dale Jacobsen for her work as secretary and her work on the e-bulletins, Newsletters and ‘The Journal’. A huge thanks also to Jason Stein and CFMEU (Queensland Constructions Workers Divisional Branch) for their ongoing support and most generous donation.

* * * *

In Memoriam

Edgar Waters – **Folklorist and Social Historian: 1925–2008**



Edgar Waters at the 2005 National Folk Festival – Photo: National Library of Australia (Greg Power)

Edgar Waters, scholar, folklorist and social historian, brought a sharp intellectual approach and an unwavering commitment to historical rigour to the emerging field of Australian folklore. His knowledge of the writings and

collections of the world of folklore studies was exceptional, and his early involvement in such studies in Australia put him in a position to influence some of the pivotal moments in folklore studies in the second half of the 20th century. He also brought a generous spirit and supportive personality which encouraged and informed even while maintaining a critical stance, and a lifetime of research simply for the love of learning.

Edgar Waters was born in Sydney in 1925, but grew up in Casino, northern NSW. His father, Eric, was a bush worker — a tick inspector at the time he died in a tent away from home when his son was 11 years of age. His mother, Thelma Lancaster, subsequently worked as a cleaner to raise the family. Unusually for such a beginning, Waters’ scholastic achievements saw him accepted into Sydney University at 16 years of age in possession of a scholarship for the children of veterans of World War I. The only other of the students of Casino High to go to University that year was the much older son of the doctor.

Sydney University, during and after World War II, was a tumult of ideas clashing with the constraints of pre-war thought. Thinkers like John Anderson and Ian Maxwell held sway and the young Waters' head was turned. Amongst this tumult he met Ann Barnard, with whom he shared much of his ideals and who he later married. Though his brother, Darcy, became a pivotal figure in the influential Sydney Push which grew out of the Andersonian Libertarians, Waters rejected Anderson's philosophy, opting instead for a commitment to the left which eventually led to membership of the Australian Communist Party in the early 1950s. He resigned in 1957 — his initial discontent fuelled by a sponsored tour that included Soviet Russia, and confirmed by the invasion of Hungary. He remained, nonetheless, in the circle of university academics, and in 1947 edited *Rebel Songs* with Stephen Murray-Smith.

To raise enough money to live on, and with the added aim of being closer to the workers, Waters found employment at the Feltex Factory while studying librarianship at the Public Library of NSW (later the State Library: it was nearly a decade before the first library course was established in a university in Australia). He completed his study and acquired a qualification accredited by the Library Association of Australia. Waters worked as a reference librarian in a number of areas, and was the film librarian in the early 1950s. The NSW

Public Library was a fertile environment for the specialist librarian to increase his knowledge of folklore and Australian history. In the reading rooms he met Russel Ward, who was embarking on the research that led to *The Australian Legend*. Ward encouraged Waters to record the songs of bushman and musician Joe Cashmere with the still-novel tape recorder and, in 1953, with friend Jeff Way, he visited the old man who had retired to a small bush block in Sylvania, south of Sydney. Typically, he shared the recordings with others, including John Meredith, who was similarly commencing to record.

Though he continued to record for the rest of his life, Waters felt that he did not possess the engaging personality necessary for a folk collector and instead found his *métier* in research and analysis. He and Ann travelled to London where he immersed himself in the British and Irish folklore collections of the British Library and Cecil Sharp House. He met and worked with such luminaries as Peter Kennedy, A.L. (Bert) Lloyd, Seamus Ennis and Ewan McColl and eventually took a job as Alan Lomax's research assistant. His recently augmented knowledge of the British Collections informed Lomax's *Folk Songs of North America*, for which Waters is credited in the introduction. He also talked and gave lectures in London on Australian folklore, and met some of the performers who grace the English collections.

After some time in the UK, Waters was beginning to feel the pull of home when a welcome letter came from friend Peter Hamilton inviting him to help establish a new record and production company, Wattle Films and Records. Waters agreed. Pausing only long enough to raise the funds to purchase a professional tape machine, he left for Australia via a communist youth meeting in Warsaw and a sponsored tour of communist China.

Wattle Records altered the cultural landscape, publishing Australian performers for the Australian market. *The Drover's Dream*, sung by pioneering revivalist band, the Bushwhackers, was a commercial success, charting at a time when such material was relatively unknown. Wattle went on to release more than 20 records, many of which are still referred to today. Closest to Waters' heart were the albums of field recordings including *Australian Traditional Musicians and Singers*, which was compiled by John Meredith, and *Australian Traditional Musicians and Singers in Victoria*, which contained Waters' copious notes, and which are still referred to today. Waters wrote on folklore for the next decade, preparing many reviews and articles for journals and magazines, and writing a regular column for *The Australian* on the folk scene.

Though a critical success, Wattle Records was not enough to support Waters' continued interest or make him

a living. Looking to return to some more regularly paid employment, Waters claimed that ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) provided the second of two unwitting favours. The first was some years earlier when boarding the Italian liner that was taking Edgar and Ann to Europe: ASIO operatives informed the ship's crew to be careful as they had two dangerous communists about to board. The consequence of this was that the sympathetic crew looked after the young comrades much better than they could have expected. The second was when he was seeking to return to employment at the Public Library of NSW and an adverse security report meant that he was declined employment. Unable to find a job that suited his interests, Waters responded to the urgings of his wife Ann, Bob Gollan and Ian Turner, and undertook what is arguably the first PhD in Australia to consider folklore as a subject. He lived in University House in the Australian National University and the difficult new subject was supervised first by Laurie Fitzharding and then Manning Clarke.

At the completion of his research, Waters was approached by the National Library of Australia (NLA) to prepare a report which eventually formed the basis of the Oral History and Folklore Collection, as it is now known. However, though the Library eventually implemented virtually all of the recommendations of the Waters

report, it was some time before they did, and Waters, after impressing Ken Inglis with his ideas for a history course in the University of Papua New Guinea, was offered a job teaching there. Waters developed courses which explained to the emerging independent nation how an affluent western society came into being, and described the value of oral traditions and local culture. He undertook detailed research to support his teaching. Michael Somare and John Kaputin were well known to him in the university environment; Vincent Auali and John Waiko, the latter the first PNG national to earn his doctorate, were amongst his students at UPNG.

In the mid 1980s, Waters moved back to Canberra and was again approached by the NLA, who by that time had implemented most of his recommendations, and a bemused Director General, Warren Horton, met the librarian who years earlier had been his supervisor when Warren was a “stackie” at the Public Library of NSW, (a stackie is a colloquial term for the person who retrieves the books from the shelves in the stacks of a closed stack library).

Though Waters continued to protest that he was not a collector, he recorded hundreds of hours of interviews and recordings for the collection, and helped in the negotiation and acquisition of many important collections. Just as importantly, and typical of his approach, he encouraged many other

younger researchers, collectors and performers in their quest to understand Australian culture and history. He shaped the nation’s folklore collection and influenced the way it has been studied.

In April 2008, Edgar Waters underwent heart surgery, and while it was technically a success, he never really recovered from the operation and passed away in Nowra Hospital with his wife, Ann, and daughter, Kate (his daughter with Inge Reibe), by his side; and Ella Moon, his much loved granddaughter, not far away. He died on Mayday at the age of 82; his funeral decorated by some of the folksongs he loved and studied.

Edgar Waters was an extraordinary folklorist and oral historian. He was a social historian ahead of his time, working in what is now an established field, driven by the need to understand the broad social context in which culture lived. His primary motivation was, and remained his whole life, the joy of learning and knowing.

Kevin Bradley

* * * *

The Short Eventful Life of the Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union

Jeff Rickertt

On a warm Brisbane evening on 18 November 1889, a small band of workers and trade union organisers made their way into the Maritime Hall in Eagle Street, near the intersection with Queen. It was Saturday night, the end of the working week, yet the opportunity for relaxation had to wait. For now, these men had other things to attend to. Dave Bowman, President of the Australian Labour Federation (ALF), brought the gathering to order and explained why they were there. Both in the bush and the regional centres, workers were uniting to confront the tyranny of capital. It was time, said Bowman, for Brisbane's general labourers, amongst the poorest paid workers in the city, to get organised.

Bowman was a seasoned speaker but on this occasion it was the substance of his speech that caught the imagination of his audience. His key points were received enthusiastically, and when he finished, others got to their feet to endorse his views. A number of stirring addresses were delivered, each affirming the necessity to unionise. Brother Hardacre then moved that the meeting establish a General Labourers' Union in Brisbane. The resolution was carried without dissent, and the meeting moved on to

elect an executive and committee and to set a membership entrance fee of one shilling. Messrs McCarthy, Symons and Lee were appointed organisers and empowered to canvass for members and collect fees. After three hearty cheers for the chairman, the meeting closed. Thirty-five workers were then signed up on the spot, before the men filed out of the hall and dispersed to their homes in the boarding houses and tin and timber dwellings crowding the centre of Brisbane.¹

So began the life of the Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union (GLU), an organisation launched, like many others, on the wave of optimism washing through working class Australia at this time. For the GLU, however, there would be no long history or exalted place in the labour movement folklore of the 1890s. By the beginning of 1891, barely thirteen months after its founding, the union was financially crippled and struggling to survive; by May 1892 it had officially ceased to exist. Other contemporary unions disappeared too, of course, but few have snuck under the historical radar quite like the GLU. Overshadowed by the key players in the 1890 Jondaryan and maritime disputes, and even by the Brisbane bootmakers' strike of the same year, it was a union that appears not to have left a mark. Yet for all that, it is a union with a fascinating and valuable tale to tell. It was the first general labourers' union in Brisbane and one of the first unions

of any kind formed under the auspices of the ALF. Its history can tell us much about urban unionism of this era, and about the themes and dynamics of 1890s union organising generally. This article sets out to tell the GLU's story. It will reconstruct a year and a bit in the life of this feisty, pioneering union, examining its rise and fall against the backdrop of the broader events of the day.

Brisbane Labour and New Unionism

The rise in Australia during the 1880s of the so-called 'new unions' of workers without trade skills is a familiar story and need not be recounted in detail here. Brisbane, like the southern capitals, provided fertile soil for new unionism to flourish. The city had grown dramatically during the 1880s, from a population of 22,842 in 1881 to 101,554 in 1891.² The boom created demand for the skills of the building and other trades, but it also brought into existence a sizeable concentration of wage earners without trade skills in the areas of transport, construction, retail and administration. Though manufacturing in Brisbane remained small and undeveloped by Sydney or Melbourne standards, even it grew in these years and in some cases adopted new technologies, resulting in larger factories and, on the whole, a less skilled manufacturing workforce.

By 1891, the census district of Brisbane was home to some 2720

transport workers, 5615 manufacturing workers, and 2049 workers engaged in the construction or repair of buildings and infrastructure and the disposal of silt, dead matter or refuse, these three categories together comprising almost one-fifth of the entire Brisbane workforce.³ When the sales assistants and domestic servants are also included, along with the 1804 industrial workers that the census takers decided were "imperfectly defined", it is difficult to agree with Ronald Lawson's conclusion that "social classes in the Marxian sense did not exist in the Brisbane society of the 1880s."⁴ As Lawson himself points out, there was an increasing number of unskilled workers and a growing emphasis upon the "impersonal market, the cash nexus" in social relations. By the end of the 1880s, moreover, the possibility of upward mobility was declining.⁵ Whatever Brisbane's wage earners were encouraged to think of their social position and whatever 'status' was ascribed to their particular occupations, by 1889 their world was ordered by the class relations of capitalism. Though small and undeveloped, a working class did in fact exist and was becoming more prominent, both in its contribution to economic output and in its impact on the social and political culture of the city.

Workers without trade skills, in particular, were starting to make their presence felt. Local wharfies and seamen formed unions in 1884, and

later registered them under Sir Samuel Griffith's Trade Unions Act. The builders labourers registered in 1887, while the omnibus and tram operators and the railway workers followed two years later. By March 1890 the shop assistants had formed an early closing association and joined the ALF. By May, even the Brisbane news boys were organised. They were followed in June by the Brisbane barmen.⁶

Although these new organisations were less sensitive to rank and standing than craft unions, they nevertheless shared with 'old' unionism a tendency to organise along occupational or industry lines. The GLU, in contrast, represented a different approach again. Modelled on the general labourers' unions then operating in regional Queensland, the GLU aimed to organise unskilled workers wherever they were located in the Brisbane economy. As one of its own proposals put it, the union would recruit

the pick and shovel men, hammer and drill men, storemen and packers, corporation labourers, tip draymen, dray and van and lorry proprietors, timber draymen, town draymen, vanmen, timber yard labourers, ferrymen, gas employees, hired van and dray drivers (wages men), and sanitary employees.⁷

While Brisbane's broadening industrial working class made such a proposal conceivable, the conception itself was

the work of activists from the Australian Labour Federation. Not only did the ALF initiate the GLU's founding meeting and provide ALF President Bowman to chair it, the meeting was addressed by ALF Secretary, Albert Hinchcliffe, while ALF Treasurer and leading Queensland socialist, Charles Seymour, seconded the motion to establish the union. Bowman was elected interim secretary.

The ALF was itself a fledgling body. In 1888, Seymour and Hinchcliffe had persuaded the Fifth Intercolonial Trade Union Congress, meeting in Brisbane, that unions across Australia needed to unite in a single federation. The task of devising the scheme was delegated, however, to the conservative Brisbane Trades and Labour Council. The TLC's scheme, though politically moderate, was rejected by the 1889 Congress, so the Queenslanders decided to go it alone. In May they began creating the ALF structure across the state, with a General (State) Council overseeing six district committees, each coordinating the activities of the trade unions in its own area. Of the unions that federated, some were in existence before the ALF was established, and others, like the GLU, were formed under ALF auspices. By August 1890 the ALF claimed a membership of some 15,000.⁸

The concept of the general union and the thinking behind the formation of the ALF were closely aligned. Both were made possible by the growth and



First General Council of the Australian Labour Federation, held in Brisbane 1st August 1890. L-R: G.S. Casey, R. Morrison, T. Foley, C. McDonald, M. Fanning, A. Hinchcliffe, J.C. Stewart. Photo: Courtesy, State Library of Queensland, Image 56553

extension of an economy based on the wage-labour form. Both expressed an ideology of labour as a distinct class, defined by its rancorous relations with capital and its capacity to act as a unified force in pursuit of its own objectives. As the ALF's Jondaryan manifesto explained:

...in this fight we are going to prove that the old narrow trades unionism is gone in Australasia, as in the rest of the world, that the bushmen and the townsmen and the waterside men are united in the bonds of a

sympathy that leads them to fight each other's enemies as their own: that the purse proud squatter, who denies to the wandering bushmen his Five Shillings a day, and regards as insolence the rouseabouts endeavours to organise, will be met in his pride by the united workers of the world and taught the meaning of the motto, 'that an injury to one is the concern of all.'⁹

From this perspective it is easy to see why the concept of a general labourers'

union made sense and why the ALF was keen to see one formed in Brisbane.

Successes and Setbacks: November 1889–August 1890

Six days after the inaugural meeting the union met again. Organisers Lee, McCarthy and Symonds reported that since the previous weekend they had signed up 32 more workers and found “many others interested in the movement.” It was indeed a promising start. But funds to support the organising drive were in short supply. Organisers, after all, had to eat too. The meeting considered various ideas, including a suggestion by brother Casey that they make an appeal through the Federation to various Brisbane unions for financial assistance. In the end, it was decided that the union would use its own modest resources to pay one organiser to carry on for another week. McCarthy and Symonds immediately offered their services *gratis* for the week ahead, on condition that the union pay their train and omnibus fares.¹⁰

A week later Symonds was appointed sole full-time organiser on a week-to-week basis on a wage ranging from 31 shillings to £2 a week: roughly equivalent to a barman in the hotel trade. He set about his job with skill and enthusiasm. But these were not easy times for organising. By January 1890 the ALF’s Free Labour Bureau had over 300 unemployed general labourers and over 150 mechanics on its books,

and large deputations of unemployed workers were rallying outside government offices across the city.¹¹ As the economy slid into Depression, the balance of power tilted even further in the bosses’ favour. Symonds reported he had interviewed men employed by the Waterworks Board and had visited several iron works and sawmills around Brisbane. The majority of the men favoured the union, he noted, but many “hesitated to join until all their fellow workers had agreed to do so, as they were afraid of being victimised by their employers.”¹²

But join they did. By 30 November, a mere two weeks after the founding meeting, the secretary reported there were 127 financial members on the books, while a subsequent visit by Symonds to Mt Crosby netted 26 more recruits, who immediately elected their own committee to manage the union’s affairs in that district. Closer to home, the executive shared the organising load by creating sub-committees to organise public meetings in Kelvin Grove, Fortitude Valley, Woolloongabba and Lutwyche. By March 1890, Lutwyche and Nundah had their own branches.¹³

On 6 January the Rules were formally endorsed and a new executive was elected, comprising A. Chalmers as President, A. Merlin as Secretary, F. Bevan as Treasurer, N. Smith and A. Clark as Vice-Presidents, and C. Robertson, S. Symons, J. McDonald, A. Mortimer, A. Sinclair and A. Robertson

as committeemen. Full of confidence, the new executive instructed Secretary Merlin to print 1000 membership cards by the next meeting.¹⁴ On 5 February the union's registration was completed, and a little over three weeks later, on 1 March 1890, the Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union proudly took its place between the Queensland Typographical Association and the Journeymen Bakers in the city's annual Eight Hours Day procession. For the first time, Brisbane's general labourers marched in a union of their own.¹⁵

It was also around this time that the trouble started. Back in November the ALF had agreed to pay all ordinary expenses incurred already and for the coming weeks. In December this arrangement was discontinued, the ALF apparently preferring to concentrate its resources on the bush unions.¹⁶ It also probably reasoned the GLU did not need further support. Although it was a union of the poorly paid and subscription rates were low, it did not fund funeral or other non-strike benefits and its organising and administrative expenses were quite modest. The problem was that, by April, the early stream of recruits had become a trickle. *The Worker* reported in early May that the GLU "is hardly swelling as it should be, nor are its funds remarkable for prosperity." The £32 8s paid to the organiser to that point had netted only £37 11s in hard cash. Hard times and the March Brisbane floods were held to blame.¹⁷

As it turned out, dwindling recruitment was not the only cause of the union's cash crisis. Details are sketchy, but it seems that sometime in February, March or April, the GLU's Secretary, the aptly named Merlin, succumbed to temptation and began fingering the dues. By mid-May, he had disappeared, and the executive moved to suspend payment of any monies he was owed. At that stage he was accused merely of dereliction of duty. By July, the accusation had been upgraded to misappropriation.¹⁸ For a fledgling organisation struggling to build a sustainable membership base amongst Brisbane's lowest paid workers, it was a serious setback.

There were even bigger challenges ahead. While brother Merlin was busy freebooting, Australian employers were doing some conniving of their own. A vanguard of pastoralists on the Darling Downs began the 1890 season shearing non-union. The General Council of the ALF and the Brisbane District Vigilance Committee responded in May with a ban on scab wool from Jondaryan Station, a move that brought Brisbane transport, warehouse and waterside workers into the forefront of the dispute. One hundred and twenty bales of Jondaryan wool already in Brisbane were declared black and were prevented from being shipped aboard the vessel *Jumna*.

As the ALF pressed for a conference with the pastoralists and shipowners,

it urged Federation unions to prepare for a general strike, and wired the Amalgamated Shearers' Union in Sydney, asking for 5000 horsemen to be ready to patrol the borders with Queensland if a strike eventuated.¹⁹ The GLU began marshalling its resources for the struggle. A general meeting of the union on 12 May was addressed by delegates from the Queensland Shearers' Union. The meeting endorsed the action of the ALF Central Council and pledged to assist the ALF by every means in its power. Members were asked to pledge whatever they could afford to the dispute funds.²⁰

In the end, a general strike was averted, the employers opting for a tactical retreat by agreeing to employ union shearers at rates and rules to be settled at a separate conference. This left the GLU's pledges of solidarity untested, while allowing it to share in the surge of confidence occasioned by the outcome. Brisbane unionists had responded well to the cause. Five hundred workers attended a mass meeting of the maritime unions, while 1500 turned out to a meeting of general labourers. One thousand workers from all unions attended a third meeting, addressed by W.G. Spence.²¹ For William Lane, the outcome was a vindication. "If anything were needed to show that the 'Federation' time has come," he wrote, "the events of May, 1890, are more than enough. Labour is indeed One in heart and thought and feeling..."²²

The GLU threw itself back into organising, taking the union message out into the worksites and working class suburbs. From May until September, recruiting picked up again. In mid-September the ALF reported that the GLU had 850 members.²³ By 31 December, 1103 workers had been admitted over the course of the year. Of these, only 40 were transfers from other unions. The rest – some 1063 workers – were recruited from organising in the field, a quite remarkable achievement for a union that began with no membership in November 1889 and employed only one organiser for practically its entire history.²⁴

Apart from organised labour's apparent victory over the pastoralists in May, three specific developments contributed to the GLU's mid-year turnaround. Beginning on 27 May, Brisbane's bootmakers waged a successful two-week strike over pay, hours, child labour and outwork. In some ways this victory was even sweeter than the Jondaryan result. It was an unequivocal defeat for the manufacturers, achieved by the Brisbane working class without significant assistance from external labour forces.²⁵

The second boost for the GLU came from the transport workers. Local draymen were among the union's first recruits, and by July there were enough of them to form their own branch. In August, on the eve of the maritime strike, around 30 dray and lorrymen

met to establish the Brisbane Licensed Carriers' Branch of the GLU. Though not lacking in issues of their own, their very first decision as a branch was to refuse to take "loading to or from any ships manned by officers who are not members of the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association of Australasia (MMAA)".²⁶

The third factor in the union's revival was its breakthrough in the rail construction industry. In August an unnamed organiser, probably Secretary Bevan himself, ventured north to find the pick and shovel men building the railway line between Cooran and Cooroy.²⁷ By mid-September a Gympie line branch with some 309 members had been formed, the largest branch the union would produce. Like the stalwarts of the carriers' branch, the railway workers proved to be impeccable unionists. Having sealed their commitment to the GLU by handing over £27 in dues, they immediately dug deep again and donated £25 to the Maritime Strike Fund.²⁸

Yet, as impressive as the rank and file response was, things were still not well with the GLU. Ever since the ALF had withdrawn financial support, relations between the two organisations had remained uneasy, notwithstanding the GLU's wholehearted support for the ALF during industrial battles. In late May the ALF was accused of ignoring a GLU request for help, and in July the union declined an ALF request for

an additional levy.²⁹ The root of the problem seems to have been structural. How exactly were unions to function in the Federation? What exactly was their organisational relationship to the higher committees? From an entirely different political perspective, the American Wobblies were to confront similar questions in their One Big Union.

Within the GLU, too, there were issues over structure, as officials and the rank and file grappled with finding the best organisational form for a union of general labour. As it had evolved, the GLU comprised a central executive and a mixture of geographic and industry-based branches. Issues emerged over fair representation and distribution of dues. At a meeting in July, an "animated discussion" between the Executive and the Lutwyche branch led to calls from the Executive for larger branch financial contributions, and from the branch for one delegate on the executive for every 50 members.³⁰

Around this time, GLU activist and Secretary of the Wharf Labourers', William Mabbott, came forward with a plan to save the GLU from its own organisational and financial difficulties. At a special general meeting on 18 August he presented a constitution for a new GLU based on amalgamating all the unions of general labour in Brisbane. Under the scheme each occupation or industry area would form a separate branch with its own rules and elected officers, subject to the approval of a

General Council or general quarterly meeting comprising representatives of all the branches, elected on a *pro rata* basis. The branches would be entitled to keep a proportion of their dues for their own purposes, and members were free to transfer from branch to branch without paying a new admission fee. Control of disputes would lie with the General Council. *The Worker* praised the scheme and urged “the butchers, tramwaymen, carmen and other ‘general’ workers to swell the amalgamation” which, it was predicted, “should soon be the most important body in the Brisbane district of the Federation.”³¹

But it was not to be. At the same GLU general meeting, the MMOA presented its call to arms. In Sydney and Melbourne the shipowners were refusing to deal with the maritime officers over their log of claims, with the Melbourne employers insisting the Association must withdraw its affiliation to the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. The officers had refused and a national strike was in the offing. The GLU, as was its way, agreed to provide support as best it could. In the circumstances they could not have made any other decision. With the Queensland pastoralists also preparing to make a stand, the bonds of class on both sides were firming. The GLU, however, was clearly under-prepared, despite its growth over preceding months. The suburban branches were still fragile, the carriers’

branch had only just been formed, the Gympie line branch was still some weeks away. Whatever the merits of Mabbott’s plan for reorganisation, there was no time for implementation. The ink on the minutes endorsing the scheme had hardly dried when the union, undeveloped and untested, was plunged into one of Australia’s biggest industrial confrontations.

The Maritime Strike and Beyond: August 1890–May 1892

The strike began on 16 August with the walkoff of MMOA members in Sydney. On 18 August, a joint committee of the ALF and waterfront unions called out all officers, seamen, firemen, waterside workers, cooks and stewards engaged on coastal steamers in the port of Brisbane. Other ALF unions in Brisbane, including the GLU, endorsed the action and imposed bans on any ships worked by non-union labour.

Over the first ten or so days, the Brisbane unions put on an impressive show of strength, with mass meetings of up to 6000 workers in the city streets and Victoria Park, and large contingents of strikers and supporters mobilised to picket the wharves. Around 1000 Brisbane workers were on strike, among them the members of the GLU’s licensed carriers’ branch.³² A special meeting of the carriers on 25 August affirmed that their action would continue until, as they put it, “the dispute [was] honourably settled.”³³

The union supported them with strike pay of £1 per week, funded from its own reserves.³⁴

Despite the feisty start, it was apparent quite early that this time the labour movement was up against it. The employers were determined, organised and well funded, while the unions were handicapped by the deadweight of a depressed economy and their own under-development. Labour was in plentiful supply. Despite monster rallies and determined picketing, the Brisbane unions failed to prevent the employers recruiting and deploying

strike breakers to carry their cargos and crew their ships. At the peak of the union's mobilisation in the first week of the strike, the steamer *Birksgate* was able to sail for the north with a cargo of 760 tons, while the unloading of the *Buninyong* and *Burwah* was completed by a combination of non-union and volunteer labour. The goods were then transported from the wharf by the merchants' own carts.³⁵

The availability of scab labour was identified as a problem early in the dispute. At their meeting on 25 August, the carriers threatened to punish any



Petrie Bight, 1890. The wharves adjacent to the city became a battleground during August and September 1890 as picketers attempted to block the movement of strike breakers and goods. Photo: Courtesy, State Library of Queensland. Image 67344r.

member acting contrary to the union's resolutions. But the threat apparently had little impact. Three weeks later a special general meeting considered a resolution that all members who ratted should be fined and compelled to pay arrears and levies. The meeting eventually decided to leave the motion lie until the strike finished.³⁶ Throughout the dispute goods continued to be carted to and from the wharves, protected by uniformed police and squads of baton wielding special constables. Though productivity was down, work continued on the wharves and ships. Even the labour press was forced to concede that "a considerable quantity of blackleg labour [was] obtained."³⁷

The GLU's other problem was financial. Without the injection of cash from the Gympie line branch, its own contribution to the strike fund would have collapsed quite early. As it was, the union came out of the dispute in serious debt. By the end of the year, it owed £366, of which £184 had gone on strike pay to its own members.³⁸ This was not, of course, a problem unique to the GLU. As *The Worker* explained:

...the long depression through which trade is still passing has rendered many members of unions unfinancial and melted down the balances which could ordinarily have been drawn on, [while] many federated unions are new societies with scanty funds and ill-paid memberships...³⁹

The ALF estimated that the strike cost it and Queensland unions up to £15,000 in strike pay, though it also claimed that thanks to a cash stream from the bush unions, the end of the strike in Queensland was "due to no lack of funds."⁴⁰ On a national scale, despite donations from British labour, the strike decimated union balances, leading W.G. Spence to claim that lack of funds was indeed the cause of labour's defeat.⁴¹

By October the strike was in a general state of collapse. In Queensland, strikers were returning to work with or without union authorisation, unions were discontinuing their donations, and some were even withdrawing from the ALF.⁴² Faced with "complete breakdown", the ALF recommended an orderly surrender.⁴³ By the end of the month it was all over.

The GLU emerged from the confrontation seriously weakened. In the closing stages of the strike the continuing health of the Gympie line branch appears to have buoyed the union's hopes. By mid-October the branch had grown to 417 members, and their dues, combined with an additional sum in the form of a branch 'loan' to the central body, left the union sufficiently emboldened to lease a room at 152 Edward Street and buy a horse "to more efficiently carry on the organizing work."⁴⁴ But as unemployment rose and the employers' offensive marched relentlessly on, the

confidence of working class Brisbane ebbed away, precipitating a collapse in urban union power. Plagued by money woes throughout its short life, by the end of the strike the GLU did not have the revenue capacity amongst its city branches to repay its debts, let alone continue to organise. By year's end it was reduced to 51 registered members.⁴⁵ When the debt of £366 was revealed at a meeting on 19 January 1891, the assembled members directed Secretary Bevan to write to the Queensland Labour Union asking them to open a branch in Brisbane to absorb the GLU. Brother Clark gave notice of a motion to withdraw from the ALF "owing to the state of [the union's] finances." On this note, the known surviving records of the Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union come to an end.

We do know, however, that the union limped on. Bevan called a special meeting in April with the intention of reconstituting the GLU, and in May there is a report of the union being reorganised with Matthew Reid as secretary.⁴⁶ But from here the story fades away. The fatal blow may have come in July, when the last stage of the Gympie line was opened, presumably bringing to an end the most impressive of all the GLU branches.⁴⁷ The union's registration was cancelled on 16 May 1892, a little less than one month before the registration of a new Brisbane union, the Federated Labour Union.⁴⁸ We can speculate that the FLU was in fact the GLU reconstituted as the kind

of broad outfit that Brother Mabbott had proposed back in August 1890.

In any event, the GLU was gone; its short, busy life quickly overshadowed by the bigger events and organisations of labour movement history. But from this obscurity comes an instructive story. In the legend of the great strikes of the 1890s, with its idealisation of the bush worker, the urban unions and, by extension, the urban working class, tend to be presented as the weakest link. The GLU's history suggests a more complex picture. The GLU's growth from November 1889 until January 1890 and again from May until October 1890 reveals a labouring population only too aware of its class position and acutely receptive to the class message of ALF-style unionism. But there was not enough time to reach this population *en masse* before Brisbane was engulfed by the Depression and the maritime dispute. In September 1890 the Brisbane District Council of the ALF claimed a total membership of 4000, certainly an impressive force, but insufficient for the purpose of countering a capitalist offensive in a deteriorating labour-intensive economy.⁴⁹ As *The Worker* concluded in November, "unorganised labour broke this strike."⁵⁰ Without organisation workers more readily fell victim to the fear and insecurity fostered by the collapsing labour market and the offensive waged by an emboldened employing class. As the Depression bit and employers pounced, it was not

workers' class consciousness that fell away but their class confidence, their sense of their own collective power. Depression and defeat produced doubt and retreat. It would be the same in the Great Depression forty years later. If there is a particular lesson, then, from the demise of the GLU, it is that boom times should not be squandered. They are opportunities to organise and educate, and to extract maximum concessions from capital in preparation for the downturn around the corner.

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Building Unity: an abridged history of the Queensland building trades unions

Jason Stein

Part One: Birth of Our Union 1857–1900

On 29 August 1857, a letter was published in the *Moreton Bay Courier* (a predecessor of *The Courier Mail*) calling for workers in the local Brisbane region to pursue an 8-hour working day. The letter’s author explained to readers that reducing the nominal working day from 10 hours to 8 hours was necessary for the “physical and mental improvement” of citizens and was necessary “for the future character of our country”.

That letter, written before our economy had begun to flourish and before the State of Queensland was even pronounced, proved to be the catalyst for workers in the Brisbane region to campaign for an 8-hour day. Soon after the letter’s publication, a group of 10 workers formed the Brisbane Labour Alliance Committee, which negotiated an agreement that the eight-hours system was to be adopted from 1 January 1858. Queensland’s first union, the Stonemasons, was formed with twelve members (Queensland’s “apostles of unionism”) at the home of Henry Cox of Henry Street, Spring Hill, on 18 January 1858. This location has been recognised by the Queensland Government as a place of historic significance, with a plaque placed in the footpath in nearby St Paul’s Terrace commemorating the establishment of Queensland’s first union.

Whilst the first 8-hour working day was granted for a limited number of workers on 1 March 1858, many years passed and much hardship was suffered before the 8-hour day became a community standard. As has been the case with all working conditions, the standard was won, and then lost as economic conditions turned down, only to be won again as workers fought to gain better conditions locally than their “brothers” in England had been able to establish.

One of the significant jobs where workers struck to enforce the 8-hour

working day was the construction of the old South Brisbane Dry Dock. This historic location is currently the home of the Maritime Museum, located at the south-eastern end of the Southbank Parklands.

It is difficult to establish the precise dates that each of the CFMEU component unions were formed. After the Stonemasons got things going, other building unions began to form with records showing the Carpenters began to organise in 1861. The day after the establishment of the Carpenters Union, the Painters began to organise. Records also show that by 1888, the Bricklayers were also well organised, having struck for 18 days to win a wage increase.

The Queensland Plasterers Union had published a set of “Trade Rules” in 1889 indicating the union was established some time before this date. Cabinetmakers were organised into a union well before the year 1886. One of their early disputes related to the rates paid to Chinese cabinetmakers who earned 2s. 6d. a day compared to the rate being paid to “European” cabinetmakers of 8s. for an 8-hour day. Not surprisingly, the banners at the subsequent 8-hour day march were not kind to Asian immigrants.

Interestingly, with no proper regulatory framework in place, many unions were poorly run. There are plenty of stories of union funds disappearing after the



Photo courtesy CFMEU Construction and General Division.



Gerry Dawson, (second row, first left) at a meeting with Prime Minister Ben Chifley (front row, far right). Photo courtesy CFMEU Construction and General Division.

publican (who was often responsible for the finances) did “a runner”. There were also no comprehensive rules preventing unions from being formed where an existing union had already been established. This is made clear by the record showing a branch of the British “Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners”(ASC&J) was established in Brisbane in 1879 alongside the existing local Carpenters Union.

In the years following the establishment of these early unions, economic fluctuations impacted significantly on their sustainability. Many of these

fledgling associations failed, only to be reformed again as economic conditions improved. After the devastating strikes of the early 1890s, unions floundered, but grew again in a “trade union revival” later in the decade.

As the 19th century moved toward its conclusion and the Federation of the Australian Commonwealth loomed beyond the century’s horizon, the “juvenile” Australian union movement was gaining industrial strength and developing political influence. Australian workers had become the envy of workers across the globe with

the country having earned the interesting description of being a “Paradise for workers”.

Part Two: Building Unity, Building Strength 1900–1927

In the late 1890s, Australia was considered by many outsiders as something of a unique social experiment. The old class divisions that had plagued Europe for centuries were not as deeply embedded in the new colony. Workers had stood firm against the tyranny of employers and governments, and although defeated (some would say convincingly), workers and unions remained an entrenched feature of the social structure. This was clearly highlighted in many newspapers and journals of the time. Publications such as *The Bulletin* contained language that would give many modern “capitalists” cause for concern. Strong political support for the working class was also apparent.

In late 1899, only a matter of weeks before the turn of the century, Queensland’s Lieutenant Governor S. W. Griffith commissioned Anderson (Andrew) Dawson to form the world’s first Labour Government. Although it lasted just 6 days from 1 to 6 December 1899, this event was a declaration that Australia (and specifically Queensland) was going to establish its own independent political destiny. Workers in Australia were prepared to confront the capitalist system head on.

In Brisbane at the time, although unions were still recovering from their collapse in the early 1890s, gains were being made. In 1900, building employers in Brisbane conceded wage increases and agreed to adopt a new code of working conditions after a successful campaign by building unions.

In 1901, with the federation of the colonies into the Commonwealth of Australia, a new Federal Constitution was established. Employers were now well aware of the devastation that strikes could cause. Workers were also battle-weary and wanted to avoid being dragged through the criminal courts in the future. In 1904 the Federal Labor Government used the powers contained in s.51XXXV enabling the Commonwealth Parliament to legislate in the area of Industrial Relations and passed the (Commonwealth) Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904, which in turn created the first federal Arbitration Court.

In 1907, the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association of Australia (FEDFA) became the first craft union to be registered under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904. Two separate branches were established in Queensland, one in the north and another in the south. Significant as this event was, it has been completely overshadowed in the history books. In the same year, the Federal Arbitration Court’s ruling, which later became known as the Harvester Judgment,

determined that an unskilled worker should receive a “living wage”, being enough to support a spouse and three children. This established a new principle by which to determine wage outcomes.

Arbitration gained a positive reputation as workers began to experience the benefits that now flowed from the much pain they had gone through over a decade before. From 1904 to 1914, Australian trade union membership expanded four-fold.

Despite the good news, arbitration was never considered to be the magic panacea to resolve all of the problems of workers. Many battles had to be fought to lift working conditions to an acceptable level. In 1907, Brisbane bricklayers struck for increased wages. Employers conceded then retracted their agreement. The bricklayers then struck again and this “clinched the deal”. In 1911, the plasterers and labourers struck together in support of higher wages. After 15 weeks a compromise was reached. The plasterers got all they were seeking. The Labourers got 85 per cent of their demands.

Unions were expanding in response to the positive environment. In 1911, the Australian District of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters & Joiners gained Federal registration. In 1912 a sub-branch of the ASC&J was established in Townsville.

The fight for shorter working hours was revived in 1912 when the Painters Union of Queensland carried a resolution to fight for a 40-hour week. The union journal claimed this was the first such resolution in Australia. The union held special stop work meetings on Saturday mornings in support of a 40-hour week. The Progressive Carpenters joined the call for a 40-hour week in 1915.

Despite the improving environment, the conservative forces were far from defeated. In 1913, the Queensland Government enacted the Industrial Peace Act 1912 which led to the creation of the Industrial Court of Queensland. The act did not recognise trade unions and it was claimed the Act would render all future strike action unnecessary. The fight to improve conditions through parliamentary representation had a long way to go.

With the continuing expansion of unions, agreements were being made to ensure unions did not need to compete for members. In 1915, an agreement between the AWU and the FEDFA was signed committing the AWU to not “enroll as members” any persons who would otherwise be entitled to be members of the FEDFA. The Agreement was signed by W.G. Spence and E. Grayndler from the AWU.

At the election in May 1915, Labour was again elected to Government in Queensland gaining a large majority. Thomas Joseph (T.J.) Ryan became



BWIU May Day float. Photo courtesy CFMEU Construction and General Division.

Premier, Chief Secretary, and Attorney-General, and an era of industrial legislation and state enterprise began. Among the measures passed by that Government were the Industrial Arbitration Act, Labour Exchanges Act, Workers' Compensation Act, Inspection of Machinery and Scaffolding Act and the Factories and Shops Amendment Act. Ryan showed good generalship at the 1918 election and his party was again returned with a large majority. Thomas Ryan was also instrumental in leading the fight against conscription in the referendum launched by Billy Hughes. In 1916 the Painters Union

took a strong stand against conscription and this contributed to the defeat of the proposal in the referendums of 1916 and 1917.

With the establishment of a stable Labor Government, new approaches to gaining improved working conditions were trialled. In January 1918 Fred Brazier, a leading ASC&J member and delegate to the ALP convention, moved for the 40-hour week to become an objective of the Labor Party. The move was defeated by E.G. Theodore and W. McCormack.



BWIU State Delegates Convention 1958. Photo courtesy of CFMEU Construction and General Division.

Late in 1918, the building unions began campaigning for a consolidated award with a 40-hour week. Negotiations with the Masters Builders failed. (Some things never change!) A ballot was held and workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of the 40-hour week. A claim was lodged in the court and after considerable deliberation, a new award came into force on 1 January 1920. Although the Court's decision supported union arguments for a universal 8-hour day and a 40-hour week, the union claim was ultimately rejected. Building workers, unhappy with the decision, decided to force the issue and began holding Saturday stop-work meetings commencing from 6 December 1919. The court's response was decisive: the action was to stop or the award would be cancelled. Divisions appeared between the unions and the action ceased.

After several more years of delay, the campaign for shorter hours recommenced in earnest in 1927 when building workers refused to work on Saturdays, commencing from January 8. The Master Builders threatened a lockout. The campaign continued with a ten-week dispute which eventually resulted in a lockout by the employers. A secret ballot was ordered by W.F. Webb, President of the Industrial Court, over the strike action being taken. After the ordering of the ballot, a mass meeting of 2000 building workers rejected the requirement for a secret ballot. Webb was determined to show the workers who was the boss. On 3 February 1927 the Carpenters, Bricklayers, Painters and Builders Labourers were deregistered by the Industrial Court. Although all of the unions were re-registered by early May, the risks that accompany deregistration were made clear when the Builders Labourers

Federation lost their coverage in North Queensland to the Australian Workers Union. The AWU had made an application for absolute preference for builders labourers north of Mackay in October 1926. The timing of the court's decision in this matter remains an interesting facet of Queensland industrial history.

Part Three: Industrial and Political Growth 1930–1970

The campaign for a 40-hour week faltered when the building unions were defeated by the overwhelming power of the State in the bitter 1927 dispute. Our union learned an important lesson about the true nature of the Arbitration system in Queensland. Yet, despite this setback, the pursuit of shorter hours remained on the agenda.

Unfortunately, the events that unfolded in Wall Street only a couple of years later, in October 1929, were to have repercussions around the world for years to come. The Great Depression seriously affected Queensland's economy and as a natural result, many Queensland building workers were thrown out of work.

The years from 1929 to 1935 were very difficult for all Australian workers. Wages were reduced for those who could find work and the army of unemployed grew steadily. The militancy of the 1920s was eroded as workers accepted whatever wage they

could get. Even though the economic environment was bleak, the building unions had not lost their focus. In the midst of the Great Depression, leaders like "Uncle Fred" Brazier from the Carpenters Union were determined that unionism would outlast the bleak times and remain a force into the future.

In September 1934, the "Building Trades Group" of unions began publishing a journal for all building workers. One of the important messages contained in the journal was that building workers should embrace industrial unionism in the building industry.

As the economy began to emerge from the depression, workers again began to agitate for improved conditions and "shorter hours" was an early claim. In 1935, after continued campaigning, the Arbitration Court proposed that building workers could have a 40-hour week if they were prepared to give up their Saturday morning's pay. This required a one-eleventh wage cut. The proposal came into operation on 1 July 1935.

Even though workers had essentially paid for the right to work fewer hours, the employers remained opposed to the option and in 1941 applied to have the 44-hour week reinstated. The application was rejected and Queensland building workers retained the 40-hour week. Eventually, the rest of Australia caught up with Queensland building workers and the 40-hour week

was established across Australia from 1 January 1948. Queensland Building workers also won the restoration of their lost Saturday morning's pay, returning the one-eleventh wage cut they had forgone almost 13 years before.

Another visionary claim was the call for apprentice wages to be increased. In 1939, the Building Trades Group of unions instigated demands for apprentices to be paid 20 per cent, 35 per cent, 50 per cent, 65 per cent and 80 per cent of the tradesman's rate. After 5 years of campaigning, a Queensland Government inquiry decided in 1944 that apprentices should be paid 17.5 per cent, 30 per cent, 45 per cent, 57.5 per cent and 72.5 per cent.

Amalgamation was also being pursued. In 1936 and 1937 the Queensland Branch of the Painters Union conducted ballots which supported amalgamation with other building unions. In 1942, ballots were conducted by the Bricklayers, Labourers, Painters and Carpenters Unions regarding amalgamation. The Queensland Secretary of the Labourers Union, Dick Surplus, argued that amalgamation of the building unions to form a large industrial union is "the culmination of industrial history".

In 1944, the Carpenters, Painters and the Builders Labourer's made application to the Queensland Industrial Registrar to formalise their amalgamation. However, the federal branch of the

Builders Labourer's Union and the Queensland AWU were opposed to the amalgamation and they successfully blocked it in the courts. In 1947, a national ballot of painters endorsed amalgamation with the BWIU, but support for the amalgamation did not reach the required 75 per cent, so the proposal also failed.

Whilst various unions were having difficulty amalgamating, the Carpenters were determined they would take things forward. They embarked on a mission to consolidate their regional ASC&J sub-branches into a state-wide organisation. Under the leadership of Gerry Dawson, who became a full-time official with the ASC&J in 1942, the union was transformed from a decentralised group of autonomous branches to a much stronger state-wide organisation. The Queensland branch of the BWIU was formed in 1945 with Gerry Dawson elected as the union's first state secretary.

After the end of World War II a new threat to unionism emerged. As the cold war developed, a bitter paranoia closed in on the Australian population with communism being tagged as the new threat. The leaders of many of the Queensland building trades unions were either members of the Communist Party or were strongly aligned with its ideology. To counter the supposed threat of communists taking control of unions and having influence within the ALP, a secret organisation was created



Meeting at Trades Hall being addressed by Tom Chard. Photo courtesy of CFMEU Construction and General Division.

by the National Civic Council (a subset of the Roman Catholic Church). It was to become known as the “Industrial Groups” with its operatives referred to as “groupers”. Their primary role was to undermine supposed communist efforts to control unions “by any means possible”.

A seditious campaign unfolded which in many ways paralleled the McCarthyist witch-hunts underway in the United States. Many radical unionists were targeted as communist sympathisers,

whether they supported communism or not. The groupers willingly did deals with employers to achieve their objectives, often selling out union members in the process. In the end, unions that became controlled by groupers lost their capacity to organise members and never recovered.

In 1947, the ALP Industrial Groups, which were at this stage actively supported by the Australian Workers Union, commenced their attacks against the leadership of both the

Painters Union (Jack Hanson) and the Carpenters Union (Gerry Dawson). At the annual elections in 1947, the groupers ran a full ticket against Jack Hanson. A bitter contest followed with the groupers “red baiting” and using the catch-cry “Hanson must go because he is a communist”. The membership rejected the groupers divisive tactics and returned Jack Hanson with a two-to-one majority. Whilst the painters quickly defeated the groupers the BWIU, which was strategically the most important union in the industry, became the prime target for grouper insurgency. One of the major fronts in the battle for control of the union was within the Queensland Housing Commission.

After the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement was established by the Chifley Government in 1945, the Queensland Housing Commission (QHC) was established and became responsible for building the largest number of houses in Queensland history. The progressive leadership of the BWIU called on its members to take up jobs with the QHC to build houses for Queensland workers.

During the subsequent years there were many battles between the BWIU and the QHC as workers fought for improved conditions. The Queensland “Gair” Government was extremely antagonistic toward the activities of militant unionists and maintained a sympathetic attitude to the activities of

the groupers, who had infiltrated various sections of QHC management. As a result, certain “pro-grouper” managers were responsible for transferring militant unionists away from certain sites as part of a strategic campaign to undermine the organising capacity of pro-Dawson (pro-communist) leadership.

The battle between the progressive forces led by Gerry Dawson and the secretive groupers raged for several years until eventually a court-controlled ballot was held to determine the leadership. The Gerry Dawson ticket prevailed and as a result, the groupers were repelled from the Queensland building industry.

On the National front, the registration of the national union, the Building Workers Industrial Union of Australia, was cancelled by order of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration on 27 August 1948 due to the militant activities of one of the southern branches. As a result, the union was forced to operate outside of the Federal System for many years. In 1962 the BWIU was finally re-registered as an industrial association. The application which was drafted and advocated before the Court by Queensland State Secretary Gerry Dawson was opposed by a “scab” union with the interesting title of “Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners”. It had gained registration while the BWIU was deregistered and



Gerry Dawson, who forged the BWIU into one of Queensland's most progressive unions. Photo courtesy of CFMEU Construction and General Division.

its advocate unsuccessfully argued that members of the BWIU could more conveniently belong to the ASC&J. The court rejected this argument and allowed the BWIU to re-enter the arbitration system.

Although the Queensland building unions were fighting on many fronts, the continued struggle for improved conditions was not ignored. Members continued to agitate for better safety, higher pay and conditions enjoyed by workers in other industries. At the BWIU State Delegate's convention of 1949, a resolution was passed calling

for Long Service Leave to be instigated for building workers. This resolution began the campaign which eventually resulted in the inception of the Portable Long Service Leave Scheme in 1992.

Another significant milestone was the achievement by the Painters Union in having white lead removed from paint by law as from 14 January 1956.

The 1960s saw a number of disputes in regional Queensland as the State's rich mineral resources began to be exploited. Mine construction expanded and tested the State's minimal infrastructure. Workers engaged on remote construction projects were being housed in appalling conditions as employers ignored their obligation to provide reasonable accommodation.

BWIU organiser, Kevin Loughlin, recalled accommodation at Mary Kathleen was dreadful with construction workers living next to the town dump. It was a serious public health issue and despite continued complaints from workers, the employers and the local union, the AWU didn't seem to have any interest in the matter. It took the intervention of the BWIU to fix it up.

In 1967 a major dispute broke out during the construction of the Collinsville power station. BWIU organiser Bob Anderson was involved in co-ordinating the dispute ballot and subsequently in organising picket activity after the principal contractor,

DO NOT APPLY FOR WORK AT
COLLINSVILLE
POWER HOUSE JOB

WHICH IS

BLACK

UNTIL NEGOTIATIONS COMPLETED

TURN BACK

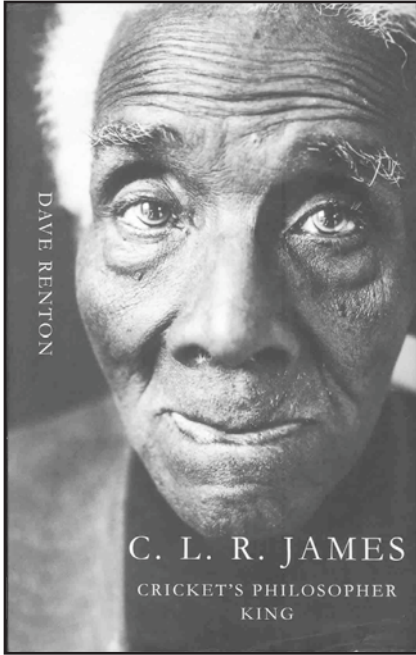
For further information contact
Queensland Trades & Labor Council
or **Union Representative**

John Holland, directed sub-contractors to sack their employees. Workers recruited to scab during the dispute were warned to “turn back because Collinsville is black until negotiations are completed”.

As the 1960s came to a close, the political climate was in turmoil. Across the globe, rebellions and revolutions were being played out and many people believed real progressive political change was inevitable. Here in Queensland, however, the clocks were about to be set back several years as a peanut farmer from Kingaroy became the State’s Premier.

In 1968, the man credited with forging the BWIU into one of Queensland’s most progressive unions, Gerry Dawson retired from the union, handing the reins on to his successor, Tom Chard. The other notable event that occurred in 1968 was the election of Joh Bjelke-Peterson as leader of the State Country Party. In Queensland, progressive politics was about to be turned on its head!

* * * *



Review of

C.L.R. JAMES: Cricket's Philosopher King

By Dave Renton

Haus Books, London, 2007

£16.99, hardback, 202pp.

Dave Renton, Sociology Professor and political activist, has produced an absorbing biography of C.L.R. James, political activist and writer on politics and cricket. Renton's hope of his book is "to persuade Marxists of the joys of cricket, and followers of cricket of the

calibre of James and James' Marxism". James was famous for many writings but two that stand out are *Beyond a Boundary*, regarded in cricket circles as one of the finest books ever written on cricket, and *The Black Jacobins*, a historical account of the 1791 slave revolt in the French colony of St Domingue, now known as Haiti.

James was born in 1901 and died in 1989, so his life spanned most of the 20th century. He was born in Trinidad and was educated in schools modelled on an English private school education. His love of literature and cricket began in these schools. He played cricket with and against famous West Indian cricketers of the time, but his life-long friendship, which to a great extent shaped his later life, was with Learie Constantine, one of the West Indies' greatest cricketers. James played club cricket throughout his 20s but after not achieving higher honours decided that writing was to be his first vocation. In 1932, after spending some time in London, James joined his friend Constantine in the working-class Lancashire town of Nelson. Constantine was playing professional cricket for the local club in the Lancashire League. As James became absorbed in the town's working-class politics, his own politics were slowly moving to the left. He was influenced by a particular piece of working-class solidarity when the town population boycotted cinemas in support of local

cinema workers whose wages had been cut by the owners.

In 1933 he moved to London and became involved in Trotskyite politics. At the same time he obtained a job as cricket correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. James' Trotskyism saw his group join forces with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and James became an advocate of colonial freedom. He attempted to synthesise Pan-Africanism and Trotskyism and saw the support for West Indian cricket as a call for self-government. During this time James was writing plays and books, writing on cricket and researching in the Parisian archives for his famous book, *The Black Jacobins*, published in 1938. Renton says that James was writing 'history from below' twenty years before E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm were doing so. In 1938 James visited the USA speaking on black liberation. In 1939 he visited Mexico and spent a week with Trotsky in the house of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Trotsky left a lasting impression on James, although James did not agree with him on a range of issues. After leaving Mexico, he visited the southern states of the USA where he observed brutal racism. James had decided to return to England in 1939, but through a combination of factors was convinced to stay and head the American Trotskyite movement.

James spent fifteen years in America as a member of the Socialist Workers Party, the main Trotskyite group in

the country. He married and had a child with Constance Webb, a political comrade. Of particular note is that he and a group of others were the first to translate Marx's earlier philosophical writings of the 1840s. Amongst many of his writings during this time were the beginnings of a full biographical study of Shakespeare and a published work, *Notes on Dialectics*, a critical study of Trotsky's critique of Stalinist Russia. In 1952, during the McCarthyite period, he was arrested and interned on Ellis Island with a number of Communists. He was deported in 1953.

During the 1950s and 60s he lived in London and Trinidad. His time in America drew him away from cricket and he returned to writing for the *Manchester Guardian*. He met up with his former student, Eric Williams, who was to become Prime Minister of Trinidad. Constantine returned and joined Williams' Cabinet and James also returned to become the editor of the People's National Movement (PNM) paper. He immersed himself in a struggle to get Frank Worrell to be the first black captain of the West Indies' cricket team in 1960. In 1963 his famous book, *Beyond a Boundary*, was published. During these years he was full of praise for Worrell and Garfield Sobers, who he regarded as the finest batsman he had ever seen. He claimed that Sobers' innings in the First Test in Brisbane in the 1960/61 Test was the finest ever in Test cricket.

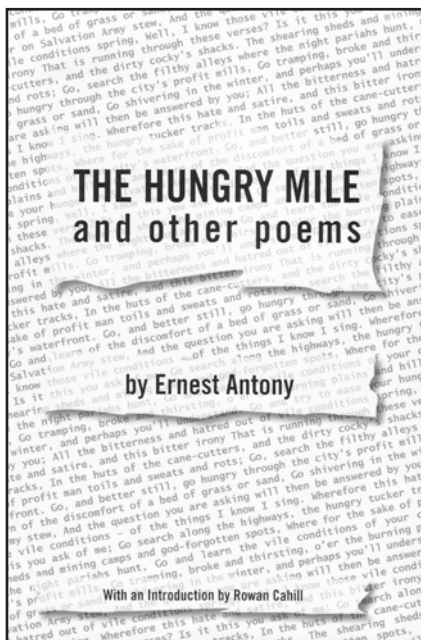
He continued on his political work in the 60s and 70s, supporting African liberation struggles, in particular Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. He spoke at various meetings during the 60s and Tariq Ali describes his eloquent scholarship at the 'Dialectics of Liberation' Conference in London in 1967, juxtaposed to the speech delivered by Stokeley Carmichael, the American black liberation leader. He continued to speak at political rallies and was regarded as the world's leading exponent of 'black Marxism'.

James lived his final years in Brixton, in a room full of books, many on art ranging from Michelangelo to Jackson Pollock. He wrote on cricket and spoke on the radio. One of his last works was a piece on Ian Botham, one of England's finest all-rounders. James died on 31 May 1989 and his body was taken back to Trinidad where he was buried. The Oilfield Workers Trade Union organised the final rites.

This is indeed a fine biography of James. Renton would have had a difficult job in matching the various aspects of James' life — left-wing politics, cricket, writing and his personal relationships. Renton presents James as a most interesting character, a man steeped in English traditions from his school days thus explaining his love for cricket. He also explains his left political involvement, which ranged from American Trotskyism to African liberation. However Renton is brief in his explanations about why he was not

persecuted by the English establishment for his left-wing activism and writings. Maybe it was his scholarship that shielded him from this. If there is a criticism to be found it would be in two areas. There is not much explanation of his political involvement during his fifteen years in the USA. There is discussion about his political writings, but not his activism. Perhaps Renton thought that other biographers, such as Paul Buhle, had covered this territory. The other criticism is the brevity of the discussion on his personal relationships. While there is some discussion of his marriages, there is little about other factors that caused the breakdown of his relationships. There is little said about his American son and what became of his third wife.

Renton is to be congratulated for bringing the complexities of James' life together. I have only learnt about James in the last few years and to tell people that we have a man who was one of the world's leading Trotskyites as well as being one of the finest cricket writers makes people shake their head in disbelief. One thing that Renton has shown is that human beings are not one-dimensional and should not be pigeon-holed. After all, Marx and Engels enjoyed a drink in the odd Manchester or London hotel and were often thrown out for raucous behaviour, but, when one goes to Highgate cemetery to visit Marx's grave, it is not this that immediately springs to mind.



Review of

The Hungry Mile and other poems

By Ernest Antony

With an Introduction by
Rowan Cahill

The Maritime Union of
Australia, Sydney 2008

\$20, paperback, 64pp.

When I worked on the Sydney Waterfront as a painter and docker in the late 1970s, I would occasionally go to jobs at Darling Harbour, where cleaning out the horse stalls on the *Union Rotarua* or fine cleaning the holds of a *Lake* boat might be the order of the day. I was soon made aware that the Darling Harbour wharves had once been part of “The Hungry Mile”, that tract of waterfront territory which for many years from the 1890s and through the Depression had witnessed the worst of working conditions for Sydney’s stevedores, captive to shortages of work and the inequities of the bull system.

Of course, Darling Harbour in the 1970s was a different place, although still a working wharf. The Big House was still across the road, a barn of a pub with early opening hours and the constant, vigorous hum of human activity — a good place to wash down the dust of the day’s toil, tell a few stories and perhaps do a little business. The offices of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) were just up the road and it was, of course, the efforts of WWF members that finally cracked the bull system and restored some form of equality to the system of labour pick up on the Sydney wharves (and elsewhere). It was still a great place with a great sense of history and an oral tradition which made it clear to a young worker that the ghosts of past generations were still with us and that we owed them a lot.

There are no longer any working wharves along the stretch of land that was once called The Hungry Mile, but the history of the place lives on. In part, it lives on in Ernest Antony's wonderful poem *The Hungry Mile* which is the centrepiece of this collection of his poems. With a concise but informative and well-researched introduction by Rowan Cahill (University of Wollongong), the book, as I understand it, contains the entire published work of Antony, a battling working-class poet who tramped The Hungry Mile and many other stretches of Australia in search of work and who developed, as displayed in his art, a thorough distaste for the capitalist classes, the religious establishment, and politicians of any ilk. In that respect, Ernest Antony comes from a great tradition of Australian working-class artists who politicise the life and work of ordinary Australians and the unjust system which condemns them to poverty and, in a word used often in Antony's poems, slavery.

I consider *The Hungry Mile* to be a great poem. It is lyrical in the way that fine Australian working-class poetry often is, and it sings with conviction. It certainly stirred me having read it in full for the first time and it should stir anyone through its description of the brutality of the work and its optimism that the ruling class would ultimately come to grief. I quote but one verse –

*But every stroke of that grim lash
that sears the souls of men,*

*With interest due from years gone
by, shall be paid back again,
To those who drive these wretched
slaves to build the golden pile,
And blood shall blot the memory
out — of Sydney's Hungry Mile.*

The rest of the work is fairly patchy — some good poems and a respectable quantity of classic Australian working-class doggerel, all smattered with lines which will bring a smile to your face and a nod of recognition. *The Slave Pen by the Sea* is a fine poem about Melbourne wharfies, written from experience, and the evils of the bull system. *Arbitration* again asks the question why the “slave class” must go cap in hand to the boss's court to be diddled once again by their masters, aided by the legal advocate “of polished voice and aspect keen”. *My Country* and *Camel Teams* are fine poems about the author's tramping through the Australian landscape. The first is overtly political, the second is not. Each in its own way pays homage to the physical environment. One of my favourites is *A Stiff's Progress*, again about tramping, but with a distinct Queensland flavour. Some gems include -

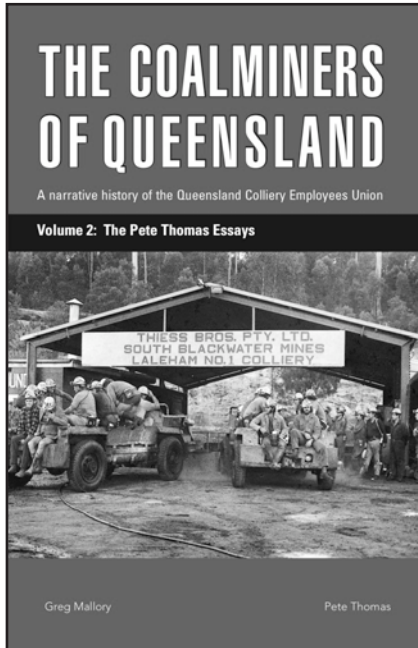
*I've toiled along the waterfront in
half a score of ports,
And sacked myself from 40 jobs of
40 different sorts;
I've camped in 50 hasheries and
boozed in countless pubs,
I've drunk the liquid dynamite that's
brewed in Queensland scrubs.*

Many of Ernest Antony's poems don't scan particularly well but they resonate with his passion and sincerity. I particularly enjoyed *The End of Near, Pirates* and *Of The Things I Know I Sing*. The book should be kept handy and excerpts read from time to time to replenish revolutionary fervour.

The MUA is to be congratulated for publishing (or perhaps republishing) this volume of poems and for contributing to the belated recognition of Ernest Antony as the author of *The Hungry Mile*, a poem which for many years was unattributed, a part of the rich tradition of Australian working-class folklore. I am sure that Ernest Antony did not mind his work being appropriated by others, but it is entirely right that his contribution to our cultural tradition be recognised in full.

Bob Reed

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Review of

**The Coalminers of
Queensland, Volume 2:
A narrative history of
the Queensland Colliery
Employees Union: The
Pete Thomas Essays**

**By Pete Thomas
and Greg Mallory**

CFMEU, Mining & Energy Division
(Queensland District Branch), 2007

\$39.95 softcover; \$49.94 hardback, 476pp.

I am a long-standing admirer of Pete Thomas's writings. My interest in worker co-operatives in particular and co-operatives generally was partly inspired by his 1979 account of the struggle of workers to keep the Nymbodia colliery, near Grafton, open. When he died in 1988, he left unpublished eight manuscripts that were to be a part of a second volume of his history of the Queensland Colliery Employees Union.

Fortunately, the Queensland District Branch Executive of the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division engaged Greg Mallory to bring the papers together and edit them. The book begins with a short essay on the life of Pete Thomas, which highlights his work in the Communist Party, his publications, including his history of the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation, and his term as editor of *Common Cause*, the national journal of the Miners Federation. The book is then divided into three sections: mining communities; campaigns and strikes; and the particular struggle of the union against the notorious US-owned Utah Development Corporation.

The book is a rich source of material and ideas for students, researchers and union activists. While industrial relations' violence in Australia is not on the scale of United States, one instance is recounted where picketers at Collinsville were shot at by scabs in 1967 (p. 22). The failure of mining

companies to provide adequate facilities for miners and their families in new mining locations led to a range of actions by miners and their unions to improve living conditions in new mining towns. At Dysart, concerns about the price of groceries and other everyday needs led labour activists to establish a retail co-operative in 1976 by purchasing an existing privately run supermarket (p. 221). The book also highlights the role of women in employment and community activities. It frequently documents the experiences of women members in employment for the first time at a number of mines and the importance of women's auxiliaries in industrial disputes. During an important strike in 1980 against the increased taxation of subsidised housing by the federal government, wives found a way to use federal social security benefits to finance the strike. While strikers could not claim unemployment benefits, their wives could claim benefits for themselves and support their families (p. 281). The book evoked my memory of a spin campaign in 1977 used by Utah to promote the benefits of the company's activities for Australia. They launched an advertising campaign involving the US-based Australian actor Rod Taylor to tell Australians that 'Utah is backing Australia'. As the book notes, the campaign 'had the soggy impact of wet cement' (p. 374). In the face of public criticism, Utah did not take up the option of rehiring Taylor for another year.

While the book styles itself as a narrative, Pete Thomas's book contributes to broader debates on the important links between the community (p. 51) and the labour movement. Alliances between strikers and local businesses can be important for sustaining and winning a dispute. Miners forged links with their local communities through active involvement in sporting and social clubs. In addition, an appendix lists material that will be of value for researchers on the Queensland coalmining industry. It is held in the Pete Thomas Archive, which is located at the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division Offices in Brisbane.

This an important book for anyone interested in labour history. The Queensland District Branch of the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division and Greg Mallory should be congratulated for putting together Pete Thomas's unpublished essays in a book that we can read, enjoy and learn the lessons of the past.

Greg Patmore

* * * *

CONTRIBUTORS

Dale Lorna Jacobsen is a freelance writer living in the mountains of Maleny in south-east Queensland, prior to which she was an environmental scientist at Griffith University and a luthier (musical instrument maker). Dale is Secretary of the Brisbane Labour History Association. She is currently working on a book on the ARU and the ALP in Queensland during the 1920s.

Greg Mallory is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Employment Relations at Griffith University. His book, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions*, was published in 2005. He has co-authored *The Coalminers of Queensland, Vol 2: The Pete Thomas Essays* with Pete Thomas, published in December 2007. Greg is currently working on a book which is a series of oral histories of some of the leading identities in the Brisbane Rugby League competition. It is to be launched in May 2009. He is also working on conference papers and a book on leadership and its relationship with rank and file activism in left-wing trade unions.

Kevin Bradley is Curator for Oral History and Folklore, and Director of Sound Preservation at the National Library of Australia. He has written on folklore and traditional music and contributed to and edited the book on Australia's pioneer collector: *Folklore collector, photographer, writer,*

performer, John Meredith: a tribute. He worked extensively with Edgar Waters on many projects and field recording trips over a period of 20 years. He has a Diploma of Electrical Engineering and an Honours Degree in Anthropology and History.

Jeff Rickertt is a labour historian and librarian. He is currently researching the life and times of pioneering Brisbane socialist, Ernie Lane, and has recently published a history of Australian telephonists and their trade union, the ATPOA. His proudest boast of late is that his nephew debuted this season in the Queensland Cup for the Redcliffe Dolphins.

Jason Stein is currently the Industrial Relations Manager for the CFMEU Construction and General Division in Queensland. He began his working life at 15 as an Apprentice Boilermaker and spent several years working in the construction industry before commencing work with the CFMEU as an organiser in 1995. He has been the editor of the CFMEU journal, *The Construction Worker*, since 1999 and in 2007 he was commissioned to produce a film history of the CFMEU in Queensland.

Bob Reed currently practices as a barrister in Brisbane, principally in the areas of industrial and employment law, human rights law and criminal

law. From 1977 to 1988 he worked as a painter and docker in the ports of Brisbane and Sydney and from 1995 to 1999 as a research officer for the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union.

Greg Patmore is chair of the discipline of Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney. He is editor of *Labour History* and was President of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History from 1986 to 1998. His research interests include consumer co-operatives, non-union forms of employee representation and a history of Citibank in Australia.

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Noticeboard

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth Branch,
is hosting
The Eleventh National Labour History Conference



8–10 July 2009

The State School Teachers Union of WA [Inc],
150–152 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, WA.

We welcome papers on any topic relevant to labour history. We especially welcome papers from post-graduate students, early career researchers, and activists, and papers with an international perspective.

All intending contributors should send an abstract of not more than 500 words to the Convenor by **30 November 2008**. Papers, maximum length 3,000 words, submitted for formal, academic refereeing must reach us by **31 January 2009**. Presentations will be 20 minutes each with 10 minutes for questions. Contributors wishing to present a display, film, performance or panel discussion should contact us with a brief proposal by 31 December 2008.

Convenor:

Dr Bobbie Oliver, Department of Social Sciences,
Curtin University of Technology,
GPO BOX U1987, PERTH WA 6845.

phone: +61 8 9266 3215 **Fax:** +61 8 9266 3166

Email: bobbie.oliver@curtin.edu.au **Website:** www/asslh.org.au/perth

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Monday 29 September 6:00–8:00pm Paddington Workers Centre, 2 La Trobe Tce, Paddington

Dialogue led by: John Robertson (Secretary, Unions NSW)
& Dr Stephane LeQueux (Griffith University)
Chair: Ron Monaghan (General Secretary, QCU)



For further information contact: Ross Gwyther 33665318
Maggie May 0430 539 653 or visit www.worklife.org.au

FORTHCOMING BLHA EVENTS

October 2008

Date and venue to be advised

Brisbane launch of book by ex-ironworker, CPA official, barrister and wine-grower, Mick Tubbs.

For further information:

contact Greg Mallory: 0407 692 377 gmallory@vtown.com.au.

November 2008

Date and venue to be advised

BLHA AGM — a social occasion, with the group *Absolutely Scandalous* performing political satire following the formal meeting.

For further information:

contact Greg Mallory: 0407 692 377 gmallory@vtown.com.au.

December 2008 – January 2009

Rekindling the Flames of Discontent concerts at Woodford Folk Festival.

For further information:

contact Dale Jacobsen: (07) 5494 4046 sr.music@bigpond.com

BOOKS OF INTEREST

A framework of flesh — By Humphrey McQueen

A framework of flesh is the opening instalment from researching builders' labourers and their unions. This volume takes up matters vital to those workers: their safety, health, amenities, compensation and the class bias of the law. Although the investigations glance back to convict times, the story gathers pace around the 1870s. *A framework of flesh* is divided into four parts.

- Part One** – **Dangers high and low**
- Part Two** – **Dirt, disease, and discontent**
- Part Three** – **Helping hands**
- Part Four** – **“Killing no murder”**

The material will be available to DOWNLOAD FREE in whole or in part by visiting website: www.alphalink.com.au/~loge27 - then to BLF folder and on to OHS folder where it is contained in ten chapters, with supporting files easily accessible by googling Humphrey McQueen.

Trade Unionism in Australia: A History from Flood to Ebb Tide By Tom Bramble

“The history of trade unionism in Australia may well be our true history, with its decent dreams and compliant reality. In rescuing it from the political shadows, Tom Bramble has written an important and fluent reminder that nothing is gained without a fight. An essential read.”

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304pp. Price: \$49.95 (paperback) Available: September 2008

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SUBSCRIBE TO *LABOUR HISTORY* — THE NATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSHL



Labour History (ISSN: 0023 6942) is an internationally recognised journal and part of the prestigious History Co-operative of the University of Illinois. It is published twice a year, in November and May, by the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History of which the Brisbane Labour History Association is the Brisbane branch. Contents, abstracts and prices of back issues are available at the web site www.asslh.org.au or on application to m.walters@econ.usyd.edu.au

Members of the **BLHA** who are not already receiving *Labour History* are encouraged to subscribe. The full rate for individuals is \$50.00; concession rate for students/unwaged is \$35.00. Rates are kept relatively low, as ASSLH is a non-profit organisation. New subscribers to *Labour History* receive the current year's journals and a free back issue of their choice.

The May 2008 issue carried several tributes to two founding members of the Society – Eric Fry and Bob Gollan; there is an article about working people of Australia, Indonesia and India co-operating in 1945 in the boycott of Dutch shipping in Australian waters to support the Indonesian declaration of independence; other articles discuss Angus Cameron's manipulation of anti-Chinese sentiments for personal political advantage; language and labour – the metamorphosis of the 'employer' into the exploitative 'capitalist' during the 1885-86 Melbourne wharf labourer's strike; feminism, Guild Socialism and the Guild Hall Commune in Melbourne, 1917; governments, unions and equal pay, 1949-68. In November 2008, the contents of *Labour History* will feature eight wide-ranging articles of New Zealand/Australian comparative labour history as well as articles on the Cold War; Bankstown Labor Politics in 1955; structural change in the Australian Trade Union movement 1969-85; minimum living standards and the working class surplus; employer militancy and industrial relations in Victoria's meat industry.

The support of the journal by individual subscribers makes it possible for *Labour History* to continue to promote and publish labour history research in Australia and beyond. Please send for the *Guidelines* if you are interested in contributing to the journal. You can subscribe from the secure website – www.asslh.org.au; or by faxing your credit card details to (02) 9371 4729; or by posting a cheque made out to Labour History or credit card details to: **Labour History, Institute Building H03, University of Sydney NSW 2006**

Enquiries: Tel: 02 9351 3786 Fax: 02 9351 4729

Email: Margaret Walters at m.walters@econ.usyd.edu.au

The Brisbane Labour History Association

The Brisbane Labour History Association was formed in 1990 to encourage and promote the study, teaching, research and publication of labour history and the preservation of labour archives. There are no limits on the study of labour history and the diverse membership reflects many different areas of concern.

The BLHA is the Brisbane branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The Association organises seminars, lectures, meetings, conferences and publications on themes of labour history. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations who subscribe to the Association's objectives.

Editorial Policy

The Queensland Journal of Labour History is a journal of labour and social history with a particular emphasis on Queensland history. The history of labour, the classic social movement, is central to our concerns, as are the histories of newer social movements. This journal is committed to the view that history has a social purpose. It publishes articles which, in Ian Turner's words, engage our sympathies, affect present circumstances and suggest answers to present problems. In the words of the Association's slogan, 'The Past is Always with Us'. Material published herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Association or the Editors. The Journal's Editorial Board is the Committee of the BLHA, chaired by the President.

Notes for Contributors

The *Journal* is published in March and September. Articles of up to 4000 words may be accepted; shorter contributions are encouraged. First person accounts of labour history are particularly welcome. Reports on exhibitions, seminars and research projects are sought, as are book reviews and photo essays. Obtain a copy of the Editorial Guidelines before submission.

Contributions should be made in hard copy to the Society's post office box and (if possible) digital format via email, to the Secretary's email address (see inside front cover). Hard copies should be typed, double-spaced, on single-sided A4 bond paper, with a margin of at least 3 cm. Please number the pages. Two (2) copies of each manuscript are required. Please ensure all contact details are given, including phone numbers and an email address.

Please advise if you have ideas for graphics (photographs, maps, drawings, cartoons, etc) that might accompany your article if accepted for publication.

The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

No. 7, September 2008
ISSN 1832-9926

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The Short Eventful Life of the
Southern Queensland General Labourers' Union
Jeff Rickertt

Building Unity:
an abridged history of the Queensland building trades unions
Jason Stein

OBITUARY * BOOK REVIEWS * NOTICEBOARD

