

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

*No. 14
April 2012*



The Brisbane Labour History Association



President: Dr. Greg Mallory
ph: 0407 692 377

Secretary: Jason Stein
ph: 0413 133 587
email: jstein@btqld.org.au

EDITORS: Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther & Bob Russell

Design and Layout and Production:
Ross Gwyther & Beverley Jeppesen

Printed by Uniprint, Griffith University

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To join, contact:

The Secretary
Brisbane Labour History Association
PO Box 5299
West End QLD 4101

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

Front Cover Photo:

Special constables gathered in Brisbane for the General Strike, 1912
405566, State Library of Qld (SLQ) Digital Image collection

&

Brisbane Strikes, 1912 "Clothing Girls forming into line"
112004, SLQ Digital image collection

The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

No. 14, April 2012

ISSN 1832-9926

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Labour History (ISSN: 0023 6942) is an internationally recognised journal 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. The journal is available in both printed form and via the non-profit publisher JSTOR. The association with JSTOR offers individual subscribers a range of advantages, including online access to the full run of *Labour History* from 1962 on.

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Labour History, no. 102, May 2011

The contributors to the thematic section of the forthcoming issue of *Labour History* (May 2012) cover interests in the Labor government of the former child miner Andrew Fisher, and the politics of the pre-World War I Australia more generally, to reconsider the government's role in the process of social, political and cultural change in a turbulent and dynamic period. The opening section of this thematic provides an overview of the origins and issues facing the Fisher Labor government, ranging across the internal processes of the labour movement which underpinned Fisher Labor's political successes, and the external factors – of both political opposition, and the conditions of industrial capitalism – which shaped and constrained that mobilisation. The second section explores the gender politics of the Fisher government and the broader issue of the political mobilisation of Australian women in this era. The final two thematic articles reflect upon the nature of the 'liberal' nation-building project, or so-called 'Australian Settlement', that emerged in the first decade following Federation in 1901. In addition to this thematic, the May issue will include articles on the political rights of Victorian public servants; shipboard protests over health and safety issues in Australian waters (1790-1900); maternity and parental leave in New Zealand; and the ALP's uranium policy (1976-82).

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Enquiries: Tel: 02 9351 3786; Fax: 02 9036 7140
Email: labourhistory@econ.usyd.edu.au

Editorial

Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell

The centenary of the Brisbane General Strike was marked in February with events in King George Square and at the Brisbane Tramways Museum. The Queensland Council of Unions and the Rail Tram Bus Union produced facsimiles of the badge that were the symbol for the battle for freedom of association between the Australian Tramway Employees' Association and Mr Joseph Stillman Badger the General Manager of the Brisbane Tramway Company. Liberal Premier Digby Denham backed Mr Badger.



The general strike was a massive mobilisation and there are many echoes into the present day. The labour movement still has the task of making employers and governments appreciate that freedom of association is a collective human right set out in article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In 1912, the company refused to negotiate with the union, it argued that it wanted to deal directly with its workers and organised an 'employee association'. All this was aptly summarised by Justice Higgins saying, "*I find that the forbidding of the badge is, in the case of Melbourne and Brisbane, merely part of the policy of the Companies to suppress unionism and especially federated unionism*". (Judgment of President in Tramways Badge Case, 27 February 1912).

There are three pieces in this edition about the 1912 General Strike. Errol O'Neill provides a history of the strike, an account of his play *Faces in the Street* first produced in 1983 and how the play was informed by the experiences of the Bjelke-Petersen regime.

Errol O'Neill says that he regrets not having sufficient material to include Emma Miller in the play as he was writing ten years before Pam Young's biography. The piece by Claire Moore centres on this biography 'Proud to Be A Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller'. As Claire says, '*The importance of this book cannot be overstated*'. Furthermore, it deserves to be kept in print.

The third piece about the general strike is somewhat of an experiment. It is a compendium of original materials from the time of the General Strike. Presented without analysis, they are an effort to give a glimpse of the tenor of the times. Much of this material is on line through Picture Queensland, the State Library and the National Library's 'Trove' that includes the Australian Newspaper Digitisation Programme.

Carol Corliss provides an account of 25 years of struggle of her union at a margarine manufacturing site. In Carol's words "*It presents in microcosm the effects of larger changes in Australian employment relations*". The QJLH is uniquely placed to publish articles of this kind and document direct accounts and experiences of work and labour relations. As Jeff Rickertt wrote in an editorial last year, "*Employed, unemployed or retired, white, grey or blue collar, we are keen to hear from you*"

We pay tribute to Fred Thompson and Jack Sherrington. Both were stalwarts of the union movement, Fred in the AMWU and Jack in the BWIU. Both fought in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War. Both were major advocates in the Peace Movement. Both were leaders in the best sense of that overused word, both were the kindest and most courteous of people.

This is the first edition of the journal under the new editorial team of Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell. Our brief biographies are included in the list of contributors. We took over from Dale Jacobsen and Jeff Rickertt who have given matchless service to the Journal and the Society. We acknowledge the grant of life membership to Dale in this issue.

We want the Journal to continue to be about the industrial and political experiences of work and workers. We want writers and readers to explore the past to inform the present. We want scholars to use the journal to share and learn with the wider labour community.

We think that the labour movement is and has been strongest when it has been inclusive and when industrial, political and community activism was part of a shared progressive struggle. We hope that under our stewardship the Journal can both record struggles of the past and study how labour in the present can be most effective in advancing progressive causes.

BLHA

President's Column

Greg Mallory

At the Association's AGM held in December there were a number of changes in the make-up of the Executive. Avalon Kent, Daniel Crute and Jeff Rickertt stood down and Jason Stein resigned from the Secretary position. I would like to thank these members for all their hard work during their respective terms. Each of these members contributed to making the Association a successful organisation. New members elected to the 2012 Executive were Craig Buckley to Secretary, Andrew Dallas to Treasurer, Ross Gwyther and Jason Stein to Executive positions. There was also a change in the Editorial Board. Jeff Rickertt and Dale Jacobsen stood down and have been replaced by Ross Gwyther, Howard Guille and Bob Russell. Both Jeff and Dale have been responsible for 'The Journal' for the past few years and once again I would like to thank them for their outstanding work. Jason Stein also resigned his Federal representative position and Andrew Dallas takes on this position.

Life Membership

The AGM awarded Dale Jacobsen with Life Membership. Dale has worked tirelessly for the Association as Secretary for a number of years as well being Editor of 'The Journal'. It was Dale who got the 'Flames of Discontent' concerts going on behalf of the BLHA firstly at the East Brisbane Bowls Club and then at the Woodford Folk Festival. Congratulations to Dale for all her hard work for the Association.

Oral History Project and Alex Macdonald Lecture

For the past five or so years the Executive has been discussing doing an oral history project of unionists and labour movement activists. Thanks to Danielle Miller we have just had preliminary discussions with the University of Queensland on how we might go about this in partnership with other organisations.

The Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture will be held on May 17th. See page 55 for further details. **Federal Matters**

At the ASSLH AGM held in Sydney in November the Federal Constitution was passed. This is the result of a number of years of hard work by a few individuals. However further problems have been encountered associated

with final incorporation in the ACT. Hopefully this will be sorted out in the next month.

I wish all members a productive year.

Greg Mallory
President

* * * *

In Memoriam

**Jack Sherrington -
1922 - 2011**

**Ross Gwyther and Stephanie
Sherrington February 2012**

Amidst the doom and gloom of the current financial crisis in the capitalist world, there are positive signs of hope. US troops finally withdraw from Iraq amidst an almost universal assessment of the futility and folly of their invasion of that troubled country in 2003. On the streets of cities all around the

world, young people take up a cry of “occupy wall street for the 99%”

Sometimes forgotten when such positive political developments occur is the patient and protracted struggle of those amongst the grass roots of the people who build such movements. Brisbane recently lost one such person, Jack Sherrington, a life-long battler for workers rights and for the peace movement.

Jack grew up in Brisbane during the depression, and as a young man saw service during the second world war

as an engineer in New Guinea. He had a field promotion to corporal that lasted half a day, when he abused the Captain for mistreating the locals! In later years he often said that it was his experience during the war that made him a passionate opponent of war and nuclear weapons, and convinced him of the importance of building a strong and effective peace movement.

Post-war he worked for many years as a carpenter in the City Council, and his strong trade union activism led to a leadership position in the building industry union. He was liked and respected by all his apprentices, but his fierce union activism did not endear him to the bosses.

From union rep to Assistant State Secretary of the then BWIU, Jack fought for fair working conditions and safety. During that time he led the union team which won the landmark case for recognition of mesothelioma as a work-related disease, paving the way for later compensation for so many in the building industry.

During the 1980s Jack took a leading role in PND (People for Nuclear Disarmament) - which rapidly grew to become the largest people's organisation since the Vietnam war. Jack's strength of purpose and quiet dignity was a real source of empowerment to many "first-time activists" in that movement. He made a major contribution to the movement

in his active and consistent links with workers in the union movement - both ensuring that many unions and union members contributed financially to the growth of PND, and taking the message of nuclear disarmament to a broad cross section of workers through their unions. Jack's work in PND in a real sense helped to lay the foundations for the peace movement of the current period, in particular the growth of Just Peace during the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts.

When we look to the future, and to the political struggles for a better and more peaceful world, it is instructive to remember the quote of Isaac Newton - "*we see further only because we stand on the shoulders of giants*". Jack Sherrington was surely one such giant.

* * * *

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•
• *The names of kings and warlords are handed down in manuscripts and in books to after generations, but few ever think of the great and humble army whose sweat and blood are mingled in the concrete and bricks as surely as if the walls were built over a framework of human flesh. They will remain unhonoured and unsung till workers write the histories that are taught in our schools. Charlie Sullivan, Shearer's Union member from 1886*
•
• *quoted in H. McQueen Framework of Flesh P 9*
•
• • • • •

Fred Thompson. Organiser, Activist, Optimist

by Peter Whalley-Thompson

On Fathers Day 2011, Townsville working class activist Fred Thompson died surrounded by three generations of his family.

Born in 1920, Fred grew up in Melbourne as a child of the depression, on local streets full of WW1 Vets and orphans who spoke directly about the effects of the war. He saw first-hand the evictions when families who had no work and no money were thrown into the street by the state police for non payment of rent. Out of these experiences grew his views about peace, social justice and inequality.

He worked first as an apprentice in the metal trade, and through the structures of the union, was encouraged to participate in planning and policy making at every level. By the time he was 18 he was on the state council of the AEU, the forerunner union to the AMWU

In 1941 he joined up when the Japanese bombed Darwin and looked likely to invade, and served in PNG.

In the postwar years, committed to the peace movement, he helped to

organise the World Peace Conference in Melbourne in 1950, and wangled himself a job as driver to the Dean of Canterbury, and controversial figure at the time, who used his position to denounce wars as a tool of capitalism for profit making.

In 1960 he also became a husband and father, meeting his lifelong partner Loma (appropriately enough, at a communist party meeting). Loma was to become one of the leading activists in the women's and peace movements in North Queensland.

As a leader of the union movement, this was the period of Fred's tenure organising in the metal trades, looking after all of North Queensland the Northern Territory and for a time Papua New Guinea as well. He was one of the key union organisers working full time in Mt Isa during the famous 1965-66 dispute.

To win that dispute, activists had to organise not just the job, but a whole town, all the while resisting the intimidation of the company, and the pressure applied by the conservative governments through the Arbitration courts, the police, and remote union officials who would rather do deals with the boss than listen to their own members.

Activism was in Fred Thompson's blood, and he dealt with each challenge in life through research, conversation,

Contemporary Extracts from 1912 Strike Literature

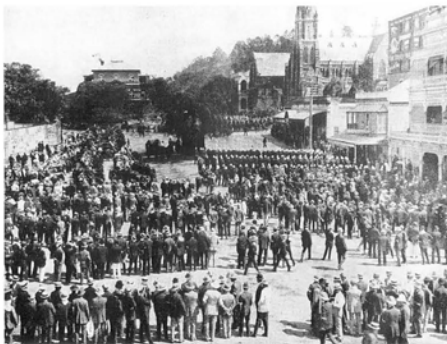
The Brisbane General Strike 1912

A Compendium of Contemporary Material

What seems to have been the first general strike in the English-speaking world took place in Brisbane in 1912. This compendium is from materials of the period of the strike. The selection is idiosyncratic and is neither analytical nor judgemental. Rather it is a flavour of what was a massive mobilisation. As John Battams says, "*Brisbane's population in 1912 was around 150,000, so a rally of 25,000 on the day after the sackings from a population of 150,000 is probably the equivalent of a rally of 250,000 people*"¹.

The political and industrial admixture is very evident in all the materials with very strong statements from both sides. There were many firsts from the first general strike in the English-speaking world to the first grant of preference for unionists by Justice Higgins. And many continuities including the formation of an 'employee association' to undermine the Tramways Union. As Murphy says, the Brisbane Tramway Employees' Association was based on the company's recreation clubs and, indeed, was no more than a recreation club itself.²

UPHEAVAL IN BRISBANE. A GENERAL STRIKE. IN FULL FORCE. UNIONS DECLARE WAR. EMPLOYERS DECIDE TO FIGHT. ALL TRADE STOPPED. INDUSTRY PARALYSED. BRISBANE, Wednesday
The Sydney Morning Herald Thursday 1 February 1912 p 9



Police and special constables in King Georges Square
Source: State Library of Queensland

That this meeting of delegates, representing 43 unions, recognising that the action of the Brisbane Tramways Company, in prohibiting its employees from wearing a badge, a symbol of their unionism, constitutes an attack on the principles of unionism, and the spirit of the statute law. Federal and State, resolves that a general cessation of work shall take place on Tuesday evening, the 30th inst., unless in the meantime a settlement be arrived at. Decision of meeting of Combined Unions Sunday 28th January

¹ Tony Moore, 'Brisbane's great strike remembered, Brisbane Times', January 18, 2012
<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/brisbanes-great-strike-remembered-20120118-1q64v.html>

² Dennis Murphy, *The Tramway and General Strike, 1912* in D.J. Murphy (ed) *The Big Strikes*



Outside Trades Hall, Turbot Street, during the 1912 tram strike
State Library of Queensland

Mr. Badger (Manager of the Tramway Company), when interviewed, said: 'I seek no conference with them. I do not propose to reply to the letter, or communicate with them at all. It is not their business, and has nothing to do with those 43 unions' representatives.'

The Register (Adelaide) Tuesday 30 January 1912

Officers and Members of the Strike Committee.

President J. H. Coyne, M.L.A. (President A.L.F.); Vice-President, P. McLachlan, M.L.A. (President Tramway Union); Secretary, J. A. Moir (Secretary A.L.F. District Council); R. J. Mulvey (Provincial Council, A.L.F.); Assistant Secretary, J. R. Crampton (A.W.A.); J. Gilday (Butchers' Union); P. Creyton (President Federated Timber Workers); R. Thompson (Waterside Workers); D. I. Estrange (Bundamba Miners); E. Hanson (Plumbers); G. Chew (A.S. Engineers); R. McCormack (Carters and Draymen); J. Brown (Bricklayers); D. Kingston (Coal Workers); W. P. Colborne (Typographical); J. McMinn (Storemen and Packers); C. Boulton (Bootmakers); Seaton (Seamen's Union); J. W. Case and W. G. Dearlove (Musicians' Union); J. Sherry and Haulon (Queensland Railway E.A.); A. Young and G. Stephenson (Federated Iron Workers of Australia); J. S. Collings ("Strike Bulletin").

Worker Saturday 3 February 1912

The Police Commissioner, however, saw five hundred Vigilance Officers in red armbands patrolling the streets as an interference with "legitimate" police work, and employers and the state found the situation needed drastic action. (Pam Young, *The Hatpin – a Weapon: Women and the 1912 Brisbane General Strike*, *Hecate* 14.2 1988)

The longest procession ever seen in Brisbane— perhaps in any Australasian city — was then formed and marched from the Trades Hall to the Valley Corner and back, by way of Brunswick, Ann, Queen, and Edward streets. It was a solid phalanx, six to eight deep, and fully two miles in length, and all unionists to a man. The long line was headed by Labour leader Bowman, Federal Labour member Finlayson, Labour members Lennon, Mullan, McLachlan, and Ryland, R. Mulvey (secretary 8-Hour Union), R. Champ (Secretary Tramway Union), W. Mitchell, and Mesdames Miller, Huxham, Bowman, Pegg, Finney, and 300 other ladies, followed by the Tramway banner. Another section, numbering 300 ladies, came later. From start to finish, the procession was as orderly as a military march-past
Worker Saturday 3 February 1912

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 9 :1912. Among the cheering signs of the times is the arrival in Brisbane of a band of bushmen, collected from 150 miles around, to act as volunteers in the work of preserving order. Up to the present, the Brisbane strikers have terrorised the city
Euroa Advertiser
Friday 9 February 1912





Clothing girls forming into line.

Workers from the clothing industry form a line at the 1912 Brisbane strikes, Picture Queensland, State Library
Emma Miller on Black Friday 'led a large contingent of women to Parliament House, braving the batons of foot and mounted police'.
 (Australian dictionary of biography, v. 10, 1986)

Police head with two Beaudesert bushmen leaders during the General Strike

Pictured are: L. W. Handley; centre: Mr. Stoddart.



Picture Queensland, State Library

Mesdames Miller and Huxham addressed the crowd, and then the procession, followed by a number of citizens, returned along George Street towards Queen Street. Foot police, armed with batons, came along in the rear. As the women approached Queen Street, they realised that they were faced with the armed force, as in Albert Street, but they did not waver. They did not have an opportunity to do so, for the command was given and the baton brigade charged them, beating the women barbarously. The police in the rear at about the same time drew their batons and used them freely on the peaceful followers, and then the mounted force, led by Chief Inspector Urquhart, ruthlessly rode rough shod over the people in the thronged thoroughfares of the City. Never before was a more disgraceful display of brute force witnessed. The people were ridden down on the foot-paths by armed police officers. As men, women and boys made to get away they were chased and ridden at, or beaten with batons. Several were injured, and the marvel is that many citizens were not killed.

Worker 3rd February 1912

And so in Queensland a general strike has had to be declared as the only answer to the tyranny of one man! The Unions cannot compromise on this matter. Be the consequences what they may, Labour must fight this business out to the bitterest extremity. Badger stands as the symbol of aggressive Capitalism; the Union is the legalised right of Australian workmen, and the Badge is the symbol of Working-class Unity.
Worker Editorial 3rd February 1912

Appeal to Australasian Unionists.

The tyrannical locking-out of the Brisbane Tramway Union men, for asserting their manhood and rights as free citizens to wear the badge of their union—as other unionists do—has now conclusively proved that the Brotherhood of Labour is no meaningless term in Queensland.

Unionists, with no direct quarrel of their own, have, in commendable sympathy with their locked-out brethren, downed tools in defence of the legalised institution of Unionism.

In this industrial struggle, the unionists of Queensland have made the fight of the Tramway men their fight, and also made it clear that an unprovoked attack on one union must be regarded as an attack on all unions, and will be resented in no unmistakable manner.

Because of this the men and women engaged in this battle claim from the unionists of Australasia that assistance which they have never denied to their brethren in their time of need.

At this stage of the combat, we desire to remind the people generally that the unions in this instance are not the aggressors. It was the despotic and overbearing instructions of a manager of a monopoly, in ordering Australians to remove from their watch-chains an emblem typical of their unity and their country, that brought upon the community the present trouble.

The fight which has, therefore, been forced on the unions is not of their seeking.

The principle that the Combined Unions and the official journal of the Australian Labour Federation is defending, is a sacred one to wage-earners, and we are determined to defend it to the bitter end.

The unorganised workers and the people generally are with us in the present struggle, for they recognise that the success of the unions will protect their children from that degradation which has, unfortunately, disgraced older countries.

The defensive struggle in which the Combined Unions are now engaged is in the interests of humanity, and nobody worthy of the name of man can betray it.

On behalf of the men and women who are now upholding legalised Unionism in this State, the Combined Unions Committee earnestly appeal to all organised unionists, and sympathisers with Labour, in Australasia, for financial assistance.

In addition to this, we have also appealed, by cable, to our brethren throughout the world, with every confidence that our call on them will meet with a generous response.

Brothers and Sisters, our Cause is your Cause. Help us to-day, that we may be able to help you to-morrow.

On behalf of the Combined Unions Committee.

Yours in Unity,

J. HARRY COYNE, President.

JOHN A. MOIR, Secretary.

WHO IS TO RULE? TRADES HALL DICTATORS. SECRET STRIKE COMMITTEE VIOLENCE IN ALBERT SQUARE THE POLICE STONED. ATTEMPTS TO UNHORSE OFFICERS. CROWD DISPERSED WITH BATONS. SPECIAL CONSTABULARY OPERATING. CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY MAINTAINED.

Brisbane Courier Saturday 3 February 1912 p4

The name of the man who gave the order to charge is Cahill. Various Cahill has been many things, but he started out as a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the most notorious body of armed bludgeoners in the world, and he remains in heart a member of the Royal Irish to this day. As he led the Cosack charge on his big horse in Brisbane on Friday last so would he, as a policeman, have cut down the Irish peasantry at Vinegar Hill, and so also would he have bitterly stormed the entrenchments at the Eureka Stockade. And maybe he would not, for at Vinegar Hill the brave patriots had their rifles, at Eureka Peter Lalor's diggers had guns, and when this Omdurman Kitchener of ours headed the foray it was women he was fighting and unarmed men.

The Worker 3 February 1912

UNPRECEDENTED SCENE.

POLICE ACT FIRMLY.

DETERMINED BATON CHARGES.

WOULD-BE RIOTERS INJURED.

ALBERT-SQUARE SENSATIONS.

Yells and angry cries were in many cases followed by blows at the police, and it became necessary to detail a squad of foot constables with batons drawn to assist in the task of clearing the square. Commissioner Cahill in person led the charge in different directions, and when some of the crowd went so far as to aim blows at him too he drew his baton and cleared a way around him. A stirring scene was witnessed as the crowd was forced back against the hoardings which surround the Town Hall site. Many of them stood sullenly against the wall and refused to move until they were actually forced back by the breasts of the horses. Some of

Brisbane Courier Saturday 3 February 1912

Presently a large squad of special constables, a fine athletic looking body selected from the Volunteer Forces, the athletic clubs and officers of the Public Service, were marched into the square, via Adelaide-street, under the command of mounted police officers. The appear-

Brisbane Courier Saturday 3 February 1912

One thing the tramway trouble should bring home to the people of this State with all the force of calamity is the foolishness — the suicidal foolishness— of permitting the means of life to be held as monopolies in the hands of a few persons who use their power for the base purposes of greed.

The Worker 10th February 1912

A horny-handed poet writes: —This is what Monopoly and its mob of satellites would like:

*Rock-a-bye, baby, asleep in your pram, ?
When you grow up, you will work on a tram,
When you are married
Your wife will work, too.
So that the Capitalists shall have nothing to do.*

*Rock-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top,
When you are old your wages will stop.
Then, when you've spent what little you've saved,
Chloroform, baby! and off to the grave !
Worker*

Premier Digby Denham says there are two authorities now administering divided rule in the capital town of Queensland, and this cannot be tolerated. And Digby is right—so far as the two authorities are concerned; but "he" is not one of the two. Badger is the supreme law on the one side. It is this non-naturalised person from America, the plenipotentiary of English capital who really rules in Brisbane to-day. It is Badger moves the puppet Denham, who in turn moves the State Governor, who moves Cahill, who moves the police who with brandished bludgeon or fixed bayonet compel the assembled peaceful citizens to "move on."

The other authority is the federated strength of Queensland industrial unionism goaded into revolt by the arrogant assumption of one man who is backed up by the combined strength of a craven truculent press, which is bounded on to the contest by the combined strength of vested capitalism.

Worker 10 February 1912

The Brisbane tramways at this time were not under municipal control, but were run by a private British company with as manager, J. S. Badger, an American; a man with a deep seated hatred of unionism, unpopularly nicknamed "Boss" Badger or "Bully" Badger.
(Pam Young, The Hatpin -- a Weapon: Women and the 1912 Brisbane General Strike, *Hecate* 14.2 1988)



Coyne, John Harry (1865–1926)

Born 16 January 1865 Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
Died 12 June 1926 Townsville, Queensland, Australia

Religious Influence Presbyterian

*Occupation**

Shearer (1890-1901) Queensland, Australia

Trade union official (1901-1916) Queensland, Australia

Labour party organiser (1902-1916) Queensland, Australia

Labour politician (1908-1923) Queensland, Australia

Member of Lower House (1908-1923) Queensland

(Australian Dictionary of Biography

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/lifefsummary/coyne-john-harry-5802>)



LABOUR WANTS A "PLACE IN THE SUN"
CAPITAL sleepily shocked at Labour's efforts to emerge: "Back to your abyss, Sir! As it is already there is scarcely enough sun to go round!"

Will Dyson 'Labour Wants a Place in the Sun',
Labor Call, 14 August 1913



The Worker 24 Feb 1912

JUDGE HIGGINS: This Court doth, on the application of the Australian Tramway Employees' Association, a party to this plaint, award, restrain the respondents, and their respective agents, managers, officers, and servants, from forbidding any of their employees to wear the badge of the Association

I find that the forbidding of the badge is, in the case of Melbourne and Brisbane, merely part of the policy of the Companies to suppress unionism and especially federated unionism.
Judgment of President of Commonwealth Court of Conciliation & Arbitration in Tramways Badge Case, 27 February 1912



Witness said that after Reah left the company's employ he was appointed organizer for the Australian Tramway Employees' Association. The company employed a conductor named Bedgood to follow Reah about and report his movements. **His Honor**— What were you paying Bedgood for? **Witness**— To keep on Reah's track. Yes, but that is a mere physical fact. What was he to do?— Bedgood was an organizer for the Brisbane Tramway Employees' Union, and he was to keep in touch with Reah to know what he was doing as organizer of the claimant association. **His Honor** He was simply a spy? **Witness**— If you choose to put it that way.

Evidence of Tramways Traffic Supervisor to Court of Arbitration **The Register (Adelaide) Wednesday 14 August 1912**

"The Brisbane Tramway Company has refused even to consider an agreement. It objects to everything. It is an English Company, and its American manager Mr Badger adheres to the time-honoured policy of absolute control over his own employees. The form of the agreement which he used for years, leaves the amount of wages to be paid to the employee from day to day absolutely in his discretion.

The position of the men who tried to leave the association at the instance of the company's officer is indeed unhappy. They had to choose between their billets and their union, between a hungry home and the reproaches of their comrades. Their conditions were "bad, but the loss of employment was worse and they chose to retain their billets.

One, of the usual methods to defeat a real union, I find, is to foster and favour a bogus union, and this course was taken in this case:

The history is painful, even ghastly, in the eyes of those who fancied that there is liberty of association in Australia. There is no doubt that all, or at least nearly all of the men who resigned from the association did so under the: intimidation of the man who could give or withhold employment, give or withhold the means of living, from day to day. Mr Badger knew well that if the employees resented the bad conditions of labour they feared unemployment more, and presumably in his capacity of 'benevolent despot,' he made full and ruthless use of his knowledge, playing off the natural desire of the men to support their wives and children against their efforts to unite for the improvement of their conditions.

Justin Higgins, Decision on Tramways Award August 1912

A LOCK OUT NOT A STRIKE. The Fight for the Badge of Unity and Australian Nationality.

"The Wearin' o' The Badge"

"Now tell us, Mr. Tramwayman, what all the row's about—"
"It means," the answer came, "a wholesale Countess Street count-out;
Because we will not bend the knee, or rat, or cringe, or cadge,
We're told "there is no work for you thro' wearin' of that badge."

Chorus :

For the wearin' of the badge, my boys,
The wearin' of the badge !
We'll best old Badger yet, my boys,
And still retain the badge.

"It looks a little thing, perhaps, this token that we wear,
But manhood, faith, and unity are trebly symbolled there;
The biggest of dictators one day met his Waterloo,
And Badger— who's no Bonaparte — will likewise find that true."

Chorus

"For Brisbane isn't Frisco, and we want no Yankee Boss.
To set up as a dollar god beneath the Southern Cross.
We'll never flinch, or budge an inch, or scab, or smoodge, or cadge,
But beat old Bully Badger yet by wearin' of that badge."

Chorus

Worker 27th January 1912

**THE STRIKE ENDS. NORMAL CONDITIONS IN BRISBANE. OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENT.
GENERAL RELIEF. BRISBANE, Wednesday.**

Sydney Morning Herald Thursday 7 March 1912 p9

A RETROSPECT.

The dispute first arose because the Brisbane tramways manager, Mr. Badger, refused to allow the men to wear their union badges.

The dispute first arose because the Brisbane tramways manager, Mr Badger, refused to allow the men to wear their union badges, basing his action on a regulation of the company which prohibited it. Application was made to the Federal Arbitration Court by the union, of which Brisbane forms a part, for the right, among other things, to wear the badge. While this matter was subjudice, the men, misled by their leaders, struck work. It was not disclosed till the general strike which followed was in full swing that the claim to wear badges was actually in the plaintiff before the Court. The men struck, including the men who took part in the general strike, in the belief that the badge question was not before the Court. The irony of the thing is that the Arbitration Court has now granted the right to wear the union badge, and there is not one man left to wear it.

For the first few days of the general strike mob rule prevailed in the city. Shopkeepers were compelled to close, and their employees were terrorised into ceasing work. Then the Government suddenly was wakened, and it gave the Commissioner of Police (Major Cahill) a free hand. He restored order in one short hour, and upon the Prime Minister refusing to afford military aid in view of further outbreaks organised in a few days a force of special police the efficiency of which surprised military critics. The militiamen were brought in under their own officers and sworn in as special constables. Brisbane for a week or two was to all intents and purposes defended by an armed military force in spite of Mr. Fisher. It was really the Employers' Federation and the Commissioner of Police who fought the Brisbane strike.

The tramway strike began on January 20 and the general strike was declared on January 31. The general strike, after the first two weeks resolved itself into a sectional strike of the men employed in the main arteries of trade. That strike was practically maintained till yesterday. Forty-three unions were engaged in the general strike.

Sydney Morning Herald Thursday 7 March 1912 p9

Notes on Sources

Picture Queensland and Trove

The photographs are from Picture Queensland (<http://pictureqld.siq.qld.gov.au/>) part of the State Library of Queensland. Currently 52,536 images are searchable via "One Search". There are 38 photographs under the heading "Brisbane General Strike 1912". Almost all are of police or specials.

The Official Strike bulletins, put out by the Organising Committee are available on microfilm at the State Library of Queensland (record no 703878).

Text is taken from contemporary newspapers. The National Library now has more than five million pages of newspapers on-line through its Australian Newspapers Digitalisation Programme (<http://www.nla.gov.au/ndp/>) A free online service enables full-text searching of newspaper articles through Trove (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>). The General Strike was reported throughout Australia and use has been made of a number of mainstream newspapers including the Brisbane Courier (as it was then called) and the Sydney Morning Herald.

The cartoons

All the cartoons are taken from the Worker. This was first published in Brisbane in March 1890. By 1912, it was a weekly with a claimed circulation of 30,000 copies under the auspices of the Australian Federation of Labour, the then peak body. It came under the control of the Queensland branch of the AWU, led by Ted Theodore, in 1914.

The cartoons and the message of the Worker were strongly anti-monopolist and anti-capitalist. As Nick Dyrenfurth writes

Central to this radical genre was the villainous 'Mr Fat Man': A depiction of big business or capitalism as a grossly overweight, top-hatted older man, often with spats and morning coat, and occasionally with cigar in hand, 'Fat' made his first Australian appearance in the Bulletin during the mid-1880s³

More academic sources

Academic material on the general strike is limited. The best known is *Dennis Murphy, The Tramway and General Strike, 1912* in D.J.Murphy (ed) *The Big Strikes 1889 – 1965*, University of Queensland Press, 1983. Murphy cites the most complete account of the strike as Glenda Strachan, *"The Brisbane General Strike of 1912"*, (B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1972).

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³ Nick Dyrenfurth, 'Truth and Time Against the World's Wrongs': Montagu Scott, Jim Case and the Lost World of the Brisbane Worker Cartoonists, *Labour History*, Number 99 • November 2010

A HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE BRISBANE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1912

Errol O'Neill

The second of February 1912 is a significant date in the history of Brisbane and of Queensland.

It was a day of infamy, which exemplified some of the most basic elements of the power relationships which have always lain at the very heart of Queensland's public life: repressive conservative governments using the power of the state, on behalf of powerful interests in the private sector, to suppress the voice of critical opposition. And yet this day also exemplified another ironic accompaniment to that public life – a massive and paradoxical innocence. That day, it could be said, was when the workingman's paradise lost its innocence

“Black Friday”, as 2 February 1912 came to be known, is for me one of four such days in Queensland history. Brutal in the fundamental clash of opposing wills between two significant sections of the community, and yet innocent in that, despite the massive forces on display and the huge numbers of people involved, there were, while

several injuries, no deaths. Queensland seems always to be innocent, and yet always losing its innocence. People may have alternative lists of such days but for me, after 1912, there was the violent police riot of St Patrick's day 1948, the civil liberties march of 1967, and the violent police charge on anti-apartheid demonstrators at the Tower Mill in 1971. But they are three other stories – stories which illustrate that movements of protest about particular issues in Queensland have generally been forced to become movements for basic civil liberties in the first instance.

Back in 1912, in this simple paradise, the seeds of conflict were already sown. Not just the class division, which was bitter enough, but the jostling ambitions at Trades Hall and the grand career plans further down in George Street where the few Labour politicians fervently believed it was only a matter of time before the dream of power which had begun with the 1891 shearers' strike could be realised.

The comments I make here are not those of a card-carrying historian. The reason I took an interest in the events of 1912 was that I was commissioned to write a play¹ in the early 1980s by La Boite and the Warana Festival, and this was the subject I was most interested in at the time, after six years work writing and producing political satire for the Popular Theatre Troupe. My comments are based on the research I did for that play, and I'll also quote a few passages

from original documents, some of which found their way into the play.

In the early 1980s I approached the task of writing the play with certain objectives, and I did it with a certain attitude to living in Queensland under the iron rule of the then premier, the cunningly inarticulate and corrupt Johannes Bjelke-Petersen.

The reason the 1912 strike stayed alive in our cultural and political memory was probably the utter brutality of the police and special constables, in the face of the relatively peaceful industrial purpose and demeanour of the strikers. The event is sometimes referred to as the “Tramway strike of 1912”. It was of course no such thing. It was a lockout of tramway employees, which resulted in 43 other unions coming out in sympathy. It soon escalated into a general strike, the first in Australian history.

And the reason for the original lockout? The wearing of union badges while on duty. Joseph Badger was the manager of the Brisbane Tramway company. An American who had come to Brisbane to oversee the electrification of the previously horse-drawn tramways in the late 1890s, he had become the boss of the company by 1912. Australia was well used to suppressing the legitimate desires of the organised workers, but here it was generally government that did the suppressing. In the American tradition, which Badger brought with

him, employers took the initiative and government simply fell in line and gave support. This was certainly the pattern in the 1912 dispute. In the early 1980s, at the height of Bjelke-Petersen’s illegitimate rule, while I was doing the research and writing the play, this was the strongest parallel which affected me. Another strong element was that of Brisbane’s population of 150,000 in 1912, there were 15,000 on strike. It seemed remarkable that ten percent of a city’s population would cease work on the principle of the right to belong to a union and to publicly identify as union members.

Background

The employees of the Brisbane Tramway Company had organised themselves into a union (a branch of the national tramways union), but they encountered opposition from Joseph Badger, who had created his own company “union” which he expected the company’s motormen and conductors to join. No self-respecting worker, then as now, would have contemplated joining a bosses’ union, so things shaped up into a basic battle for the right of workers to organise and negotiate on their own behalf with their employers. Badger knew that to protect the growing profitability of the tramway company he would have to crush the trammies’ union before they started demanding higher wages and better conditions, and after several skirmishes, he forbade the wearing of

union badges while driving trams or collecting fares.

Naturally the unionists retaliated and decided to put their badges on, in defiance, at an agreed time on Thursday, the 18th of January 1912. They were promptly sacked – locked out. Other unions, who all knew this trouble was brewing, went out in sympathy over the following days and on the 28th of January Harry Coyne, MLA, the president of the Combined Unions Committee of the Trades and Labour Council, called for a general cessation of work. To get to this position, there were a great many internal debates and divisions within the labour movement, but after this point, near complete solidarity – at least in the public gaze.

Using The Research To Create Theatre

One of the most helpful tools I found while researching was a book by Mary Hall², a travelling Englishwoman who was present in Brisbane during the general strike. I naturally wrote her into the play, as she provided a valuable contrast. Her old-world, British-Empire-centred view of how workers should conduct themselves in order to keep society functioning properly, contrasted with Joseph Badger's new world American view, the voice of the future. His was the world of unrestrained capitalism, defended by company goons. We've seen these gatekeepers more recently,

in balaclavas, accompanied by Rottweilers.

Joseph Badger did in fact keep the trams running, although not as fully as before the strike. Then, as now, there were blacklegs enough to rally to his side, although a great number of Brisbane people not directly involved in the strike refused to ride on the trams out of respect for the industrial claims of the trammies, thereby depriving Badger of at least some of the profitability he sought to defend.

Mary Hall, when writing her memoir a few years after the general strike, said:

Queensland, I think, savours rather more of England, perhaps, than the other States. At any rate, I had much the same feeling on my arrival as I experienced in Natal, where I seemed to breathe the sentiment of England the moment I landed...

She went on

...Australia in general and Queensland in particular, is looked upon as, and is called, the workingman's paradise but alas even here the maggot is at the core and eating its way through the luscious fruit. The seeds of discontent are easy to sow but the green weed is not so easily eradicated.

In the play, Harry Coyne presented to a general meeting the resolution which began the general strike:

“The Combined Unions Committee of Brisbane and district at a meeting on the twenty-eighth of January, 1912, resolved: “That this meeting of delegates, representing 43 unions, recognising that the action of the Brisbane Tramway Company in prohibiting its employees from wearing a badge, the symbol of their unionism, constitutes an attack on the principles of unionism and on the spirit of the statute law, federal and state, agrees that a general cessation of work take place on Tuesday the thirtieth of January at 6 p.m. unless in the meantime a satisfactory settlement be arrived at.” And further, “that this resolution be forwarded at once to the Brisbane Tramway Company””.

But Badger was pretty clever. He had obviously been in touch with tramway company managements in other states, because the same issue of union badges turned up very soon in the Federal Arbitration Court, which dealt with similar situations in Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne. The necessity for unions to federate was created by such employer collusion. It became a common pattern during the 20th century.

Nevertheless, when Harry Coyne moved this motion it was endorsed overwhelmingly by union members and thus began the general strike.

Mary Hall commented:

The opening scenes were peaceful enough. A procession was organised, and paraded the streets in the morning. Some of the business houses were open, but there was not much work done. As the day wore on, some of the thousands of idle men and boys were bound to get into mischief and by evening events had taken a more disquieting turn. Those who remained at their posts were jeered at and called ‘scabs’. Everywhere a good deal of horse-play was indulged in. On the second day, the procession waxed more aggressive, all the shops were closed, in fact trade and business of any kind was at a standstill. The crowds who filled the streets wore the red ribbon of the Socialist Party... and the hooligan element was not absent.

The strikers and their sympathisers wore red ribbons on their arms as a sign of solidarity, but when Mary Hall refers to the “Socialist Party” she was being less than exact. There was at that time no such organised party. She may have meant the Labour Party, of course. Which would show how the fear of opposition to the established order caused even such level headed Englishwomen to exaggerate wildly.

Premier Digby Denham’s response to the calling of the general strike was swift and severe. He called in mounted

bushmen from country Queensland, appointed special constables in Brisbane itself, and ensured that the normal police attended demonstrations with not only their rifles, but often with fixed bayonets. It was not uncommon to see ranks of special constables with rifles and fixed bayonets as well.

Running the Strike

One of the most interesting things about the strike was the level of organisation displayed by the Combined Unions Committee. They organised relief parcels, they issued food coupons, they established vigilante officers to monitor and in some cases disrupt or prevent blackleg activity. As all the blue collar trades and occupations were out, the Vigilance Committee members swooped threateningly on anyone pushing a trolley or loading a wagon. Naturally enough, the motormen and conductors of any passing tram were routinely jeered at by those walking along the route.

The Combined Unions Committee also established an Official Strike Bulletin which was printed daily for the five weeks that the general strike lasted. This bulletin became an integral part of the communications network for the 15,000 strikers and eventually became a fully fledged newspaper, the Daily Standard, which lasted for many years after the strike. It's interesting to note the comment made about this

newspaper's history by Ernie Lane in his 1939 memoir, *Dawn to Dusk*:

During the general strike in 1912 the urgent necessity of a daily Labour newspaper, owned and controlled by the workers, was realised as never before. A daily strike bulletin was issued and with this foundation, a few months later, the "Daily Standard" was inaugurated in the face of almost insuperable obstacles. Although the paper was made possible by private shareholders, the majority of the shares were taken up by the unions... It is difficult for those who only knew the "Standard" in the later years of its existence, when it first came under the baleful editorship and subsequent managership of "Alick" Robertson, to visualise the fine work carried on by that paper in its unswerving advocacy of the Labour cause. It is also interesting to note that the A.W.U. was indifferent in its support of the "Standard", and it was only very begrudgingly and practically under duress that a modest number of shares were taken up. It was the usual A.W.U. policy of declining to be a minor partner in any working class movement where other unions had a predominating control. Many years later the A.W.U. obtained a majority of the shares and thus completely dominated the "Standard" and its policy, resulting in its ultimate extinction.³

Black Friday

During the general strike there were daily gatherings and marches of the striking unionists, radiating out of Trades Hall in Turbot Street⁴. But then, as now, the press, the government, and the big end of town were the natural opposition. There were several clashes, the most notorious being on Friday 2 February in Market Square – Black Friday (also called Baton Friday). This was essentially a police riot, not unlike the police riots we witnessed several times during the Bjelke-Petersen era. The only difference being that in the Bjelke days the cops didn't have bayonets with which to threaten and mete out punishment, only their boots.

Mary Hall observed the events of Black Friday:

The appearance of a squad of special constables, fine athletic-looking men, selected from the Volunteer Forces and officers of the Public Service, caused a hostile demonstration. Some ugly rushes were made, and men and women surged across the roadway, shouting invectives against the 'specials' and throwing stones at them. Women stabbed the horses and officers' legs with their hatpins, and the locality became a regular pandemonium. Portions of the crowd were sullen and difficult to treat with, and now and then a very serious affray was only narrowly averted by

the determined attitude and well-organised arm of the law. It was imperative that the police should break up the crowds and keep the public moving, but happily the rifles and bayonets were efficacious only as a show of force, although batons were pretty freely used.

...In an hour from the time the command was given to clear the streets, comparative order was established. Only an hour! But an hour pregnant with tragic possibilities. A little less restraint on the part of a constable, a heavier blow from either side than was intended, a little more resistance to the inevitable, a stray shot such as happened the previous day... who can say what the outcome might have been?

Some of her phrases are borrowed directly from the news reports of the Brisbane Courier, which makes one wonder about how close Mary Hall got to the action. And mention of hatpins brings up the subject of Emma Miller, of course.

Emma Miller had been active organising unions for women workers and campaigns for women's suffrage over the previous quarter of a century. On Black Friday she led a women's march to parliament house, and upon their attempting to return to Market Square, the procession was surrounded by mounted police in George Street,

outside Lennon's Hotel. Presumably this was an attempt to prevent the women swelling the crowd back in Market Square. There was a melee, and at one point, the Police Commissioner himself, Major Cahill, had Emma Miller hemmed in against a wall in George Street, outside Lennon's Hotel (coincidentally the place where Mary Hall was staying while in Brisbane). In an attempt to defend herself she drew her hatpin, and used it. The Major's horse was repulsed, it reared, and threw the Commissioner off. Unfortunately, this was the main reason why Emma Miller lived on in memory. But she did a lot more than that, of course, and was an indefatigable working class representative whose legacy has never been adequately examined or written about. Pam Young's biography of her⁵ is the most comprehensive study I've come across. But there is still a need for further investigative research on this remarkable woman.

Weeks of Hard Slog

After the strikers were routed on Black Friday, there were still four weeks of the strike to go. Things looked bleak.

Mary Hall observed:

The residents of the city were living more or less on a smouldering volcano which might erupt at any moment. Trade at the port was paralysed. Perishable goods were rotting for want of labour

to clear them and the whole industry of the town was at a standstill. The strikers were said to be contemplating cutting off the electric light, plunging the city into total darkness... not a pleasant condition to picture with one section of the community on the verge of revolution! Food supplies were running short and, in this respect, it was the very class responsible for making the trouble that felt the pinch most keenly.

Indeed, according to Denis Murphy, in his biographical essay on Denham in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, the besieged premier actually thought he was dealing with the beginnings of a revolution:

During the strike Denham received many telegrams praising his efforts to maintain law and order; but he was widely criticised for the violence of the police and special constables towards the strikers. It is apparent that he genuinely feared a revolution. When the Commonwealth rejected his request to supply troops to put down the strike, Denham discussed with the governor, Sir William MacGregor, the landing of troops from a German warship then off the Queensland coast, to assist in maintaining law and order.⁶

Divisions on the Left

As with any social or political upheaval, the general strike was full of conflicting ideologies. The class war was certainly there – the basic battle for recognition of trade unions was the major impetus for the strike. But for me, the most interesting dramatic element was the tension between different viewpoints in the labour camp. Previously I had conceived of labour history naively, thinking the class war was the only war. But it seemed the play would be more interesting if it also examined the divisions on the left. There was much evidence from the press of the time that there was division on the left. Harry Coyne and others tried to contain the frustrations of the militants but there were endless arguments about tactics, strategy and long term goals.

The difference in the social and political atmosphere between then and now is significant. In 1912 there had not yet been a full-term Labour government in Queensland. The Russian Revolution had not occurred and so there was no practical example of a socialist state, well-functioning or otherwise. And the First World War, where we tragically learned so much about national sovereignty and the foolishness of fighting other people's battles, was still a gleam in the eye of the European profiteers.

Translating The History Into Dramatic Characters

I tried to select the historical characters which gave some of this contemporary flavour, and I also created fictional characters who were composites of many of these conflicting aspirations. The historical characters were all more or less on record so all I had to do was present them as they were. But in order to create the fictional characters I consciously tried to present people who were not just individuals but who also represented the competing social forces and political theories of the time.

Further, the people to whom the play would be presented were the inhabitants of a city whose social and political fabric was built on such incidents as these. I didn't know much about the strike until I stumbled across it, so to speak, and I presumed that such a story, if told well enough in a dramatic structure, would be interesting and informative to other Brisbane citizens. Working class history deserves more attention, particularly in the performing arts.

The Historical Characters and Their Significance

I've already outlined the essential characteristics of Mary Hall. I naturally chose her as the embodiment of the establishment. The comments she made herself provided an attitude

suit to dramatic purposes far better than anything I could have made up.

Joseph Badger the American boss of the tramway company was an obvious antagonist to choose, and while he remained a minor character in the play, his real life actions and statements were the catalyst for the entire episode. And because such people, and their supporters in government, are generally the ones who create situations to which the working class are forced to respond, I felt that simply to create a play which reinforced oft-told stories of class antagonism would not provide a good enough analysis to be helpful. The more I read, the more I found appeal in the idea of concentrating most of my efforts on exploring the arguments within the labour ranks.

Emma Miller herself, I'm ashamed to admit, I excluded from this play, fearing that a 75 year old woman with her determination (and wearing the ridiculous fashions of the day, particularly the hat) would be hard to portray on stage with the kind of dignity she deserved, knowing, or at least thinking that I knew, the available theatrical talent at that time. Also, I didn't have much information about her beyond stories about the hatpin incident, and it was to be almost ten years before Pam Young's biography of her appeared. If I ever re-write this play, I'll be sure to make amends.

Harry Coyne had been in the 1891 and 1894 shearers' strikes and was now in the Queensland parliament as the member for the western Queensland seat of Warrego. He embodied the traditional dilemma of labour politicians – trying to match their original socialist beliefs with the personal pursuit of a political career. Before being elected to Parliament he was a fencer, slab-splitter, drover, shearer, rouseabout, woolpresser, miner, station-hand, and sawmill. He exemplifies the orthodox view of the time that “the political wing of the labour movement should be based on sound union organisation.”⁷

Premier Digby Frank Denham, essentially a nineteenth century liberal, was a fairly typical conservative politician of the time. “Business, not politics, was his primary interest. He was one of a group of leading Brisbane businessmen who from 1902 to 1915 enjoyed their last period of political influence in a state dominated by rural interests.”⁸

Major William Geoffrey Cahill was an Irish immigrant. A disciplinarian, he had been Police Commissioner for seven years. A few years after the strike he was to oppose the formation of a police union which he considered would be a breach of good order and discipline. “Cahill was threatened that a future Labour administration would give him four minutes to resign, but he was complimented by the government

and its supporters. On the election of the T. J. Ryan Labour ministry in 1915, Cahill retained office, with his erstwhile opponent David Bowman, one of the 1912 strike leaders, as his ministerial head.”⁹ I could see in this historical character some of the elements which have traditionally characterised the way the Queensland police force serves the government of the day. Only a few years after the play was first produced, the Fitzgerald inquiry was to vividly illustrate some of these dark traditions

Reverend J.S. Pollock was an articulate socialist as well as a Presbyterian minister – an unusual mix of radicalism and Christianity which provided the play with an opportunity to contrast the church with the labour movement. Pollock was the link between the two, an ecumenist before his time, who demonstrates in his debate with the fictional Monsignor the regressive, pro-employer nature of the Catholic Church’s social teaching of the time and the tendency of the non-conformists to take social and political responsibility far more seriously. I represented Reverend Pollock fairly accurately, I think, as he was quite prominent at the time and there were many news reports about him and the trouble he caused among his conservative Sherwood parish.

Religion and Politics

Because there was such a strong representation of Catholics among the working class, I thought it would add to the drama if we dealt with the religious attitudes of the time. I constructed a fictional scene in which Pollock tries to get an interview with the Archbishop in order to widen support for the strikers, and is fobbed off with the (fictional) Monsignor, the Archbishop’s secretary, whose arguments in the play were my interpretation of the current teaching of the church, based on the 1891 encyclical letter of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, specifically addressing the subject of Capital and Labour.

The Monsignor tells Pollock:

The great mistake is to take up with the notion that class is naturally hostile to class, that the wealthy and the working man are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. It is ordained by nature that these two classes should dwell in harmony and agreement... Each needs the other. Capital cannot do without Labour, nor Labour without Capital... I’m sorry, Reverend Pollock, but I can do no more than to state the Church’s position. The objectives of unionism are not in question. What is in question is a theory which urges the attainment of those objectives by class warfare. The Church cannot condone such conflict, cannot

condone the division of society and the destruction of peace and good order.

The Fictional Characters

The fictional characters Marion Regan and Paddy Duffner, and all the strikers, policemen, specials, citizens and others, were created to allow a broad view of the Brisbane of that time. Many of the people who had swelled Brisbane's population had come to the city looking for opportunities for themselves and their children which the bush could not provide. The city was growing, trade and commerce were flourishing, industries were expanding. Although Brisbane and Queensland have never had the amount of secondary industry the other eastern mainland states have had, the capital was a bustling, expanding metropolis whose wealth rested squarely on the rural industries.

The failure of William Lane's expedition to Paraguay in the 1890s had sent back to Australian political life a scattering of highly motivated people, such as Marion, who had learned the value of maintaining a grand social vision, even though they constantly met with frustration in the world of practical politics.

For me, this tension between the pragmatic political ambitions of the Labour party and the idealism of the socialist principles that gave rise to the

labour movement lay at the core of the play.

There was one crucial scene in which I tried to encapsulate this tension. It was an argument between Harry Coyne the historical politician, and the fictional Marion Regan (a sort of composite character based on a mixture of Mary Gilmore and Emma Miller) and Paddy Duffner, an itinerant shearer and untutored militant concerned more with a response to injustice than the niceties of gaining political power. It was the scene I wrote first. I then built the rest of the play around it. Here's an extract (Scene 35, p 89):

COYNE Politics is a dirty business, like it or not. When the election's over, we're still going to need Badger and people like him. Strange bedfellows I know, but it's a necessary evil. If we represent too much of a threat to the employers, even some of the workers will be put off.

MARION But there's a fundamental difference between the interests of capital and the interests of the working class...

COYNE The Labour Party has to present an image of competence... the ability to run the state efficiently. How do you think the Liberals won the last election?



MARION (Dale Murison) COYNE (Matt Foley) (from the 1983 production at La Boîte Theatre)

MARION So, all we provide is an alternative management of capitalism?

DUFFNER All right, what happens next year when Labour's in power? What if Badger sacks everyone who took part in the strike? You'd probably send the bloody wallopers in to drive the trams. You'll be a strike breaker, just like Denham.

COYNE A Labour government would never use the police against strikers.

DUFFNER Bullshit.

COYNE Mind your language, there's a lady present.

MARION Don't change the subject, Harry... You were on the streets on Black Friday. You saw

what the police did under Denham's orders. That's "running the state efficiently"!

COYNE Wasn't necessarily Denham's orders. Cahill took the law into his own hands. And the police didn't want to be there. They were as scared as we were.

MARION That's not what you said a week ago.

COYNE We're getting off the point.

DUFFNER Which is?

COYNE Getting Labour into office... Look, the strike is probably going to fail. It's winding down. There were telegrams from Townsville and Rockhampton this morning. It looks like most of the north is going back...

(silence. Marion and Duffner are momentarily deflated)

But let's look on the bright side. We're now in a position to command a healthy majority. Every time I speak I remind people to get on the rolls. We represent ten percent of the population directly and beyond that we've got a lot of sympathy from the non-union workers. Labour's getting more and more support in the cities and towns up the coast. Our only hope

now is to put all our energies into winning the election. And winning it fairly.

DUFFNER What's that supposed to mean?

COYNE It means everybody in our ranks has to give up these ideas about sabotage and confrontation. It's undermining the party's chances. We've to play fair in order to win.

MARION What's 'fair'? Is the tramway company fair when it keeps the men's wages down to subsistence level while they're happily raking in bigger and bigger profits every year...

DUFFNER And sending them to London...

MARION ...while it won't even open up new lines to the outer suburbs without government subsidy? Is Cahill being fair when he rides his horse into a crowd of women and children and cracks them over the head with his baton? Is Denham being fair when he gets three thousand specials in and gives them guns to shoot us in the streets? It's not up to us to stop the confrontation. It's already there. It's *their* weapon, not ours

(a silence, full of tension)

COYNE *(throwing his arms up in a gesture of frustration)* Oh, I don't know. I don't know... We'll take this up again later, I've got to get to a meeting.

(Coyne leaves. Marion and Duffner look at each other for a moment)

DUFFNER I think I'll take a walk.

(Marion returns to her work at the table)

Justice Delayed

The strike did in fact fail, although the Federal Arbitration Court ruled, four weeks after the strike had started, that Badger had no legally valid authority to prevent his employees from wearing their union badges in the first place. The President of the Federal Arbitration Court, Mr Justice Higgins, declared:

Mr Badger has a quaint theory that he has a common law right to tell an employee what he should wear. Apart from the power given to make regulations, I know of no such common law right. A servant has to obey lawful commands, not all commands. The servant does not commit a breach of duty if he refuses to attend a particular Church, or wear a certain maker's ringlets. The common law right of an employee is a right to wear what he chooses in matters not affecting

his work. Prima facie, a man may wear what he likes, so long as he does not offend against decency, and the burden lies on the employer to show the contrary... As to the validity of the regulations, I have seen the Queensland Tramways Act of 1882, the memorandum and articles of association of the Brisbane (Tramway) Company, the power of attorney from the company to Mr McIlwraith, and the subsequent power to Mr Badger. Mr Badger has power to do whatever Mr McIlwraith had power to do, but it is by no means clear to me that the Act or the articles of association enable the company to transfer its power under the Act to make by-laws. Assuming, however, that it could transfer its power, the notice issued by Mr Badger on May 3, 1911, as it was not approved by the Governor in Council, or published in the "Gazette", was, in my opinion, unauthorised and invalid.¹⁰

This judgment was stunning in its simplicity and its fairness. If such recourse to logical and legal argument could have been had a month earlier, an enormous amount of needless suffering and aggression could have been avoided. But as in so many other epic struggles for industrial justice, the justification came too late and, in the oft-repeated pattern of labour history, the boss had got away with murder in the meantime.

Eventually, worn down by police repression, dwindling morale, and lack of funds, the workers reluctantly agreed to call off the general strike. But things had changed somewhat in the attitudes of Brisbane's population, even though country Queensland's attitudes remained the same.

Changes Comes Slowly

Let's give the last word to Mary Hall. This is how she summed it up in the play:

No thoughtful person could imagine for a moment that the wearing or not wearing of a small metal badge was the root of the trouble. No, it lay much deeper and was far more significant than that...

I was happy nonetheless to receive a report that in the elections held immediately after the general strike, the people of Queensland showed great confidence in Premier Denham's strong leadership by re-electing his Liberal government. However, the rot had set in. In that election, Mr Denham lost six seats in metropolitan Brisbane to the Labour Party. In the election three years later, in 1915, the whole of Queensland went this way, and the socialists came to power.

If only.

Notes

- 1 O'Neill, Errol *Faces in the Street* Brisbane, Playlab Press, 1993. The first production of this play took place at La Boite Theatre in September 1983. An earlier play about the Brisbane general strike (*Billets or Badges*) was written by Jim Crawford in 1959, performances of which are listed in Connie Healy's book *Defiance – political theatre in Brisbane 1930-1962*, Boombana Publications, 2000 (p240).
- 2 Hall, Mary *A Woman in the Antipodes and the Far East* London, Methuen, 1914.
- 3 Lane, E. H. *Dawn to Dusk – reminiscences of a rebel* Brisbane, William Brooks, 1939, p143.
- 4 Trades Hall occupied a site in Turbot Street midway between Albert St and Edward St from 1891 until its demolition in the 1980s (the SGIO theatre stood on the same site from 1969 until its recent demolition). In April 1891, while the shearers' strike was continuing in western Queensland, the foundation stone of the Trades Hall in Turbot Street was laid by Sir Charles Lilley, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Henry Lawson, then in Brisbane writing for William Lane's Boomerang, refers to this occasion in his poem "Too Old to Rat".
- 5 Young, Pam *Proud to be a Rebel – The life and times of Emma Miller* Brisbane, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1991.
- 6 Murphy, D.J. "Digby Frank Denham 1859-1944" in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 8 MUP 1981.
- 7 See Armstrong, J.B. "John Harry Coyne 1865-1926" in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 8 MUP 1981.

- 8 See Murphy, D.J. "Digby Frank Denham 1859-1944" in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 8 MUP 1981.
- 9 Wilson, Paul D. "William Geoffrey Cahill 1854-1931" in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 7 MUP 1979.
- 10 Brisbane Courier, Weds 28 February, 1912, p5.

* * * *

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 .
 . *General Strike* .
 .
 . *General strike! General strike!* .
 .
 . *That's the only 'general' working* .
 . *people like.* .
 .
 . *We may not be an army but the* .
 . *enemy's in our sight* .
 .
 . *And the way to bring them down is* .
 . *general strike.* .
 .
 . *A Song by Smokey Dymny* .
 .

Queensland Journal of Labour History: *Emma Miller and the Brisbane General Strike of 1912*

Claire Moore

It is a century since the Brisbane General Strike occurred in Market Square, now known as King George Square. On February 2 1912 forty-three unions gathered in an unprecedented show of solidarity in order to defend the right of unionists to wear their union badges to work. The events that followed gave birth to a legend in Queensland that spread internationally, the legend of Emma Miller. Emma Miller, also known as Mother Miller, the Mother of Labor was on the frontline of the action that day and her exploits became the subject of one of the most significant works of Australian Political History 'Proud to Be A Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller' by Pam Young. This was a formative lesson for me, in both history and solidarity. The importance of this book cannot be overstated. Emma Miller's story is one that ensures every time it has been put into print that it is also sold out.

Before the General Strike there had been trouble in Brisbane between the Tram Union and their employer for several years. This trouble took a dramatic turn when in late January 1912

workers from the Tram Union were turned away from their employment. Brisbane was now without public transport, a serious disruption to the city even then. Subsequently from January 18 to February 2 industrial action occupied the streets of Brisbane that included both unionists and the wider community.

A special union badge was created so that people across the area could identify the strikers who could explain the reasons for their action. The badge bore the insignia of the rail, tram and bus union, the forerunner of the current union the RTBU. In addition there were Red Ribbons made available for everyone in the community to identify their solidarity with their fellow workers.

The Premier of Queensland wrote to the Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher seeking support. Fisher opposed the Queensland Government's efforts to get police specials onto the streets but neither did he provide military support to the unionists. However, he did make a personal donation to the unionists in support of their action.

There were twenty thousand people on the streets of Brisbane on February 2 which works out to about one in five of the population. At the forefront of this industrial action were women workers in particular women of the clothing workers' union. Emma Miller led a group of between three and six

hundred women, depending on which newspaper you believed, to Parliament House in an attempt to speak to the Premier of the day. The women were told they couldn't speak to the premier and were turned away. They returned along George Street. While marching down George Street the women were subject to a direct charge by mounted police

Emma Miller was dressed in her Sunday best. She was seventy three years old and four feet 11 and half inches tall. She had already walked several kilometres just to get to the march. In response to the charge by the mounted police Emma pulled her hat pin from her Edwardian hat and stuck the horse of the Police Commissioner.

I will always believe Emma was attempting to strike the policemen on the horse. There were some who say she was aiming for the horse.

The horse reared and the Police Commissioner was thrown off. The legend of the Emma Miller hat pin and this small woman defending the rights of women workers was born.

We in the Queensland Trade Unions have maintained this legend through the Emma Miller Hat Pin Awards which are given to women unionists every year for the last fifteen years in tribute to their activities in the unions. During the Centenary of the Brisbane General Strike celebrations held in

February this year more than thirty of the almost hundred women who have received Emma Miller Hat Pin Awards were in attendance.

These women were there to prove that women unionists and workers who were on the streets of Brisbane in 1912 would be joined by the women of the unions today especially if there was a need to fight for freedom and the rights of people.

Emma Miller had a long experience of activism. She was a proud suffragist and worked tirelessly to ensure that women had the vote. Her work in the union movement continued and she was involved in an extraordinary number of cases about equal rights and pay and protecting the conditions of women workers. Emma took up the fight for peace and became a well known peace activist during the First World War. Emma never accepted injustice and where she found it she would stand up and make sure the people were armed with the facts and the power and inspiration to take action.

One of the topics discussed during the anniversary of the General Strike was that only the day before the general strike commemoration, the Fair Work Australia decision on equal pay was announced. I could not help thinking that Emma Miller was fighting for that very issue in the early part of last century and we had finally achieved it.

There was a moment for the raising of hat pins.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Queensland Council of Unions in making sure the centennial commemoration of the Brisbane General Strike was able to take place. The work of Amanda Richards and John Battams from the Queensland Council of Unions and Owen Doogan and Dave Matters from the Queensland Rail, Tram and Bus Union are much appreciated as they were able to explain how important the 1912 action was for workers in 2012.

Unionists know the value of history and the value of the story of Emma Miller and the 1912 strike cannot be overstated.

Because the suffragist movement is a rarely remembered part of our history and because Emma Miller is largely forgotten outside of union or suffragist circles Pam Young's biography of her life is ever more crucial as that part of our history becomes more distant.

* * * *

Manufacturing Margarine

By Carol Dian Corless

Introduction

This article is a narrative about the struggle of a union at a margarine manufacturing site. The company is an Australian owned entity that has existed since the 1920s. The site that I have worked at has been trading since the early 1940s. The struggle of the union members to come to terms with the changing world market, shifting business strategies and altered production paradigms presents a microscopic portrait of Australian labour relations over the last quarter of century. As set out below, the work force was able to exercise some control over the changes that beset production, while in other instances it was forced to adjust to external pressures that are equally important to understand. Such forces consisted of shifting modes of government regulation, ongoing mechanisation of the labour process, changing consumer buying habits and alterations in the world market. This is a narrative that is told from a personal perspective that includes the last 25 years of the story. It presents in microcosm the effects of larger changes in Australian employment relations over this same time period.

The union has been a part of the margarine company at the Murarrie site for many years in fact the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU) was the union that was party to the first Industrial agreement for the Industry. The company produces a diverse range of products including industrial margarines and shortenings for cake and pastry manufacture, both for the domestic and overseas market; retail tubs for the domestic and international market; and drummed oil for the local and foreign market. The union that has coverage of the general workers is United Voice formerly known as the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) and the FMWU. They cover a broad range of workers from the Refinery, Packing Room, Security, Stores and Laboratory. For many years the union on the site had operated on a Log of Claims, which set the ground for the Enterprise Bargaining process of current times.

The Accord Period: 1st Tier, 2nd Tier

The earliest firsthand knowledge that I have for the Murarrie site is the 4% 2nd Tier wage bargaining round. It influenced my decision to move from another food manufacturer to the margarine plant. The margarine plant was paying \$10 a week more without the 4% 2nd Tier increase. The “training structure” also allowed further wage increases above the base rate.

In 1987 an agreement was negotiated under the Accord for the 2nd tier that was signed off in 1988. Under the frame agreement with the ACTU a pay increase of 4 per cent could be included for productivity offsets at individual companies such as in this case study. Each of the areas negotiated their section of the agreement separately. The laboratory members went from 12 paid union meetings per year to 6 paid union meetings per year. This is the agreement where the laboratory members went to pay by electronic funds transfer (EFT) while the rest of the site stayed on cash payment. In this agreement the refinery operators agreed to some minor testing of in process oils. This change to testing did not occur and it wasn't until the year 2000 that the company actually acted on this agreement to get operators doing checks on their own production plant.

The laboratory employees at that time were deemed to be laboratory assistants and as such were to assist the chemist. This meant that the chemist, a staff member, had the final call on releasing a product for use or sale. This also meant that if the laboratory members took action such as overtime bans, the chemists could still test the product that needed releasing.

The first involvement I had with the union on site was during the late eighties. We were negotiating to increase our redundancy agreement

from 2 weeks per year of service and by 1990 we had achieved four weeks pay per year of service. The redundancy entitlements paid under the agreement that we have in 2011 are basically the same as we negotiated in 1990 with minor refinements on the conditions of the redundancy. Adequate redundancy payments were an important outcome of this period.

The Period of Award Restructuring: Job Enlargement & Multitasking

In 1990 the award restructuring process began. Part of the process was that the process operations (tasks) had to be given relativity against the metal trades structure. This involved equating an operation as being worth a certain percentage of the trade qualification. Prior to award restructuring the packing plant and the refinery were on one award; the canteen employees were on another and the Laboratory personnel were party to an Industrial agreement, which had been made in 1972. The award restructuring process was partially divorced from the site as agreement making followed a pre-set template rather than an open set of negotiations.

Part of the award restructuring process was the implementation of a training structure. The training structure that was eventually negotiated made allowances for people who did not wish to undertake the training, which nobody was forced to undertake.

The training structure that was put in place was to be an interim measure until the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) - Fats and Oils training structure was available. This training structure remained in place until the 1998 EBA where the training program was disbanded by pay out of the hours of training that an employee had undertaken.

The Laboratory was well set up for the training structure process as it was a requirement of employment to have an Associate Diploma in a relevant discipline to work in the lab. The laboratory also had a training structure that had been in place since 1984. The training structure was established on a laboratory operational basis (laboratory tasks and skills). This structure was modified to include a total of 400hrs of modules, to be delivered by Technical And Further Education (TAFE), and had to be completed to obtain requisite pay levels.

The Packing Room and Refinery workers had to do 960 hrs of TAFE modules to obtain a Certificate in Food Processing in subjects such as computer skills and equipment repair. To obtain a pay increase under the new pay structure the operator had to do the relevant hours of modules for each level as well as learn one operational group of skills per pay level (e.g. operating packing equipment). A few of the operators opted to not undertake the TAFE training. It should also be

said that this training was offered under the Federal government guaranteed training scheme. There were two pay streams; those that opted for the training stream and those that chose not to do the modules from TAFE. The greatest number of hours that any person achieved under this training structure was 400hrs as the rate of courses being offered was about one course per TAFE term.

In 1992 there was a transition document negotiated to assist anyone involved in moving from the old classification structure to the new structure. This set out the rules of the training committee and how to raise a dispute. A few of these rules still apply to the structure as it stands now, such as the provision for single time payment for training time.

The Shift to Enterprise Bargaining

Our first certified agreement was negotiated in 1994 and included all of the unions on site. It was originally going to be for 2 years but the company had enough of the negotiations and reduced it to a one-year agreement. The main item of contention was that the company wanted a 6-day operation in the refinery. The refinery operators agreed to a 6-day operational roster but so as to keep all employees they went to a 4-shift rotation on 12hour shifts. The roster went from 6pm Sunday to 6pm Saturday. By doing this roster no operator was made redundant.

The 37.3hour week was made up of three 12hour shifts, a 30 min meeting and three 15 min changeovers, which had been traditionally paid at double time. The operators were to lose no pay out of this change so any changeover allowances and meal allowances, that were already being paid, were calculated over the year and averaged out to one allowance called the refinery allowance. These allowances were to be paid at all times including annual leave. There was also a weekend penalty rate from 12am Saturday to 6pm Saturday and from 6pm Sunday to 12am Sunday. The penalty was time and a half for the first 3 hours after 12am Saturday and then double time to 6am Saturday morning. The shift from 6am Saturday to 6pm Saturday received penalties of time and a half for the first 3 hours and then double time thereafter to the end of shift. The shift on Sunday night received double time for the first 6 hours of their shift and then single time after 12am. For this and some other minor changes the whole of the site received a 3 percent pay rise on ratification and then 2.5 percent after 6 months. Importantly, during this period, changes that the company wished to introduce had to be paid for.

The 2nd Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

Within 6 months we were back to negotiate for the next agreement. It seemed that we had only just finished

discussing the previous agreement when we had to start on the next one. The other unions on site started with us at the negotiations but felt we were taking too long so part way through the negotiations they settled their agreements separately. This 1995 agreement was for two years to run until 1997. Some of the items that were agreed were payment of wages by EFT and changes to the laboratory roster to 6-day operation. As the laboratory is a service department its members had to eventually accommodate the same roster as production workers in the refinery.

The main item of contention for this agreement was the rotating shifts in the packing room. This issue lead to several compulsory conferences in the IRC. In the end the union was told that the company could have rotating shifts by only giving the union members seven days notice of the change. So the members agreed to the rotating shifts but using a 12-hour shift roster to maximise the length of time off. The company had wanted an 8hour shift rotation. As the packing room operators were not in receipt of a changeover allowance the 37.3 hour week in the packing room was made up of three 12hour shifts and a 12hour 'make up' shift every 9 weeks. Weekend penalties were payable on the makeup shift from 12 am Saturday to 6.00 am Saturday at the same rate as the refinery. As these members did not have a meal allowance paid or changeover allowance they

continued to be paid the allowances on the overtime worked at any time they worked. This created a split workforce in terms of the payment of wages.

Now that most of the workforce was working 12 hour shifts the union got the company to agree to have an independent assessment of the occupational health and safety risks of this regime prior to their commencement in the packing room and at 6 monthly intervals for the next 12 months. An honours student from the Queensland University conducted the survey.

The pay rise that we achieved for this agreement was 6 percent on ratification and 3 percent 9 months after the ratification and a further 3 percent 18 months after ratification. Also in this agreement the company agreed to look at the laboratory pay structure 6 months after ratification. It was felt by the laboratory members that we should have been receiving a higher rate than the rest of the site, as an Associate Diploma was required for work in the lab. Consequently, during the life of the 1995 - 1997 agreement, the pay rates for the laboratory were renegotiated and the laboratory had a separate training structure and pay scale from the rest of the site that was registered with the IRC as an amendment along with an amendment to the redundancy clause. New pay rates for the lab were \$18.88 per hour up from the \$15.98 of the previous agreement.

The issue of child care and shift rosters were raised with the company during the negotiations of the 1995 - 1997 agreement. The union felt that childcare was an issue that had not been taken into consideration when the roster changes were occurring. The company agreed that the union could conduct a survey of the employees that also included any employee of the company at Murarrie whether they were staff or award employees. The survey was conducted and collated by a union member on the site. As the workforce was an aged and male dominated one, the need for childcare was not a dominant factor in shift changes.

The 3rd Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

The 1997 - 1998 agreement was our third EBA and it also only went for 12 months. There had been so much discussion over the wording of the previous agreement that it was decided to document all of the scenarios so that there was no argument over the meaning of a clause. The main items that were agreed was core complement in the packing room of 17 employees to run all bays; 3 spare operators in the packing room for annual leave, sick leave and training coverage. These new staffing arrangements entailed 9 redundancies, 3 per shift. There was also an amalgamation of processing plants in the refinery and changes to the laboratory roster due to changes in testing requirements.

During the negotiations of this EBA the union was concerned about the Federal government of the day's stance on the 20 allowable matters for Awards. The federal government had legislated that there should be only 20 matters of relevance in awards. The concern was that the State government of the day would legislate to flow this onto State Awards. To this the company and the union agreed that the award would be written into the EBA to protect the conditions of the Award.

The wage increase we achieved from this one-year agreement was 5.25 percent with 1 percent of the increase diverted to provide for an Income Protection Scheme. Only a slim majority of members had voted in agreement with the sickness insurance plan. This scheme has proved invaluable to so many employees since its inception.

The 4th Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

The next EBA ran from October 1998 to April 2001. This was quite a strategic move of the part of the company to shift the end of our agreement to the next year as we found out when negotiating the agreement of 2001 - 2003. This move of the end date took us from bargaining in the same year as the other margarine production sites that the company owned into the opposite year. As other unions cover the other production sites it is hard to coordinate

communication between the different operations. The sites in WA and NSW are covered by the Australian Workers Union and the site in Victoria is covered by the National Union of Workers.

The main issue that we negotiated in the 1998 - 2001 agreement was the removal of the training structure. The TAFE based training structure was disbanded in 1998, as the courses were not truly reflective of the business requirements. About this time the Fats and Oils Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB) had finalised the Certificate in Food processing - Fats and Oils but the company thought it too difficult to simply change the agreed structure to the Fats and Oils modules. The company made ex-gratia payments of \$5 per hour of training that had been completed. This led to three further redundancies of training relief staff. A senior operator position, with associated skills was created while the 'sun setting' of leading hands was also included in this agreement. Finally, a formalisation of the disputes procedure into a standardised protocol was set out. The pay rise that we achieved from this agreement was 3 percent on implementation, 2 percent in August 1999, and a further 2 percent in August 2000 and also up to 2 percent if productivity indicators were met. This productivity percentage was on a sliding scale that changed on a quarterly basis depending on shop floor control and production losses.

The old documents that had been compiled together into a memorandum of understanding were placed into this agreement. There were four redundancies during this agreement, as one position on the Yard Gang was made redundant, as well as the three previously mentioned. A permanent casual worker would now be employed to work when the permanent member was on holidays or relieving the security personnel at the gatehouse.

During the negotiations of the 1998 - 2001 agreement there was a feeling of job insecurity so the union managed to have a special redundancy clause placed in the agreement. The clause is to be used in the event of a total site closure where there is now an entitlement to 13 weeks of extra pay or an extra notice period of 13 weeks on top of the notice period already contained in the redundancy agreement. This clause was carried over to the subsequent agreements as well.

Company Rationalisation

Shortly after the implementation of EBA 4 the company had a change in direction and a rationalisation of where goods were produced. There was still the same amount of finished product being produced but as the retail market was now mainly spreads (60 to 75 percent fat) and not margarines (80 percent fat) the amount of oil required to be processed to produce the finished product had decreased. This meant

that the refinery did not need to run on a 6-day operation but required only 5 days of operation. This led to a total of 5 operators being made redundant.

Each refinery employee at the time was given the opportunity to interview for a position in the refinery. The employees that were not rehired had the opportunity to volunteer for redundancy or work in another area of the site. This selection process occurred in early 1999 and the operators were to go by August 1999. The company did allow the redundant employees to seek further training to equip them for employment elsewhere.

In September 1999 the laboratory employees, staff and award, were told that there was to be a new direction with the testing. The National office of the company was advocating 'Quality at the Source' with reliance on suppliers to supply the correct product and the operators to do their own testing in the refinery. This meant that the laboratory went from 5 staff people and 11 award people to 2 staff and 5 award employees. We had to also interview for our positions and those that did not make the cut opted to take voluntary redundancy. The redundant award employees had between October 1999 and March 2000 in which to leave.

The 5th Enterprise Bargaining Agreement

The 1998 - 2001 agreement was finishing in April 2001 so as always we started to negotiate for the next agreement six months prior to the expiry of the agreement. This meant that we were negotiating over the Christmas period.

The negotiation for this agreement became quite acrimonious as the company kept saying that all the money they had to give was 4 percent per year and that our Log of Claims had to come out of "the bucket" of 4 percent. In the end we whittled down our claims to a few core items. We were able to achieve a 4 percent pay increase every year with 2 percent paid for the last 6 months, a total of 10 percent for the agreement. The company wanted the AQF training structure put in place, which we agreed to in principle. There was to be continued amalgamation/rationalisation in the refinery, leading to 6 additional redundancies, as well as a total of 8 further permanent layoffs in the packing operations and the pastry department, even as production levels were set to increase. Finally, this agreement contained a delegates' charter of rights.

An issue on which a lot of the shift workers did not agree was the fight for day workers to get double time on overtime. There were only 9-day workers out of 94 members on site. These workers were being paid time and a half for the first three hours and

double time thereafter on any overtime they were working. The company agreed to the double time for all workers with a proviso that if the site suddenly were to have a majority of day workers that it would revisit that clause.

The ability for the company to use casuals was a particularly contentious issue. Up until this agreement the company was only able to use casuals for extended leave greater than 4 weeks for an individual or for seasonal increases in production requirements. It was agreed after much discussion that the company could use casuals, in process worker (unskilled) positions, up to a maximum of three per shift in the event of sick leave, annual leave and long service leave.

The site to date is still negotiating EBA's with some agreements having to be rolled over to maintain conditions due to changes in the legislation. There have been four more agreements since the agreement negotiated in 2001. All agreements have been about maintaining and trying to improve the conditions. Some agreements, due to the political climate had to be rollover agreements with not much gain other than pay increases based on CPI. The last agreement where we negotiated an agreement was 2010 where we managed to negotiate some improvements in the training structure.

In recent times, we have had minor disputes about the EBA as well as some changes in the laboratory section

around tasks that are performed. As part of this change the company asked the employees to remove the RDO provision, that is they were asked to work 7.47 hours per day, 5 days per week. This was fought and won by the employees of the section for the whole of the site as other sections of the workforce could have been affected later.

Conclusion

The labour relations on this site are mirrored on many other manufacturing sites and a similar narrative could be written. Bargaining in recent years has been about maintaining conditions of employment that previous members have taken action for. As demonstrated by the recent laboratory dispute, the union has remained relevant and strong on this site due to the majority of employees understanding that there needs to be a union to protect the conditions of the employees. The other underlying theme that emerges from this history is the continuous pressure to downsize employment at the operation, while making do with more casual (i.e. precarious) work. This again is common across many industries in Australia today. Only by compiling and studying past experience, will we be in a position to actively shape the future.

Note

1 Meadow Lea (Enterprise Bargaining & Classification Structure) Certified Agreement NO. 2

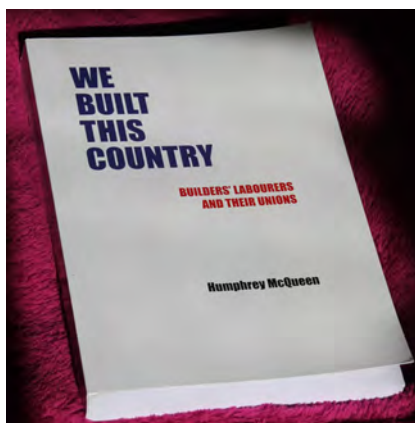
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Review of

‘A Manual for Unionists’

reviewed by Howard Guille

reprinted with permission from
Australian Options, Summer
2011, p. 32.



This is the second book of Humphrey McQueen's research into builders' labourers and their unions. Read it, as the author says, with the earlier volume *Framework of Flesh*. This book is a history of builders' labourers and their work from colonisation onwards. More especially, it is an account of the formation and operation of the Australian Builders Labourers Federation from 1910 to the amalgamation of its residual bits into the CFMEU in 1991-2.

The book cannot be summarized in a review that is two words for each of the years that McQueen covers. One impressive aspect is the weight given to the outlying States as well as to Victoria and New South Wales. Another is the section on the 'money flow' within unions; put plainly, a union will fold if it fails to collect and bank members' dues. McQueen also looks past a 'cult of individuals in the Jack and Norm show' (p. 12). Even so, his account of the genesis of green bans and his analysis of the conflicts between Norm Gallagher and Jack Munday will raise controversy.

McQueen tells how workers tried to control what was happening to them – in practice, what bosses were trying to do to them in the face of economic and social forces and changing technology. There are fascinating insights – for example, other things being equal, concrete gave builders' labourers opportunities and increased their relative power and work value but scissors lifts reduced them. He makes subtle use of Marxist political economy weaving ideas of surplus value, socially necessary labour and the like into understanding the actual economic forces pressing on workers.

Unionised labourers fought with tradesmen, with judges, arbitration commissioners and other unions as well as with bosses. The Arbitration system was a site for almost constant contest about which union covered

which jobs and how these fitted into job award coverage – for example, was a plasterer's labourer a tradesman's assistant or a labourer?; is a bridge or communications tower a 'building'? There was, especially in Queensland, an incessant coverage battle with the AWU. This went beyond the Builders' Labourers and was a general fight from 1915 to 1996 between the AWU, as Labor government ally, and the unions affiliated with the Trades and Labour Council. This was reprised after 1989 with Goss ALP government.

I finished reading this book just as Alan Joyce gave QANTAS shareholders 'certainty' by grounding the entire flight of planes. The QANTAS dispute and media shrieking about unions came after a period of 'official quiet' about industrial disputation that McQueen's book helps to put into perspective. Disputes fell off in the 1990s and 2000s apart from a few unions including the CFMEU, CEPU (ETU) and NTEU that adopted disciplined pattern bargaining. This has a clear lineage from the Victorian Building Industry Agreement of the 1950s onwards, led, as McQueen documents, by the Builders' Labourers. This was 'collective bargaining' on an industry basis designed by unions. It is a far cry from today's 'enterprise bargaining' designed by the Business Council of Australia and their legal and academic advisers as a second best if individual contracts could not be achieved.

McQueen says his book is about 'defeats as well as victories, drunks and thieves as well as militants and revolutionaries'. More importantly, as he says, it shows 'why a union should be a school for the working class'. (p. 11) The book should be compulsory reading for new and old union officers and organisers: it will certainly challenge them to decide whether they are workers' representatives or 'workplace relations practitioners'.

* * * *

Dale Jacobsen Life Membership

At our December AGM of the BLHA, President Greg Mallory proposed life membership be awarded to Dale Jacobsen. In speaking to the proposition, Greg explained the various roles Dale had preformed for the Association over many years. Bob Reed also spoke about Dale's contribution with particular focus on her work as editor of the journal. In accepting the award, Dale received a certificate and spoke of her love of the BLHA. Below is Bob Reed's speech:

It is a pleasure to speak on the award of life membership of the BLHA to Dale Lorna Jacobsen.

Dale has been a stalwart of the association for many years. She has served with distinction on the committee. Perhaps her greatest contribution to the study of labour history, apart from her own writings, has been her editorship of our journal. Dale has produced, as editor, 11 issues of the Journal over the past 5 ½ years and I pay tribute to the quality of the work that she has produced and the effort and dedication with which she has produced it. The latest edition of the Journal is the last to be edited by her.

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Until the coming of the welfare state in the 1970s few workers enjoyed any of the labour market securities now taken for granted. The current transformation of work, with its increased insecurity, the pressure to work faster and harder and greater levels of exploitation, is more of a reversion to form than a radical new departure.

Ian Watson, A world built on precarious foundations, Inside Story, 02 April 2012

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CONTRIBUTORS



Carol Dian Corless is a Quality Technician for Integro Foods which is based in Brisbane and has worked there since 1988. She graduated in 1985 from Queensland Agricultural College (UQ) with an Assoc Dip in Food Processing. Carol is a shop floor union delegate for United Voice which is the union that has coverage of the majority of workers on the site and she is the current elected Vice President of United Voice in Qld. Carol has been on the State council of United Voice (and previous namesakes) since 1990. She has been on the United Voice National Council since 1994. Carol has recently returned to study for her Bachelor Degree in Historical Inquiry and Practice from UNE.

Dale's participation in the affairs of the BLHA will be sorely missed but she has left a wonderful legacy.

As we all know she is a woman of many talents – writer, musician, environmental scientist – to name a few. We appreciate that she has many projects competing for her time and BLHA wishes Dale well in all her future endeavours

Thanks again Dale on behalf of the committee for your sterling efforts over such a long period of time, and congratulations on the award of life membership.

Bob Reed currently practises as a barrister in Brisbane, principally in the areas of industrial and employment law, human rights law and criminal law. However, from 1977 to 1988 he worked as a painter and docker in the ports of Brisbane and Sydney, holding positions on the committees of management of the Queensland and New South Wales branches at various times.

In 1987 he resumed legal studies which he had abandoned some years earlier for the earthier pleasures of industrial life. He completed an LL.B. in 1990 and has a B.A. which he gathered on the run in the mid 1970s.

Bob also worked as a solicitor from 1992 - 1995 and from 1995 - 1999 as a research officer for the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union.

Peter Whalley-Thompson is one of three children to Fred and Loma Thompson. Born and raised in Townsville, North Queensland, and trained as a primary teacher before taking up the itinerant life, working in construction and mining and travelling between jobs on a motorbike and sidecar, accompanied by his dog. Eventually he settled in South Australia, where he worked as a youth worker in unemployment projects and secure care facilities.

After taking a degree in Public Policy and Economics at Griffith University, he returned to Townsville with his partner, where they raised a family, and he embarked on a career as an activist in the Community and Public Sector Union. In 2005 he took up as the JCU Branch Organiser for the NTEU.

Peter and Fred shared a passion for woodwork and boatbuilding, something they had done together when Peter was young. In later years the roles were reversed, with Fred becoming the very capable offsider to house and boat projects they pursued together. It was over coffee in the shed that Freddy told Peter his history of an activist's life.

Errol O'Neill has worked since the early 1970s as an actor, writer, director,

dramaturge and producer, specialising in the creation of new work for the theatre. He was an actor, then a resident writer-director with the Brisbane-based Popular Theatre Troupe (1977-82), where he performed in, wrote and directed many political satires which toured throughout Queensland and nationally. He has written five plays about significant events in the history of the Australian labour movement, which have been produced by La Boite, Queensland Theatre Company, and other theatres in Brisbane and interstate. *On the Whipping Side* deals with the 1891 shearers' strike. *Red Soil White Sugar* is the story of the 1911 sugar strike, set in Childers. *Faces in the Street* deals with the 1912 Brisbane general strike. *Popular Front* traces the political career of Fred Paterson MLA. *The Hope of the World* deals with dilemmas of the left during the final years of the Bjelke-Petersen era. Errol is a member of the National Stage Committee of the Australian Writers' Guild, and a proud member of the Actors Equity division of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

Stephanie Sherrington was born to Jack and Marie on July 8th 1950. "My childhood memories are of fun Saturday nights with my parents playing in a bush band (Jack the lagerphone or tea-chest base, Marie the bongos). From the age of ten I joined them in peace demonstrations including a walk from Ipswich to New Farm Park. Dad and I were very active in the anti-Vietnam and right to march rallies. I was very

proud of the commitment they had to making the world a better place.”

Stephanie worked as a vet pathologist and later as an IT systems analyst. “I spent 25 years as a volunteer in the State Emergency Service. I am now retired and volunteer at the nursing home where Dad lived his last years. I am carrying on his passion for the natural world through my support of animal charities and the creation of gardens and bird and frog habitats at my home. I will keep his memory alive at the Hiroshima rally each year”.

Claire Moore Claire worked for the Commonwealth Public Service in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Social Security during the 1980s and 1990s. She held the elected position of Queensland Branch Secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union from 1994 to 2001. During this period, she was Vice-President of the Queensland Council of Unions, Chair of the Women’s Committee and Chair of the Arts Committee. The Emma Millar Awards for union women were introduced during her tenure as Chair of the QCU Women’s Committee.

In 2001 Claire was elected as ALP Senator for Queensland and served in the Senate from 2002 to date. She is Chair of the Community Affairs-Legislation Committee and of the Parliamentary Group on Population Development.

Claire continues to be a community activist. She is involved in many different community groups committed to social justice and equality for all Queenslanders. These groups include Amnesty International, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation and the Queensland Peace Network.

She is a member of Friends of the ABC, Patron of the Boggo Road Gaol Historical Society, Children by Choice, Brisbane Labour History Association, Brisbane Multicultural Arts Centre and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music.

Journal Editors:

Howard Guille worked and taught in Europe and New Zealand before coming to Australia in the mid-1970s. He was the foundation appointment in industrial relations at what became Brisbane CAE. He worked at the Trades and Labour Council of Queensland from 1988 to 1992. He was involved in major projects in restructuring, award restructuring, industrial policy and in trying to combat corporatisation, privatisation and national competition policy.

Howard was the Queensland Secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union from 1994 to 2006. This became increasingly complex with enterprise bargaining and the assault of the Coalition Government on the NTEU.

He was a member of the TLC Executive from 1996 to 2006. He is currently the QCU representative on the Queensland

Heritage Council. In 2000 and in 2008 Howard assisted the Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress with research and submissions to the National Minimum Wage Boards of those years.

He retired from the paid workforce in 2008 after two years as Associate Professor in Humanities at Queensland University of Technology. He has undertaken research and written on a wide range of topics including industrial relations theory and policy, labour market policy, globalisation, industry, housing and social policy.

Bob Russell received his Ph.D. in 1983 from the State University of New York at Binghamton, specialising in industrial sociology and development studies. Following this, Bob lectured for 15 years at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, where he became professor of Sociology. Since 2000 he has worked at Griffith University where he specialises in work and employment studies. Bob is the author of previous books on industrial relations in Canada (1990), and work transformations in staples producing sectors, including the global mining industry (1999).

More recently the focus of his research has been directed at work and employment in information industries and its globalisation through outsourcing as evidenced by the publication of two recent books - *Smiling Down the Line: Info-Service Work in the Global Economy*, University

of Toronto Press, 2009 and a co-edited book, *The Next Available Operator: Managing Human Resources in the Indian Business Process Outsourcing Industry*, Sage, 2009. Currently Bob is pursuing further research on the impact of new information and communication technologies on established professions, working with Queensland Health on a project that examines the relationships between professional identities and digital technologies.

Ross Gwyther has worked in Brisbane as an organiser with the National Tertiary Education Union for 10 years, after an earlier career as a research geophysicist, and some years working in factories and on the Qld railways. His experience has reinforced the importance of labour history as an essential tool for workers to use in building and crafting organisations capable of not only resisting the many onslaughts of capital, but also capable of building a better world.

His interests centre around strategies for labour movement renewal and union organisation, and the intersection of these with community movements around ecological and anti-war campaigns. He is currently working on developing a “workers’ education project” to assist unions in building active and informed networks of delegates and young workers, particularly amongst a rapidly casualising workforce..

* * * *

2012 Alex Macdonald Lecture

From Bullockies to Baristas: The Challenge of Combating Insecure Work in Australia

Dr. Iain Campbell



5.30pm for 6.00pm
Thurs 17 May
Level 2 TLC Building
16 Peel St
South Brisbane

***free admission**
***refreshments available**

In this lecture Iain Campbell examines the historical background to the spread of insecure (or 'precarious') work in Australia. He considers the significance of insecure work and the causes of its resurgence in recent decades. In particular, he focuses on the successful struggles in the past to reduce insecurity in employment. What are the lessons of these struggles? What are their limits? What needs to be invented to fit the changed labour markets of the twenty-first century?

Dr. Iain Campbell researches labour restructuring, precarious work, temporary migrant labour, working-time patterns and work-life balance at RMIT Centre for Applied Social Research, has written books on casualisation, and was a key expert witness at the Reasonable Hours and Family Provisions Test Cases and recent Federal Inquiry into insecure work in Australia.

The Alex Macdonald lecture is an annual event organised by the Brisbane Labour History Association. It commemorates former Qld TLC Secretary Alex Macdonald and the critical role unions have played in the Qld Labour Movement.



A BLHA event with generous sponsorship by the Qld Council of Unions.



Noticeboard

Labour Places on the Queensland Heritage Register

State protection of heritage places in Queensland is just over 20 years old and over 1,600 places are on the Queensland Heritage Register. Heritage protection applies to places and fixtures not moveable artefacts. For a place to be listed it must be significant to the state and meet one or more of eight criteria set out in the Queensland Heritage Act. The criteria cover the aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, or other significance of the place.¹

While there are plenty of cathedrals, public buildings, shire halls and mansions, the largest single category are war memorials. Numerous mines are listed including the delightfully named La Societe Francaise des Metaux Rares treatment plant at Dimbulah where wolfram, bismuth and molybdenum were mined. Bowen Consolidated Colliery and Dawson Valley Colliery are listed as the first two shaft mines in the State. Railways, (including the Main Toowoomba Range and a range of suburban stations), roads, (including the Mt Spec Road which was the largest depression project in North Queensland) and ports are well represented.

Places listed because of their association with the labour movement include

- The Tree of Knowledge at Barcaldine
- The Shearers' Strike Camp Site at Barcaldine
- The Maryborough Waterside Workers' Hall
- The Lilyvale Stand Monument at Capella (from the 1997-99 Gordonstone dispute)
- Toowoomba Trades Hall
- Australian Meat Industry Employees Union Building in Townsville

The Heritage Register is a very valuable source of information about places and their history. The citations are up to 5,000 words and are researched by historians, architects and archaeologists in the DERM Heritage Branch. The heritage register recounts industrial and community activism and disputation for some places. For example, the listing of the former Taroom Aboriginal Settlement includes reference

to acts of resistance, frequent escapes and a short-lived strike in 1916 over a demand for cash wages. The listing for the Queensland Woollen Manufacturing Company Ltd Mill at Ipswich mentions the strike of the predominantly female workforce in 1942 at the height of the war.

Despite the places mentioned, the labour and community heritage of Queensland seems under-represented. The statue of T.J. Ryan is included in the listing of Queens Garden but more of the citation is given to Queen Victoria than to Premier Ryan. There are no places, to take a random list, associated with Emma Millar, Fred Paterson, Ernie Lane or with nineteenth and twentieth century unions and their leaders or of the long line of politicians from Dawson and Fisher onwards. In part, this may be because there are no tangible places clearly associated with them – for example, Emma Millar Place carries her name rather than memories and marks of her activity.

While there are many war memorials there are few if any monuments to industrial disasters. A strong case could be made that there is state heritage significance in listing memorials about Mount Mulligan where 75 workers were killed in 1921 or the three disasters at Kianga and Moura of 1975, 1986 and 1994 respectively. It may even be possible to list sites where disasters occurred – the recent listing of the former Taroom Aboriginal Settlement confirms that history of unpleasanties is a legitimate part of the heritage of Queensland.

As shown, heritage protection and conservation in Queensland is well beyond churches and mansions. There is an open process of nomination and listing even though it requires some effort in researching and documenting.

Any person or organisation can nominate places for consideration and once a nomination is made, the Heritage Council must consider it. Two of the eight criteria for listing readily apply to places that might be significant from a labour or community viewpoint. These are that the place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group or with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in Queensland's history. The Brisbane Labour History Association is well placed to nominate places and to work with unions and community groups in doing so.

To get things started we are asking readers of the Journal to suggest places to the editors. The first five people of interest (in alphabetical order) are Andrew Fisher, Ernie Lane, Alex McDonald, Emma Millar, , Fred Paterson and Ted Theodore. Do any readers know of places that are associated with the life or work of any of these

people? Places that in some way mark or have tangible memories of their life and work. Second are there any Queensland union or community buildings from C19 or the C20th that you think are significant to the State's history – either as places from where unions and community groups operated or that are linked to any of the big industrial, environmental or other disputes.

Note

- 1 See Department of Environment and Resource Management, Entering a State Heritage Place in the Queensland Heritage Register, <http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/heritage/qld-register/register-enter-remove.html>

Howard Guille



Toowomba Trades Hall
(Queensland Heritage Register 602768)



Maryborough
Waterside Workers'
Hall
(Queensland
Heritage Register
15492)

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. 14, April 2012
ISSN 1832-9926

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Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*