

Vere Gordon Childe

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Chapter 1. Origin and General Structure of the Political Labour Movement

THE Labour Movement in Australia takes on its specific character only from the date of its entry into the political arena with the formations of Labour Parties in most of the States in 1889-90. It is therefore convenient to make this date the starting for our study. Up to this point the history of unionism in the Australian colonies presents no features to make it worthy of any special attention from students of industrial and social questions. By the end of 1888 Labour had achieved a considerable degree of organisation especially in the skilled trades. Craft unions on the English model had been set up for the majority of the occupations requiring any degree of training in their employees. A start had also been made in organising the bush workers by the establishment of unions for shearers and miners. Moreover, while mainly confined to the skilled workmen, unionism was not entirely unknown among the unskilled. On the waterfront in the main seaports, the wharf labourers and coal-lumpers had unions, and in Queensland the shed hands or roustabouts – the unskilled workers employed beside the shearers in the country woolsheds – had an organisation of their own. Intercolonial Trade Union Congresses had been held regularly since 1879, and within the several States the forces of labour were given some sort of co-ordination, at least in the chief towns, by the existence of Labour Councils. In Queensland still further unity had been achieved by the formation of the Australian Federation of Labour, “Northern Province,” commonly spoken of as the A.L.F. At the same time new ideas were being spread by the Australian Socialist League formed in Sydney in 1887, by the writings of William Lane in Brisbane, and by the visit of Henry George. Labour was now a force to be reckoned with in the community and had already achieved several notable victories in these years of booming trade by industrial action. The A.L.F. had in particular demonstrated its power in the northern State at the beginning of 1890 in connection with a shearing dispute and a general spirit of solidarity as well as a confidence in the irresistible might of the organised workers prevailed.

This confidence was rudely shaken by the failure of the Maritime Strike of the same year. This dispute was occasioned by the refusal of the shipowners to permit the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association to continue its affiliation with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. The seamen and the waterside unions resolved to assist the marine officers, and ceased work in their defence. In Sydney the issue was complicated by the attempt of some pastoralists to shear their sheep by non-union labour and the boycotting of non-union wool by the transport and waterside unions. In sympathy with the maritime workers, who thus came out on strike in a body, the coal miners also ceased work, and at a later date all the members of the Shearers' Union were withdrawn from the sheds. Even the Broken Hill A.M.A. was asked to join in, and the militant miners unanimously downed tools. In the end the unions were defeated all along the line. The Employers' Federation and the Pastoralist Union had displayed perfect solidarity, and they had at their disposal the whole force of the State

– the police to guard their property, soldiers to protect the strike-breakers collected by the Federation, and the State railways to convey them wherever they were needed.

“The N.S.W. Labour Party of 1891,” says George Black, “was the creation of the Maritime Strike of 1890.” Its failure had convinced the unionists of the futility of attempting to extort reforms by direct industrial action in the teeth of a hostile Government and all the powers of the State. It had further shown that, however ready bourgeoisie ministries might be to receive deputations from trade unions with smiles and to promise reforms in return for working-class votes, when the fundamental issues of the class struggle were raised, they would be solidly behind the employers and lend them every assistance to defeat the toilers. The workers had been defeated by the use of the Governmental machinery in the hands of the master class; but in a democratic country, where every man had a vote and the workers outnumbered the employers, there seemed no reason why they should not wrest that machinery from the masters' hands and control it themselves. The very manifesto which declared the strike off suggested this policy. “We would also call attention,” runs the manifesto of the Strike Congress, “to the actions of the Governments of each colony in regard to the strike, and would recommend active, energetic work throughout all Labour organisations in preparation for taking full advantage of the privileges of the franchise, by sweeping monopolists and class representatives from the Parliaments of the country, replacing them by men who will study the interests of the people, and who will remove the unjust laws now used against the workers and wealth-producers, and administer equitable enactments impartially.” 1

The public, sick of the disturbance to life and business caused by constant strikes, welcomed this idea, and the Press applauded it. On the face of it, it seemed feasible enough. There was no class of hereditary or quasi-hereditary legislators in the colonies such as had grown up in older societies. Payment of members had been introduced in all the States by 1890. Working-men representatives had sat in several of the State Assemblies before this time, though they had tended to drift into one or other of the political parties of the middle-class world. In South Australia candidates had been wont to woo the votes of unionists, and eagerly sought “endorsement” from the Trades and Labour Council before elections, though it is by no means clear that they afterwards displayed any anxiety to fulfil the promises on the strength of which this endorsement had been given. It was quite possible that Labour, if it formed a distinct and independent party, would at least control the balance of power between the middle-class parties, and thereby be able to exact concessions in return for support on the policy initiated by Parnell. This was especially likely in N.S.W. where there were two, and only two, parties sharply divided on the fiscal issue. Accordingly the recommendation of the Strike Congress was adopted. The workers determined to have a political party of their own, with their own independent representatives in the House. Steps to this end were accordingly taken in all the self-governing colonies except Tasmania. A brief account of events in N.S.W. and Queensland will sufficiently illustrate the manner in which the energies of the Labour Movement were diverted to attain the conquest of political power.

In the former State, the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades and Labour Council, immediately upon the settlement of the Maritime Strike, formulated a scheme for the foundation of a Labour Electoral League, with branches in every electorate. A platform was drawn up, and both were submitted to and approved by the Council. Organisers were accordingly sent into the electorates to establish branches and enroll members. Membership was not to be restricted to unionists, but any one who was in sympathy with the aims of the League and would subscribe 5s. a year was eligible. The branches were given the right of selecting candidates, from whom a pledge was demanded that they accepted the Party platform. For the present the executive of the Trades and Labour Council acted also as the executive of the Labour Electoral League. The elections were held in the middle of 1891, and Labour contested forty-five seats and succeeded in securing the return of thirty-six of its candidates, thus being in a position to sway the balance of power between the Protectionists and the Free Traders. Thus was the first Labour Party formed in N.S.W. The steps taken in Victoria and South Australia were similar.

In Queensland the circumstances were somewhat different. At the meeting of the Provincial Council of the A.L.F. in August, 1890, W. Lane, a journalist of great power and strong Socialist convictions, who had already been appointed editor of the Federation newspaper, *The Worker*, persuaded the organisation to adopt political action for the attainment of Socialism. A programme of "aims" of a pure collectivist character was adopted, as well as an immediate platform for submission to the electors, demanding simple constitutional reforms in the direction of broadening the franchise and abolishing all limitations on the popular will. The A.L.F. sent organisers all over the country to organise what were called Workers' Political Organisations (W.P.O.'s) which corresponded to the Electoral Leagues in N.S.W. It was decided that all Labour representatives must sit on the crossbenches, no matter what party was in power, and pledge themselves to resign if so required by a two-thirds majority of their constituents. Four Labour candidates were returned by this Party in the elections of 1892, but the Party was not finally constituted till the following year. Then the A.L.F. called a conference of the W.P.O.'s, which adopted its own platform and constitution. This included an executive representative of the W.P.O.'s, the A.L.F., and the Parliamentary Party.

The Labour Parties in all the States were agreed in adopting a novel view of democracy and in a determination to remain separate and independent entities, not connected by any permanent bond with any of the older parties. The new theory of democracy which distinguished the Labour Party is well stated by W. G. Spence, himself one of the founders of the political movement. "The idea of self-government," he writes (A.A., p.220), "came to the worker in a new light, and he saw that he must not only vote, but must make the platform and select his own political war-cry." Previously the democracy had been asked to choose between policies framed by the Party leaders on their own responsibility. At most the workers had been able to extort promises of particular reforms in return for union votes. This was not self-government as understood by the proletarian democracy of Australia. The issues to be submitted to the people must also be determined by the people if true democracy is to exist. The

Labour Party sought to make provision for this. "There is no other party," said T. J. Ryan in his address to the Queensland Labour-in-Politics Convention of 1913, "that has a policy which is formed on the initiation and at the instance of the people themselves." The realisation of this ideal has been found to require a system of checks and controls which grew up gradually to meet the demands of the situation. A conference of representatives of all the Party members chosen by the leagues and unions frames the policy; an executive interprets the platform laid down by conference; a meeting of the Parliamentary Party – the Caucus – supervises the execution of the policy by the members in the Houses of Parliament. We shall in the next few chapters examine more in detail this machinery, and try to decide how far it fulfils its purpose. At this stage, however, it will be desirable to study the early history of the N.S.W. Labour Party, as there the several organs of control were developed to meet emergencies at first unforeseen.

When the Parliament of 1891, met it was found that there were fifty-five followers of the Free Trader Parkes, and fifty supporters of his opponent Dibbs. Hence the thirty-six Labour members held the fate of the Government in their hands – on one condition, that they were a united block who could be relied upon to vote solidly on every question. Given that condition, they were clearly able to demand very substantial concessions in return for support. The policy of the other parties on the other hand was obviously to try and divide the Labourites by raising issues not included in the Party platform. These tactics were easily foreseen, and at the first meeting the following pledge was adopted at the instance of G. Black:

"That, in order to secure the solidarity of the Labour Party, only those will be allowed to assist at its private deliberations who are pledged to vote in the House as a majority of the Party sitting in Caucus has determined.

"Therefore we, the undersigned, in proof of our determination to vote as a majority of the Party may agree, on all occasions considered of such importance as to necessitate a Party deliberation, have thereunto affixed our names."

This pledge was signed by nineteen out of the twenty-seven members present.

When Parliament met it was found that Parkes had included in the Governor's speech a number of Labour measures, including electoral reform, a Bill for the establishment of courts of arbitration and conciliation, a Factory and Shops Act, and so on. But it was soon evident that the fiscal issue was seriously threatening the unity of the Party. This question had been deliberately left out of the Labour platform because of the great division of opinion among the workers upon the subject. Individual members of the Party had therefore felt themselves free to adopt one side or the other in their electoral campaigns. Many of them were protectionists, and were returned as such. When, then, Dibbs moved a protectionist amendment to the Address-in-Reply the latter found themselves torn between two duties. If they voted for Dibbs they risked sacrificing the reform legislation promised by the Premier. To support Parkes, on the other hand, would be to betray the pledges given to their constituents. Some

protectionists like McGowen were prepared to do that in the interests of solidarity, but others were less tractable. Six left the Party on this question.

Yet it was evident that the policy of “support in return for concessions” adopted by the Party implied continuous support to one side of the House or the other. A group that was prepared to support the Government in respect of a fraction of its policy alone, but held itself free to allow that Government to be defeated on another issue, would have little bargaining power. That implied further that, if the Labour Party was to be any use at all, members were not free to adopt any attitude they chose, even on questions on which the Party's platform was silent, but that the Party must act as one body even where the platform gave them no guidance. That presupposed a body capable of determining how the Party should speak and vote on such issues. The body best adapted to serve the purpose seemed to be Caucus, and that was the intention of the pledge proposed by Black. On the other hand, the adoption of this system would do away with the old theory of representative Government and the responsibility of the member to his constituents. He would no longer speak freely for these alone, but would have to speak for the Labour Movement as a whole. For the time being, many members of the Party were unwilling to accept this theory of the subordination of the individual member to the whole Party, and as a result the Party was hopelessly divided on the fiscal question.

The division in the ranks of the parliamentarians practically invited the Electoral League outside to interfere, and when a conference of delegates from the local leagues met in January, 1892, it set out to try and control the politicians. It declared that it was the duty of the Labour Party to support “any Government on condition that a good portion of the Labour platform was carried into law.” As the dissensions within the ranks of the Parliamentary Party still continued, the next conference declared “that the Labour Party shall be a distinct Party and not allied to any other party, and that the sinking of the fiscal issue shall mean that any Labour members elected to Parliament shall support any Government that would give Labour measures and should vote as a solid Party till the fiscal question should be settled by referendum of the people.” It further recommended “that the Labour Party in Parliament expel any members from that Party who do not abide by the rule of a majority of the Caucus.” These resolutions were a confirmation of the attitude implied in Black's pledge. But they raise a further consideration. The Labour member is responsible not only to his constituents and his fellow members in Caucus, but also to an outside body – The Annual Conference of the League. As we shall see, this third body serves to reconcile the apparently conflicting loyalties to electors and to party. The authority of Conference, however, was challenged next year.

In preparation for the elections a special Conference met in November, 1893. It adopted the following pledge that all candidates who wished to run under Labour's banner must accept:

A. “That a Parliamentary Labour Party, to be of any weight, must give a solid vote in the House upon all questions affecting the Labour platform, the fate of the Ministry,

or calculated to establish a monopoly, or concede further privileges to the already privileged classes as they arise; and

B. “That accordingly every candidate who runs in the Labour interest should be required to pledge himself not only to the fighting platform and Labour platform, but also to vote on every occasion specified in Clause A, as the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party may in Caucus decide.”

The Parliamentary Party met at once and determined to resist this interference. They held that their duties were to their constituents, not to Conference or Caucus. As they had shown no inclination to vote against the Labour platform, the leagues had no excuse for complaint or interference. Joseph Cook, the leader, issued a lengthy manifesto on behalf of the Parliamentary Party, stating inter alia:

“That the pledge was both absurd and impracticable, and calculated to thwart the desires of the workers,

“That the pledge destroyed the representative character of a member and abrogated the electoral privileges of a constituency;

“That the effect of the pledge had already been to drive from the leagues some of the staunchest members of the Party who were now called traitors because they refused to be slaves.”

The open revolt of the politicians created a ferment in the League. The manifesto was described as a declaration of war, “after which nothing remained but to fight the signatories as traitors to Labour.” J. C. Watson, President of the League Executive, explained that the pledge was necessary to prevent a split in the Party, and would not have been insisted upon but for the fact that present members did not work solidly without it. The Executive circularised the leagues, and found that seventy-two out of eighty-four endorsed the “solidarity pledge.” Thereupon they declared that the recalcitrants were “rats,” and outlawed them from the organisation. Cook found support in his own league. Hartley a coal-mining centre, and this league, together with four others, was declared “bogus.” Only those candidates who signed the pledge were recognised and endorsed by the central body to run as Labour representatives at the forthcoming General Election. They included but four of the original Party: McGowen, Cann, Davis and Kirkpatrick. Many of the recusants ran as “Independent Labour” candidates.

At the July elections of 1894 fifteen “solidarities” as the pledged men were called, and twelve independents were returned. Among the former were W. M. Hughes and J. C. Watson, who had come into prominence as champions of the Executive against the Parliamentary Party. We shall find later that the championship of the organisation outside Parliament against recalcitrant sitting members has often been a road to Parliamentary honours for the champions. The 1895 Conference modified the pledge to read as follows :

“I hereby pledge myself not to oppose the selected candidate of this or any other branch of the Political Labour League. I also pledge myself, if returned to Parliament, on all occasions to do my utmost to ensure the carrying out of the principles embodied in the Labour Platform, and on all questions, and especially those affecting the fate of a Government, to vote as a majority of the Labour Party may decide at a duly constituted Caucus meeting.”

Three of the “independents,” Black, Brown, and Edden, accepted this modified pledge and returned to the Labour fold. The remnant either disappeared from political life or became merged in one or other of the bourgeoisie parties. Cook, in particular, was rewarded for his apostasy by the portfolio of Postmaster-General in the Reid administration of 1894.

Accordingly, the contentions of the pledge party were amply vindicated. It was proved that the pledge was essential in order to maintain the individuality and identity of a Labour Party in a middle-class Assembly. Without it the Labour Party would have gone the way of the “workingmen” candidates in the past and become mere hangers-on of one or other of the older parties. In the future the only recognised Labour candidates were those who had not only been selected by the local Labour leagues, but had also received the endorsement of the Central Executive; for, as we have seen, the latter body in 1894 was obliged to restrict the choice of the local leagues and refuse recognition to those which, like Hartley, supported the candidature of men who had not signed the Executive's pledge. Hereafter, too, it was admitted that Labour members spoke not for their constituencies alone or for the little leagues that had actually selected them, but for the Political Labour Movement as a whole. In compensation the local leagues had the right of sending delegates to the Annual Conference and instructing them how to vote as well as themselves sending in proposals for embodiment in the platform and policy of the Party. Thus the local bodies were given a voice in framing the policy of the movement. For the limitations placed upon their separate representation on the floor of the House, they received instead effective representation on the controlling authority of the whole Party.

Conference had won for itself the right to be considered the supreme governing power in the whole organisation, framing the policy which Labour's parliamentary representatives had to further and advocate, and thus exercising a certain control over their actions. In the intervals between Conferences, the Executive was accepted as the guardian of the integrity of the movement, with the right in particular to grant or refuse endorsement to would-be Labour candidates. The oversight of the details of parliamentary tactics was left to Caucus, whose decisions the individual Labour member was pledged to obey. The same general theory and the same system of triple controls was adopted in the other States, copied in most cases from N.S.W., where alone the logic of its evolution as an adaptation to circumstances can be clearly exhibited.

We shall see in the sequel that the elected representatives of the Labour Movement showed a continual inclination to revolt against the discipline which was so essentially involved in the whole theory of democracy adopted by the Party. To check

this there was a steady process of tightening up the control exercised over the individual Labourite by the organs of the whole Movement. A widening cleavage between the Parliamentary representatives of Labour and the Party outside the sacred precincts of the House makes itself apparent, leading to fresh struggles, in which the Conference and Executive constantly arrogate to themselves additional powers of oversight and direction with respect to the politicians. As a further phase we shall observe a conflict between the genuinely working-class elements as represented in the unions, upon which and for which the Party was originally founded, and the middle-class voters whose support had been secured through the leagues. In the next three chapters we shall trace the history of these dialectic developments from a purely formal point of view and inquire how far the various controls set up have served their purpose. In a later work I hope to examine more in detail the actual aims and ideals of the Labour Parties, and then to present some data to enable the reader to judge how far these parties have been successful in realising the objects they have been sent out to strive for.

NOTE.—For convenience I shall always speak of the local branches of the parties as “leagues,” though this term is not used in all the States. For instance, in Queensland the name W.P.O. is used. Similarly, there are differences from State to State in the nomenclature of the Party organisations. Queenslanders spoke of the Labour-in-Politics Convention and the Central Political Executive (C.P.E.). In N.S.W the term used was Political Labour League (P.L.L.) Conference and Executive. Victorians had a Political Labour Council (P.L.C.) corresponding to the Executive and a P.L.C. Conference. All these, however, since 1918 have been State branches of the Australian Labour Party (A.L.P.).

Chapter II. The Theory and Practice of Caucus Control

AS we have seen the events of 1891-94 in N.S.W. had established finally the principle of the supremacy of Caucus as representing the Labour Party as a whole over the individual member. Henceforth the Labour Member of Parliament spoke and voted on all vital questions, not so much as the representative of a constituency, but as a representative of the Labour Movement. But he still had one alternative to submission to the rule of the majority in Caucus – he might resign his seat. Here was a loophole by which a discontented minority might defy the dictates of Caucus. This was demonstrated in N.S.W. in 1899. The Party was as a whole supporting the Reid Ministry, but six members, headed by W. A. Holman were uncompromisingly antagonistic to the Premier. Reid held office by grace of the Labour votes alone, but so evenly were parties divided in the House that the absence of the six Labour members would have meant the defeat of the Government. The Leader of the Opposition, Lyne, raised an issue on which the six said that they would resign their seats rather than support the Government. As, therefore, the Ministry were doomed to defeat anyway, Caucus decided that it would be wiser to support Lyne and take the responsibility for the defeat of Reid in return for concessions from the other side than to allow the resignations of the six to put Lyne in power irrespective of the attitude of the Labour Party, and therefore allowed themselves to be swung round behind Lyne. Thus, by threat of resignation, a minority of the Party had been able to override the decision of Caucus and impose their will on the majority of their colleagues. In this case the issue was unessential and the danger of this loophole in Caucus discipline was ignored.

In 1911, however, a crisis was precipitated by the resignation of two Labour members, and the life of the first Labour Government in N.S.W. was imperilled. An important plank in the Labour platform was “Immediate Cessation of Crown Land Sales” – as a step to the ultimate goal, land nationalisation. Instead of freehold the Party proposed to give “perpetual leasehold” titles. But this principle was distinctly unpalatable to the small farmers upon whose votes the Party relied in the country electorates. The representatives of country constituencies were accordingly very timid about referring to the leasehold plank. But the Labour Minister for Lands, Neil Neilson, had strong views upon the subject, and the newly-formed Ministry had to face more than one vote of censure for its adherence to the leasehold policy.

One item in the Lands Minister's programme aroused especially acute hostility. That was his interpretation of the plank as it affected what was called the Conversion Act of 1908. By this Act the Wade Ministry had conferred upon those who had taken up leases of Crown land the right of converting their holdings into freeholds. These settlers had deliberately taken up leases, and the Labour Party had vigorously denounced the measure conferring this unexpected privilege upon them as robbery of the people's heritage. Neilson, when he was appointed Minister, announced his intention of repealing this legislation which plainly conflicted with the Party's platform. He further indicated that he interpreted repeal to mean the denial to those

who already had taken up leases, but had not as yet applied to have them converted, of the right in future to convert into freehold. This pronouncement created dismay among the farmers who contended that, having taken up lands at a time when they would have had the right to convert their titles into freehold, the withdrawal of this right would be repudiation of an implied contract. Most of the representatives of country constituencies were terrified into concurring in this view. They contended that repeal of the Conversion Act should mean only the refusal to allow those who took up land after the amending Bill were passed, the right to convert; those who already held leases should not be prejudiced. This view had been accepted by Holman, the deputy leader of the Party, before the elections and announced by him. Accordingly there were many intrigues in Caucus to defeat the more rigorous interpretation of Neilson and prevent him giving effect to his policy.

The crisis was reached while the Premier, McGowen, was in England attending the Coronation. On July 22nd, 1911, Wade, the Leader of the Opposition, moved the following motion of censure:

“That the declared policy of the Government that, in the proposed repeal of the Conversion Act, they will not preserve in their entirety the rights of those persons who are now entitled to convert their holdings, thereby repudiating a statutory compact, is inimical to the best interests of the State.”

This test was too much for the loyalty of two members of the Ministerial party. Messrs. Horne and Dunn, knowing well that they could never face their constituents had they voted for Neilson's policy, resigned without consulting either their leader or Caucus.

As the Government had only a majority of two at the best of times, this precipitate action at once destroyed its power in the House and brought about the defeat of the Labour Government. The Party managed to keep in office, but only by repudiating Neilson's policy, ejecting from office the Minister who was too scrupulous in his interpretation of the platform, and re-selecting one of the recalcitrants to contest the vacancy; for the stricter policy was an utterly hopeless one as the main issue of an election. Thus a minority was able to dictate to Caucus before it had even had an opportunity of discussing the details of the proposed Bill, and forcing upon the Labour Party a policy which appeared disingenuous. To prevent a recurrence of such a crisis the next Conference of the P.L.L. decided on the motion of Stuart-Robertson, M.L.A.:

“That any member resigning without the consent of Caucus and the Executive shall be ineligible for selection for five years.”

To ensure the reality of Caucus supremacy, a further safeguard was needed – the election of the Ministry by that body; the leader was already elected each Parliament by Caucus at its first meeting. At the 1906 Conference in N.S.W. a motion in favour of this procedure was moved. “Hitherto,” said the mover, “men who have got seats in Cabinets have been merely friends of their leader. A man would abstain from

criticising his leader's actions in expectation of favours to come." Thus the rule of Caucus might degenerate into a thinly-veiled dictatorship by one man working through the forms of majority rule. Many of the older parliamentarians, such as Holman and Catts, bitterly opposed the motion. They contended that the leader, who is responsible to Caucus and Conference for the successful passage of Labour's legislative programme and the execution of its administrative policy, was the best judge of the fittest lieutenants to assist him in his task and that, therefore, it was in the best interests of the Movement that he should be allowed to choose men he could rely upon. The motion was at this time rejected, but the election of the Ministry by Caucus has since become the recognised rule of the Labour Parties. In 1908 Fisher, in forming his first Ministry in the Federal Parliament, left the selection of Ministers to Caucus, reserving to himself the allocation of portfolios among those selected. This practice has since been invariably followed.

The test of the adequacy of the Caucus checks comes when Labour has at length climbed into office. It has been found so far only partially effective. Elevation to Cabinet rank at once gives a new status and a new outlook to the Labour Minister, sharply sundering him from his former associates on the floor of the House. McNamara, M.L.C., a Victorian delegate, told the 1919 Federal Conference of the A.L.P. that Ministers receiving high salaries had become a class apart. "They came into Caucus as a solid body, even when they had differences of opinion upon subjects amongst themselves, and presented their proposals in such a way that it did not always make for the best in administration and subsequently in legislation."

The Minister faced with the actual responsibilities of governing, administering the details of his department, surrounded by outwardly obsequious Civil servants, courted by men of wealth and influence, an honoured guest at public functions, riding in his own State motor car, is prone to undergo a mental transformation. He inevitably looks at administrative questions from a different angle to that in which they appear to the private member. The latter wants a lot of things – mostly apparently small and simple – done for himself, his constituents, his friends, or his union; the Minister seems to possess the power to grant most of such requests. But the Minister is painfully aware of the limitations placed upon his power by considerations of finance, by constitutional usage, by the traditional procedure of his department, and by the very multiplicity of conflicting claims upon his favour. He is more fully seised of the implications of each question than a private member can be. He must beware of creating precedents rashly, confidential information in his possession cannot be revealed, lest it should slip out if too many persons are privy to it. The members of the Cabinet become bound together by sharing such difficulties, by the mutual recognition of the more intimate and secret problems of Government and a common desire to maintain their positions in the House and the Party, and to ensure both their return by the country and their re-election by Caucus. For that reason they tend to preserve a solid front to Caucus. They resent its criticism both because they can see ways of retaining the Party in office and dangers to themselves and the State, which it would be unsafe or useless to explain to their followers, and because the latter's criticism is often inspired by personal jealousy and ventilated by possible rivals. They

can generally secure the support of a majority at any meeting by judicious concessions to the demands preferred by individual members on behalf of their constituencies, and thus buy over a sufficient number of waverers to secure their supremacy.

And then the decisions of Caucus can very often be ignored. It is hard to imagine that a majority of members would be prepared to vote against the Government on the floor of the House and thus jeopardise the Labour Ministry if Ministers took the bit in their teeth. In any Parliament composed of professional politicians the anti-dissolution party is always in a majority, and this is especially so in the case of a Labour Party where the members are not only professional politicians, but are practically kept off the labour market by the possession of seats. Hence the threat of a dissolution is always a powerful weapon in the hands of the Ministry.

The only real check which Caucus can exercise in the last resort over defiant Ministers is to refuse to re-elect them if the Party is again returned to power in the next Parliament. It is noteworthy, however, that it is extremely rare, save in cases where the Minister has resigned owing to a definite split with the majority of Caucus, his colleagues, like Neilson in 1911, or Adamson in Queensland at conscription time, for a Minister to fail to secure re-election. In 1914 it is true that Caucus refused to re-elect Edden, the former Minister for Mines, but he had displayed a quite unusual degree of culpable incompetence. In two successive Federal Ministries no Ministers were eliminated by Caucus, and the same has happened in three consecutive Labour Governments in Queensland, although in the Caucus election of 1920 J. Fihelly failed to secure re-election as Deputy-Leader. Such remarkable consistency in the choice of old favourites is sufficient commentary on the efficacy of this check in the hands of Caucus.

The deliberations of Caucus are supposed to be secret, and it is therefore difficult to gauge accurately how far Ministers are prepared to defy it. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of instances are common knowledge to enable one to confirm the opinion advanced above on a priori grounds.

For example, the McGowen Government in 1912 introduced a Bill into the Assembly granting a piece of land at Newcastle to the B.H.P. Company (Broken Hill Proprietary Company, Ltd.) for the establishment of steel works. This seemed a contravention of the plank of the fighting platform promising State iron and steel works. It was afterwards admitted that this measure had been tabled before it had ever been submitted to Caucus. Several members of the Party, therefore, voted against the Bill in the Assembly, but it had the support of the Opposition and passed easily. In the second Parliament of the Holman Government, Caucus set up a Bills Committee, to which all legislation had to be submitted before it was introduced in the House. The Premier seems to have acknowledged its right to examine Government measures.

A very critical question for the Party arose during this Parliament – the right of Caucus to be consulted in respect to the appointment of Legislative Councillors. Conference in 1911 had recommended a certain procedure in regard to these nominations, but the Cabinet ignored this. After the nominee Upper Chamber had

mutilated a large number of Labour Bills, the Government at last in 1912 recommended ten gentlemen for appointment to the Council. Of these ten only four had signed the pledge approved by Conference. Some of the others were really members of the Party, but others again were not, and two consistently voted against the Government. In making these appointments Cabinet had acted entirely on its own initiative, and they came in for very scathing criticism from Caucus and Conference.

Accordingly, in the next Parliament, Caucus carried a resolution on the motion of R. D. Meagher, that no further appointments to the Council should be made unless the names of the proposed appointees had been approved by Caucus. Holman, the Premier, was absent from the meeting which made this decision, but when he heard of it, he announced his intention of defying it in a Press statement. "As long as that resolution remains on the records of the Party," said the Premier, "there will be no appointments to the Upper House." He contended that such appointments were purely Executive matters, and that Caucus could not interfere with Executive functions. As if to enforce the latter dictum, he shortly afterwards assigned the portfolio of Public Health to G. Black, who had been elected to the Ministry on the distinct understanding that he should be only an honorary Minister.

Had Holman's dictum stood it would have meant a very serious limitation of the supervisory power of Caucus, since administration is, from the Labour standpoint, often quite as important as legislation. Nor is the distinction between executive and legislative acts logical. A Government is called upon to give an account in the House of its administration, and therefore the Party must take responsibility for acts which they may have to defend in the Assembly. However, the Holman position was finally rejected by the Party at the 1916 Conference. In Queensland, the only other State that has a nominee Second Chamber, the Ryan-Theodore Governments have always left the choice of Councillors to Caucus, while the names have also been submitted to the Executive for endorsement as in the case of Labour candidates for the Lower House.

It must not be thought, however, that the Labour Governments in Queensland have been much more submissive to Caucus domination. In 1919 J. M. Hunter was holding no less than three portfolios in a temporary capacity although Caucus had more than once laid it down that this gentleman was to be only an honorary Minister. It is also understood that Caucus passed a resolution forbidding further expenditure on the purchase of State cattle stations. A little later the purchase of a still larger estate for this purpose was announced.

Yet, although unable to control the actions of Ministers, the Labour Member is discouraged from criticising them in public. In November, 1915, Gardiner (M.L.A. for Newcastle in the N.S.W. Parliament), made a scathing attack on the Government's handling of the Labour situation during the war in his speech on the Budget. Premier Holman rushed into the Chamber in a towering rage, and said in the course of his reply: "If the hon. Member makes another speech like the one he made to-day in this House, I will have him expelled from the Party, or I will leave it myself. He has already been warned privately, and now I tell him so publicly." Similarly Frank Anstey, sickened by the Government's inactivity and pre-occupation in militarism, and

finding his criticisms in Caucus falling upon deaf ears, resigned from the Federal Labour Party in order to be in a position to ventilate publicly his indignation.

The limitations of Caucus control have become so notorious that some curious proposals were put before the Federal Conference of 1919 for revolutionary modifications in the system of Cabinet Government. One motion proposed to associate with the Minister in the administration of each department a committee of five members elected by Caucus. The mover wanted the work of administration to be carried out by practically the whole Party, and not to be the work of ten or twelve men. Another delegate thought a committee would help to fix responsibility, and go a long way towards purifying public life. Premiers, actual like Theodore, or expectant like Tudor and Storey, agreed in branding the proposition as unworkable. If responsibility was divided it could not be fixed. As it was, Cabinet had to account to the Party for any errors. The motion was lost by 11 votes to 17.

In conclusion, we may remark that the Caucus system seems to discourage brilliance and originality. The exceptional man is always suspect. When a man of marked ability does succeed in gaining the lead, like Holman or Theodore, he tends to become autocratic. A man of outstanding ability and dominating personality naturally resents dictation from those less gifted and well informed than himself – men who are not in so good a position as he is to judge of the complexities of a political situation, and whom he is apt to despise as intellectual inferiors. The democratic discipline of the Labour Party has in several instances turned such men into apostates. That was the fate of Holman, Kidston and Hughes. Such men may honestly believe that they are indispensable to the Party and that they, and they alone, know what is best for it and the masses it represents; and therefore persist in a policy, in the teeth of popular opposition, to the breaking point, where a lesser man would seek by servile compliance with the caprices of his followers to maintain himself in his position at the cost of his principles. The truly great Labour leader who can steer a middle course between both these extremes is rare. T.J. Ryan was the most splendid example. In general Caucus likes an able man as leader, but in filling other posts inclines to pay more attention to personal qualities of good fellowship than to fitness for Ministerial responsibility. A versatile and original thinker like Anstey is too dangerous to receive preferment from Caucus. Safe moderate men are generally preferred.

Chapter III. The Control of the Politicians by the Movement

THE Labour view of democracy which has been explained in Chapter 1 implies the formulation of a policy for the Parliamentarians by the Party as a whole and, to ensure its proper execution, a control of the politicians by the Movement outside Parliament was also found to be required. To fulfil these two objects an elaborate extra-Parliamentary organisation of the Party was inevitable. The unit of this organisation is the league in each electorate. These leagues are more than ad hoc committees such as every political party establishes for election purposes. They have not only the power of selecting the candidate to bear Labour's banner in the electorate; they also appoint delegates to the State Conference of the Party, and have the right to send along to that Assembly proposals for the amendment of the platform and other recommendations respecting the Party's policy and direction. Every voter resident in the electorate who pays a small subscription, and pledges himself not to vote against the selected Labour candidate, is eligible for membership. He thus can obtain a share in determining the Party's policy; for the league meets periodically and any member may initiate proposals to be sent on to the Conference.

Conference meets annually in the Southern States and triennially in Queensland. In the former it is composed of delegates from the leagues together with representatives of the affiliated unions. In the north the latter have only secured separate representation since 1916. In the interval between Conferences its authority is exercised by an Executive. The management of the Party funds, details of organising work, and the endorsement of candidates are in the hands of the latter body. For the management of the Federal Party an Inter-State Conference, consisting of six delegates, each selected by the State Conferences, meets at least once every three years. It draws up the Federal platform, and generally deals with subjects that come within the scope of the Commonwealth Parliament, considering, as a rule, only propositions emanating from one of the State Conferences. An Inter-State Executive has been established only since 1915. It is composed of two delegates chosen by each of the State Conferences, but, chiefly owing to the enormous distances separating the several State capitals, it scarcely functions. Moreover, it has no separate funds under its control, the conduct of the Federal elections being still reserved to the State Executives, which also retain the exclusive right of endorsing the candidates for the Federal Parliament who run in their respective States.

We have already seen how the organisation of the Party outside Parliament was in N.S.W. obliged to exercise a control over the members of the Legislature. The exercise of the rights thus vindicated for Conference and the Executive has often been found necessary since then. The Parliamentary representative of the workers tends to set himself up as a leader and to claim the right to neglect the recommendations of Conference, and even the sacred platform itself in accordance with his interpretation of the interests of the Party which is frequently determined by considerations of personal safety and mere political expediency. This is plainly contrary to the Labour theory of self-government, and has to be checked by the exercise of the authority of

the governing organs of the Party. The fact is that, possessed of a substantial salary, a gold pass on the railways and other privileges, and surrounded with the middle-class atmosphere of Parliament, the workers' representative is liable to get out of touch with the rank and file that put him in the Legislature, and to think more of keeping his seat and scoring political points than of carrying out the ideals he was sent in to give effect to. Thus conflicts between the politicians and the organised Labour Movement have been fairly frequent. In cases of downright defiance the Executive can resort to the expedient of refusing endorsement to the recalcitrant at the next election, thus preventing him from running as a Labour candidate. This was the method by which Joseph Cook and his followers were got rid of in 1894. Revolts of the politicians ending in their expulsion or desertion from the Party have been fairly common in most States.

Queensland had such an experience in 1905. In the previous year the Party had agreed to enter a Coalition Ministry, and Kidston, a Labour M.L.A., was chosen to represent the Party as Treasurer in the new Government. The State Conference met in 1905 and reaffirmed Plank XL of their platform – “Immediate Cessation of the Sale of Crown Lands.” This plank was an integral part of the Party's policy which aimed ultimately at the abolition of all freeholds and the substitution therefore of perpetual leaseholds. Conference therefore determined that compliance with this plank should be a condition of further support for the Coalition by the Labour Party. At the same meeting a new Socialist objective was adopted. The Labour Treasurer was not prepared to enforce Plank XL, which was unpopular, while the sale of Crown Lands brought in a substantial revenue. Therefore he left the Party, putting forward as his pretext the new objective. The Party still gave regular support to the Government, of which Kidston soon became the head; for Labour could hardly support the extreme Tory opposition, the only alternative.

But in 1907 Conference reaffirmed its decision in regard to the enforcement of Plank XL in opposition to the wishes of George Kerr, the new Parliamentary Leader. He, too, thereupon deserted the Party along with eighteen other members, twelve of whom were rewarded for their treachery by losing their seats at the next election. Some sentences from the Presidential Address of Mat Reid at the 1907 Conference are worth quoting as a commentary on these events. After condemning opportunism in the rank and file of the Party, he proceeded:

“Opportunism will always produce Opportunists. Once you allow the politician to boss the show, he will give away everything to save himself, because he believes himself indispensable to the show, and in fact ends by becoming the show himself, and making a holy show of the rest of us. The supposed strong point made by the defaulters is their practical achievement of something in our time . . . legislating up to public opinion as all politicians do. But no party worthy of the name of Labour will follow public opinion; it will make and mould it.”

After this first disillusionment, and the warning given by the fate of the “rats,” the Party in Queensland has preserved a remarkable solidarity. For instance, it alone stood united on the Conscription issue, suffering only one desertion.

In N.S.W., although disillusionment soon came to the rank and file, no actual split took place between 1894 and 1916. The Movement tolerated, albeit not without impatient protest, the obvious determination of the Parliamentary leaders to set the rank and file at defiance. This was probably attributable to the unwillingness of the Party to sacrifice the services of such brilliant men as W. A. Holman. They tried instead to make him and his colleagues subservient to the general will of the Party, and a long record of bitter disputes and wrangles testifies to the vanity of the attempt.

The question of alliances may serve as an illustration of the tendencies of this struggle. In its early days the Party had adopted the role of a third party bargaining for concessions. When, however, Federation removed the fiscal question beyond the realm of State politics, the only real issue that kept apart the two old parties had disappeared, and Labour could no longer hold the balance of power and extort concessions thereby. To achieve their aims they must hope to reach the Treasury Benches. Labour, therefore, took on it the functions of direct opposition in 1904, but a sort of alliance was maintained with the remnants of the See-Lyne party. But Coalition Governments were no longer the ambition of the Party. The example of Kidston was a warning against that, while Labourites reasonably expected soon to attain a direct Labour Government which they supposed would give effect to a large portion of Labour's ideals. Accordingly the 1906 Conference resolved "that in future Labour should not enter into any alliance with another Parliamentary Party extending beyond the existing Parliament or promise immunity at election time." This encroached on the functions usually left to Caucus, but Conference feared lest the prospect of escaping three-cornered contests, if immunity were granted to sitting Labourites in return for a similar concession to members of some other party, might prove so alluring to the politicians that they would sacrifice the best interests of the Movement as a whole to their personal advantage. Therefore H. Lamond said that if it was necessary to depart from the principle thus laid down the decision should rest with the leagues and not with the Labour Members, who were personally interested in the matter. On the other hand, it was argued that "if the Party could not trust men like Watson, Hughes and others – well, they had no right to send them into Parliament." The men on the spot with their fingers on the pulse of the electorates were in a better position to decide what measures were likely to further the progress of the Movement.¹

The decision of Conference was not accepted quietly by the politicians. They found a way of subverting it by their influence on the Executive. In the State elections of 1908 Mr. Cameron, who had been selected to contest the Annandale seat in the Labour interest, was asked to stand down at the last moment at the instigation of Holman. In defence of this action at the 1908 Conference, the latter explained, that by granting immunity to the See-Lyne candidate for that seat, Labour got a clear run for five other seats in Sydney and his explanation was accepted. Nevertheless, at a subsequent session it was resolved that in future every seat should be contested. This had the effect of denying all discretionary powers to the Executive in the matter of granting immunity. In support of the resolution Arthur Rae (A.W.U.) said:

“If you entrust this question to the Executive when there are a number of members of Parliament on that body who see before them the glittering rays of office, there is a strong temptation in their way to do things which a calm, cool body like Conference might not sanction. Some of the Executive have indulged in an amount of wire-pulling that is calculated to do harm to the general principles of the Movement.” 2

As a safeguard against the subversion of Conference decisions by political influence on the Executive it has been proposed to exclude parliamentarians from that body. In Queensland there is a rule which prevents members of Parliament occupying a majority of places on the Executive, and a move in this direction was made in N.S.W. at the 1910 Conference. Lynch then moved that all members of Parliament returned by a P.L.L. be eliminated from the Executive. He contended that it was an anomaly that State Labour Members should be represented on a body that was practically there to control them. However, the motion was defeated. A similar motion was, however, adopted by the 1916 Conference. By that time, as we shall shortly see, the unionists in the Party had been thoroughly sickened by the failure of the Holman Government to carry out the platform of the Movement and had organised to capture Conference. The motion emanated from J. Cullinan, of the Western Branch of the A.W.U., and speaking to the motion Arthur Blakeley, A.W.U., remarked that:

“After twelve months' experience on the Executive, I am of the opinion that it is impossible for men to sit on the Executive, meet a politician and speak with him without being influenced by him. If we are going to let our servants review their own work we are not going to get very good work.”

Another delegate argued that members of Parliament were there to pass legislation, yet, instead of being their servants, they claimed to dictate to the Labour Movement.

Before, however, describing this crisis, it will be best to recount the steps by which the growing hostility between the rank and file to the dominant personalities in the State Parliamentary Party became manifest. During 1909 McGowen and Holman differed violently from the Federal Party on the subject of the “Financial Agreement” between the States and the Commonwealth, and went so far as openly to oppose the views of the Federal Party during the campaign. For this they were hotly criticised at the 1910 Conference which supported the Federal Party.¹ Two years later, when both the State and Federal Parties were occupying the Treasury Benches, a dispute between the two parties brought the recently-formed State Ministry into open conflict with the governing body of the Movement.

The Federal Labour Government, led by Fisher, found the powers allowed to the Commonwealth under the Constitution insufficient to give effect to vital principles in the Federal Labour platform, particularly the “New Protection” and the control of monopolies. To meet this impasse they decided to ask the people to extend their powers over commercial and industrial matters at the expense of the States' powers by a referendum. The proposals were submitted to the 1911 Labour Conference by Hughes, the Federal Attorney-General. The majority of the newly-elected State Ministry were not anxious to see a large slice of their recently-acquired power taken

out of their hands and transferred to their Federal confrères. Holman, in particular, was too jealous to allow his rival Hughes to snatch from his grasp a jot of his lately-won prestige and influence. He stoutly opposed the proposals of the Federal Ministers, and argued that, after all the time and money spent on getting Labour into office in N.S.W., the Ministry should be given a chance. However Conference was against him, and, true to the unificationist tendencies of the Movement, approved the referenda proposals by an overwhelming majority at the close of a protracted and acrimonious debate.

In the light of the pronounced hostility of Ministers A. Rae moved on behalf of the A.W.U. :

“That Conference's decision in regard to the Referenda proposals requires that State Labour Ministers and members should at once cease their opposition, or resign from the Movement.”

To this R. D. Meagher, M.L.A., moved as an amendment:

“That Conference, having overwhelmingly declared in favour of the Referenda, is prepared to trust to the loyalty of Labour members thereon.”

In the course of the debate, which was held in camera, Holman stated:

“In view of the overwhelming decision arrived at, I desire to say on behalf of myself and my colleagues that we will withdraw any opposition, and fall into line behind the proposals.”

In view of this assurance Meagher's amendment was carried. But Holman did not really give in so readily. On the following Saturday, when Conference was beginning to peter out, and most of the A.W.U. delegates were absent, he came down with a series of resolutions, having as their logical outcome the reversal of the previous decision. He first secured the passage of a motion :

“That Conference reaffirms the necessity of reconstituting the Inter-State Conference on a population basis.”

Next he moved:

“That the next Federal platform should be drawn up by such an Inter-State Conference, and that the Conference elected on the present basis should confine its labours to effecting such a reconstitution.”

This passed by 125 votes to 115, and Holman then proposed:

“That the Labour Movement oppose all further extension of the powers of the Federal Parliament until the Constitution has been remodelled on lines which secure Parliamentary supremacy (i.e., either by abolishing or so reconstituting the Senate that the States should be represented there in proportion to their populations).

This proposition aroused a storm of opposition, and Conference adjourned till the following Monday. That morning the Annual Convention of the A.W.U. suspended its business to resolve :

“That this Conference of the A.W.U. indignantly resents the traitorous attitude of Mr. W. A. Holman, M.L.A., in his latest attempt to trick the P.L.L. Conference into opposing the Federal Referenda, after signifying his readiness to obey the former decisions of Conference. His motion is a distinct breach of faith, and proves conclusively that he is determined to do the work of Mr. Wade and other reactionaries. Further, this Conference is of opinion that Mr. Holman should be at once required by the P.L.L. to withdraw from the Political Labour Movement and fight it outside and not from within.”

Copies of this resolution were distributed among delegates when the P.L.L. Conference resumed that evening. Lamond, of the A.W.U., was now in the chair, and he ruled Holman's third proposition out of order, and his second resolution was rescinded by 129 votes to 82 – a bitter lesson in discipline to the Deputy-head of the State. But Conference recognised the gifts of leadership possessed by Holman too well to act on the last paragraph of the A.W.U. resolution.¹

When the referenda campaign was opened the majority of the State Ministers kept ostentatiously quiet. The Premier was in England, but Holman and most of his colleagues retired to the expensive tourist-resort of Mt. Kosciusko. Beeby, on the other hand, announced in his own electorate that he intended to vote against the Federal Government's proposals. Of the members of Cabinet, only Carmichael and Trefle bowed to the will of Conference, and spoke in favour of the constitutional alterations, and that only in a belated and halfhearted manner. The passive resistance of leading Ministers came in for some stinging criticisms in the columns of the Worker, the only Labour paper in N.S.W., controlled by the A.W.U.

“There are times,” it wrote, “when silence is more weighty than speech, and the silence of men who should have been speaking for Labour, is the keenest weapon used against us in this campaign. Mr. Holman and his followers may pose as passive resisters, but are in reality in the forefront of the Tory campaign.”

On Beeby's declaration of hostility it was even more severe. The leader was headed “THE BACKSLIDING OF BEEBY.” The article went on to describe his attitude as

“a challenge to organised Labour. This can only be ignored by those who are prepared to sacrifice that solidarity without which the Labour Party would soon be reduced to impotence.”²

The Executive took a serious view of the situation, and called a special Conference to consider the attitude of the State Labour members.

The Special Conference met late in August, and the substantive motion was:

“That any member of Parliament, who by omission or commission has opposed the Referendum, be censured by Conference for disloyalty.”

To this an A.W.U. delegate moved an amendment that Holman, Beeby and Page be expelled as traitors. Both motions were, however, felt to be too strong, in view of the political situation at the moment; for the State Government was still in the throes of the crisis caused by the resignations of Horne and Dunn. Hughes therefore proposed the following :

“That in order to preserve the solidarity of the Labour Movement, Conference decides that the sole right of interpreting the planks of the Federal and State platforms rests with Conference, but that until Conference has exercised its right, this power rests with the Federal and State Parties.”

In the course of his speech, he laid down two principles of tremendous importance in the future evolution of the Movement. He argued:

(1)” That the Movement as a whole should control the actions, and, if necessary, the speeches of members of it. The repression of individual will involved did not concern them because no one was bound to come into the Movement or forced to remain in it.

(2)” To require men to adhere to certain planks involved that they should know what those planks meant. Conference was vested with the power not only of creating, but also of interpreting the platform. Every member of the Movement had to accept that interpretation.”

In the end, however, a non-committal resolution was carried to the effect that

“in future the Executive shall not endorse as Labour candidates any person who at a referendum opposes or fails to support proposals submitted to the people by the Federal or State Labour Parties, provided that such proposals must first have been endorsed by an InterState or N.S.W. Conference.” 1

The comparative lenience shown by the Special Conference was hardly justified in the sequel. The same propositions were again submitted to the people by the Federal Labour Government in May, 1913. Before the campaign Holman took a trip to Japan. Beeby resigned from the Labour Party, Parliament and the Cabinet, in order to oppose the referenda; and Page, M.L.A., did oppose them without, however, resigning from the Party. In the by-election, rendered necessary by his resignation, Beeby ran again as an independent for his old seat Blayney, and received the secret support of his former colleagues. The election was held under the second ballot system. In the first ballot, Ministers of the State Labour Government gave little support to the selected Labour candidate. In the words of the Worker:2

“Ministers were almost as busy outside the Blayney electorate as they had been within the Mudgee electorate when Beeby's brother Dunn was being ministerially whitewashed.”

This leader was headed,

“LABOUR BETRAYED BY THE GOVERNMENT.”

The Labourite alone was eliminated at the first ballot, and a second was necessary to decide between Beeby and the “Liberal” Ministers now showed their hands. They issued a strongly worded manifesto recommending the Labourites in the electorate to vote for Beeby. The Executive issued a counter-recommendation advising all Labour supporters to abstain from giving Beeby any support in the second ballot, “in view of his declared opposition to vital principles of the Labour Movement.” Yet Beeby was returned, and his vote kept the Labour Ministry in office for a few months, enabling it to choose a favourable time for an appeal to the country. This the Worker called “relying on a Labour black-leg for a few months more of office.”

Page was refused endorsement for the Botany seat by the Executive when the next elections came round at the end of the year. He left the Party, which lost the seat. The matter was discussed in connection with the Executive's report at the 1914 Conference. Holman, now re-elected Premier with a large majority, warmly defended Page. Many, he continued, did not believe in the referenda in their entirety. “Do you,” he asked, “expect those to go on the platform and make public liars of themselves?” “You ought to have got out like Beeby,” interjected a delegate. “There would have been many of us,” replied the Premier, “who would have had to get out, and many in the Movement who wanted to get us out so that they might take our places.” 1

Probably there was a good deal of truth in the Premier's retort.

The disputes between the State members and the Party organisation on the questions at issue between the State and Federal Parties have been described at some length, because they serve to illustrate the relative immunity with which the politicians could defy the clearly expressed will of the bulk of their supporters and their persistence in so doing in spite of the decisions of Conference. That body showed itself powerless to enforce its determinations. The only weapon it possessed was the refusal of endorsement, and when that was applied in the case of Page it recoiled upon the Party, as he won the seat against Labour instead of for it. Even more hopeless seemed the attempts of the governing organs of the Movement to compel the Parliamentary Party to carry out the planks of the platform on which they had been elected when the Party had at length reached the longed-for goal of Ministerial responsibility. Great things were naturally expected of the Labour Government. Ministers, on the other hand, did not seem eager to set about putting the platform on the Statute Book. Perhaps their supporters did not appreciate the difficulties that confronted their representatives, but they certainly had cause to be disappointed.

The question of land nationalisation and the abolition of freehold played a prominent part in the earlier stages of the process by which the rank and file were disillusioned. As noted above, this plank in the Labour platform was very unpopular among the farming constituencies, and therefore Labour candidates for such electorates did their best to hide the plank. Even at the 1909 Conference notice had to be taken of

statements by two Labour Members to the effect that they did not believe in land nationalisation.¹ The 1911 Conference reaffirmed the plank, and, as if to emphasise its insistence on the question, A. Rae proposed to censure the new Minister for Lands, Neilson, for proceeding with the sale of Crown Lands at Maroubra. The Minister explained that the lands in question had been already offered for sale before he assumed office, and his explanation was accepted. Indeed, as soon as he entered upon the duties of his department, he had published a minute prohibiting further sales of Crown Lands.

The resignations of Horne and Dunn in the same year, however, as a protest against the same Minister's strict interpretation of the plank as it applied to the Conversion Act, put a new complexion upon the situation. As we have remarked, those resignations were the outcome of a revolt of the representatives of agricultural constituencies against Neilson's scrupulous adherence to the spirit of the Labour platform. In order to save their majority in the House, Cabinet repudiated Neilson, and with him a fragment of the Labour platform. They forced Neilson to resign, and then persuaded the Executive to re-select Dunn to contest again his old seat (there was no time to hold a plebiscite). This action was thus described by the Worker:

“In order to win these seats, the Party has brought itself into line with traitors and even adopted one of these traitors as its representative. The Executive has been practically superseded by the State Party by whom the selections have been controlled.”

At the 1913 Conference Lestrangle (A.W.U.) moved to express disapproval of the action of the Executive in re-selecting Dunn for Mudgee. Holman admitted the charge of having interfered with the Executive's function, and personally assumed full responsibility for the selection. But he denied that Dunn had ratted. The repeal of the Conversion Act was not on the platform, and in any case Neilson's interpretation of repeal was not necessarily the right one. The Government, he continued, could not help the feeling in the country against leasehold. Dunn was the only man who could have won the seat, and he had saved the Government and therewith the Redistribution Act (which would give Labour a better chance of adequate representation at the next election). The latter arguments were no doubt right, but they were cynically opportunist, and did not meet with the approval of Conference which adopted Lestrangle's motion.¹

Undeterred by this adverse vote, the politicians during the next session not only neglected to do much towards putting the Labour platform on the Statute Book, but also flatly defied two other planks of their fighting platform – Abolition of the Legislative Council and State Iron and Steel Works. Conference had adopted a “suicide pledge” to be signed by all Labour nominees to the Upper House (i.e., that they would strive and vote for the abolition of the Chamber to which they were appointed). But when the Government made ten appointments to that House, it was found that only four had been required to sign the pledge. Some of the appointees were not Labour members at all, though there were plenty of men who had worked for the Party, without reward for years, who were entitled to seats in the Council.

Secondly, Cabinet stultified Plank 6 (State Ironworks), by concluding an agreement with the B.H.P. Co., ceding them for a nominal consideration a valuable water frontage at Newcastle, on which to build a private iron and steel works. The Bill ratifying this agreement had not even been submitted to Caucus when it was introduced.

Both these matters received the attention of the 1913 Conference. It decided by a ten to one majority "that the action of the McGowen Ministry in appointing other than pledged Labour men to the Legislative Council was contrary to the spirit of the P.L.L. constitution and detrimental to the Party." Carmichael, who apologised on behalf of the Government, said that there were some things that the Government had to take into their own hands. "As far as they knew," several of the nominees objected to were members of leagues. The appointment of the Lord Mayor of Sydney – Sir Allen Taylor, a bitter Conservative – was a long established usage that outweighed Party considerations. In reply J. J. Talbot asked "Why Ministers did not stand up like men and say, 'We gave them seats for payments received.' The public knew that." It was true that several of the unpledged appointees were men of considerable wealth, while Taylor, in addition, was supposed to have been associated with the Minister for Works in an allegedly corrupt transaction – the purchase of a site for State Timber Works. These circumstances suggested a similarity between these appointments of persons to the Council with the title "Honourable" and a gold-pass for life, and the award of honours for services to the Party under the English system. The B.H.P. steel works deal was also condemned as a violation of Plank 6. Hughes warned delegates that it would mean the establishment of a monopoly – the very thing the Labour Party was fighting. McGowen confessed that the Bill had been tabled without Caucus being consulted. The only reply that the Minister for Works had to offer was that it was a question between the B.H.P. steel works or none at all. The Government could not get money to establish works of their own. The adverse vote was carried by 104 votes to 42. These remonstrances had no immediate effect, but before the elections, which were due at the end of the year, the old Premier, with his twenty years of service to the Movement in Parliament, retired from the leadership to make room for the ambitious young Attorney-General, W. A. Holman. This was a concession to the general dissatisfaction in the ranks of the Party with the do-nothing policy of the McGowen Cabinet. It was reasonably hoped that the young and supposedly advanced Holman would display more zeal and energy. Thus McGowen was made to shoulder the blame for his Government's obvious shortcomings. This change was the more necessary, since the old Premier had inflamed the feelings of unionists by issuing a proclamation calling for volunteers to work the retorts during the gas strike of 1913.

The apparent triumph of Conference was, however, deceptive. Although returned to power with a substantial majority, which gave it no excuse for inaction, at the elections of December, 1913, the new Government did nothing more than its predecessor. Parliament took a long recess at the beginning of 1914, and then, with the outbreak of the European war, the Premier announced a Party truce and the abandonment of contentious legislation. This attitude did not meet with approval of the Party outside. While entirely loyal to the Empire the bulk of the Labour

Movement did not realise the gravity of the situation as vividly as its leaders did, not being exposed to the same influences as they were. It wanted labour legislation and saw no reason for its postponement because of events at the other end of the world. The Ministers, on the other hand, felt the full pressure of imperial propaganda and took an alarmist view of the financial situation. Moreover, the Party strongly disapproved of the Government's action in signing a contract with the Norton-Griffiths Company for the execution of public works. The Labour policy was the elimination of the middleman, and the carrying out of such work by the Government direct with "day labour."

Hence, the 1915 Conference proposed to censure the Government for "their absolute failure or refusal to carry out Planks 1 (Abolition of the Legislative Council), 4 (Day Labour), and 6 (State Ironworks) of their Fighting Platform ; and their pre-election promises – Fair Rents Courts and the extension of the State Housing Scheme." The opposition was confident, and had brought Hughes up from Melbourne to denounce as financially unsound the Norton-Griffiths contract. But Holman had carefully organised to defeat his critics. His replies were uncompromising. He dwelt on the danger of a financial crisis, involving the complete suspension of industry and general unemployment. "Who," he asked, "in such straits would tinker with Arbitrations Bills?" As to the Upper House, he had promised three seats, but he thought that two of his nominees would sign the pledge. The Movement was under an obligation. It was no use attacking that Chamber unless they caught it red-handed. The contract with Norton-Griffiths provided for the financing of public works at a time when loan money was unobtainable. The company was committed to a large annual expenditure, and this would provide work for a number of men and keep down unemployment which otherwise would have been terrific. The day-labour principle was retained under the terms of the contract. The Government engaged the workmen and supervised the execution of the works. In conclusion he castigated the Worker for its disloyal carping criticism, and attacked the A.W.U. Many bitter things were said in reply. The Premier was told that he had no right to promise seats in the Council without consulting the Party, and could not put the Movement under any obligation. Even his own parliamentary colleagues contributed to the attack, and in so doing summed up the position rather acutely. J. Dooley said "Holman's promise was a scrap of paper, or else the platform was." Stuart-Robertson remarked that a motion might as well be carried to "hand the Movement over to W. A. Holman to do what he liked with." Yet, thanks to Holman's preparatory organisation, the no-confidence motions were defeated by large majorities.¹

The result of the Conference had therefore been only to emphasise the disregard of the Government to the wishes of the Party. They only showed a slight amendment during the following year. The House sat for long hours, and did pass a Fair Rents Bill, but the Council remained defiant and even rejected an urgent Bill to enable the Government to establish a system of bulk-handling for grain without further delay, thus providing the very chance of "catching them redhanded" that Holman had postulated at Conference. Yet no move was made for its abolition. J. D. Fitzgerald, the President of the P.L.L., who had been one of the Government's most severe critics at

Conference, was the only fresh appointment to that Chamber. He was given a portfolio, but this step was looked upon as an attempt to stifle criticism by corrupting the critic. Accordingly an attack was very carefully organised by the industrialists in preparation for the next Conference. The failure to deal with the Council was selected as the point of attack.

The 1916 Conference marks the culmination of the struggle of the Labour Movement to exercise an effective control over its political representatives. It was also the occasion for the emergence of a new force in the Party organisation, the banding together of the unionist backbone of the Party into the Industrial Section – a phenomenon to which the next chapter will be mainly devoted. At this Conference even Holman was forced to recognise the supremacy of the extra-parliamentary machinery. The industrialist section of the Party were clamouring for industrial legislation which had been scandalously neglected by the Holman Government, but every one was heartily tired of their dalliance with the Upper House. The first step of the sectionalists was to capture a majority of places on the Executive by means of a ticket. They also secured that Conference should sit only at night, so that city toilers should be able to attend, though country delegates might cool their heels all day. Then they got to work. On April 26th J. Bailey, Vice-President of the A.W.U., moved:

“That the Holman Government be severely censured for refusing to endeavour to carry out the first plank of the Labour platform-Abolition of the Upper House.”

The debate traversed every phase of the Government's policy. “The Council,” said Lamond (A.W.U.), “has too long been an excuse for men who do not want to give us what we want.” Blakeley declared that if they could not get what they wanted from the Government, the industrialists would form a party of their own. Holman at first failed to realise the strength of the forces against him and trusted to his superiority as an intriguer. He could not imagine that the unionists should not prefer a Labour Government of whatever kind to a Tory one. In his speech he began by pointing out that an election was due in eight or nine months' time, and that the Government was getting unpopular as any Government must in war time. Next he stressed the importance of having a Labour Government in office to meet the situation which would arise on the outbreak of peace; the army would be demobilised, emigrants would stream in, unemployment would undermine the positions of the unions. “I am the only man in Conference,” he added, “who tries to concentrate his mind on how political power is to be obtained.” Then he pointed out that an appeal on the sole issue of abolishing the Council would be fatal. The Verran Labour Government in South Australia had done that in 1912, and had been routed. He would not fight the next election with fetters on like that. The Ministry had done its best. If Conference was dissatisfied he would be only too glad to be relieved of the burden of leadership. Conference made it quite plain that it was still dissatisfied. The censure motion passed by 105 to 68. After consulting with Cabinet and Caucus, Holman eventually placed his resignation in the hands of the Parliamentary Party. Whether this was “bluff” or not, it was an epoch-making event, and showed unmistakable recognition of the mastery of the Party as a whole. That the Premier should resign not to the Governor,

but to Caucus, and at the behest not of Parliament, but of an outside body, formed an interesting constitutional precedent.

Caucus sent a deputation led by John Storey, and including other well-known critics of the Ministry, to Conference with the following resolutions :

“Caucus is of opinion that the vote of censure affects the Parliamentary Labour Party as a whole, and that therefore it would be illogical and improper for Caucus to accept the resignation of the Government.”

If the Government had been of a jelly-fish character in not putting proper legislation through, he and others of the Party were just as lax as the Ministry, argued Storey. He went on to ask for directions in view of the intention now announced by the Government, to force democratic measures upon the Upper House. Conference insisted, however, that steps should be taken for the complete abolition of the Council. Thereupon Caucus accepted the resignation of the Government, and elected John Storey leader. While, however, he was deliberating upon the formation of his Ministry, Arthur Griffiths, Minister for Works under Holman, was rolling logs at the Conference, and persuaded the leaders of the industrialists to be content with the victory they had attained. When Storey returned to report the decisions of Caucus, T. Mutch moved “that while Conference thanked Caucus for its willingness to form a Ministry, it is desirous of avoiding the resignation of the Government at this juncture, and invites Mr. Holman to inform Conference how far they could go.” Holman then came back. He told Conference that he would be delighted to take a referendum on the question of abolishing the Council. He would loyally support Mr. Storey, but if the Movement desired his continuance in the position of leader, he would expect from them loyal co-operation, not carping criticism. He added:

“I am not prepared to admit that parliamentary matters can be left to anybody but ourselves. You lay down the policy you wish us to carry out; once we are in power as representatives of the people, our function begins.”

This was a very softened retreat, but the last paragraph was essential for show purposes as the cry that Labour members are not representatives of the people but the tools of an irresponsible junta at the Trades Hall, always raised by the anti-Labour forces, would be serious if given confirmation. At any rate Conference accepted the position, and resolved, on the motion of J. Doyle, that it did not want the Government to resign, but wanted the platform carried out. Storey withdrew, and so Holman was Premier again.¹

His position was, however, very insecure. He had a hostile Executive which was quite ready to refuse him endorsement if he did not do their bidding. They claimed the right to control the Ministry rather closely, wanted to be consulted upon the legislative programme for the session, and actually drafted a Right-to-Work Bill which they expected the Government to introduce. Moreover, the industrialist section in a number of leagues were taking steps to organise with a view to ousting friends of the Premier and running industrialists instead. In this crisis the conscription controversy provided

the Ministerialists with an opportunity to leave the Party without risking their seats or portfolios. The Opposition, which had been working the "loyalty stunt" for all they were worth, had no choice but to accept Holman and his colleagues as high-souled patriots when they revolted against the decision of the Executive on this question. As we shall shortly see, they were welcomed by those who had been loudest in denouncing them in the vilest terms and admitted into a Coalition Ministry. By this means the determination of the 1916 Conference was frustrated, and Labour lost its hold on the State Parliament. Small advantage was therefore reaped from the elaborate machinery devised, and it looked as if the whole idea of disciplining and controlling the politicians, to achieve which so many instruments had been devised, must go by the board. But a further discussion of the lessons of the crisis must be deferred until we have examined the circumstances that led up to the conscription split and the relations of the Federal Caucus to the Party as a whole.

Up to the time of the conscription split the Federal Labour Party, both before and after it attained the Treasury benches, had escaped serious criticism from the rank and file. For one thing, it reflected fairly well the sentiments of the majority of Australian Labourites. Moreover, when Andrew Fisher was Prime Minister, the Federal Government seems to have tried sincerely to give effect to its platform. In fact, the first Fisher Ministry that lasted more than a couple of months succeeded in carrying out the whole programme laid down for it. But that programme was more moderate in extent and less controversial in character than those of the State Parties. Socialism played a smaller part in it because the Federal "State" had few "industrial and economic functions" which could be extended, while those activities which made for "the encouragement of Australian sentiment" were more widely endorsed. The constitutional limitations placed upon the powers of the Federal Parliament precluded that body giving effect to the more Socialistic parts of the Labour programme. The interpretative powers of the High Court provided Commonwealth politicians with much the same sort of excuse as the direct obstruction of the Legislative Councils gave State members, for not putting on the Statute Book any very revolutionary legislation. Then, the Federal sphere is remote from the every day lives of unionists, and therefore attracts less attention at league and union meetings. Finally, the Inter-State Conference, which is the only body which can claim to control the Federal members, generally consists itself mainly of politicians as their railpasses enable them to cover the long distances between the capital cities without incurring additional expense to the organisation.

Yet a few rumblings of discontent made themselves heard at the Adelaide Conference of 1915. A motion from the Victorian P.L.C. conference was there submitted, protesting against the administration of the policy of preference to unionists. It was stated that the manner in which the policy was being carried out was unsatisfactory. Men were joining unions to go to Federal jobs, while old unionists of long standing were being passed over. Moreover, one of the Labour Ministers had shown too little courtesy to deputations from the unions on the subject. Fisher, however, succeeded in laying the blame on unsympathetic permanent officials who had been appointed by Labour's opponents. Hughes warned the unions not to rely too much upon spoon-

feeding. His organisation had been able to demand preference by its industrial strength. Eventually the motion was withdrawn.

When, however, Fisher went to the High Commissionership in London a change came over the scene. No sooner had he resigned than his successor, Hughes, announced a change of policy. The Adelaide Conference had determined that the questions as to the extension of the Commonwealth's powers, which had been twice rejected by the people, should be re-submitted forthwith. The necessary legislation had been passed through Parliament, and all was in trim for the campaign when Hughes came to an agreement with the States that they should voluntarily hand over the requisite powers for the period of the war. The referendum was therefore called off. This action was severely criticised by the N.S.W. and Victorian State Conferences, and a meeting of the Federal Executive was called together in Melbourne. This body, in the absence of the Prime Minister, carried a condemnatory resolution, but after he had a few words in private with some of the delegates the resolution was rescinded.¹

The Federal Ministers took a view of the war that was over the head of the average labourite. This fact ultimately led to the most serious crisis in the whole history of the Australian Labour Movement. To the official leaders of Labour winning the war appeared to be of such paramount importance that all other matter seemed negligible. That was not the view of the average worker. Apart from the minority of logically minded socialists who opposed the war altogether, the rank and file were genuinely anxious that the Allies should triumph. But they did not feel that anxiety as such an obsession that they gave up all thought about what sort of a world it should be that was to "be made safe for democracy." They were not prepared to relinquish advantages already won or to abandon the struggle to make conditions better not only for themselves, but also for those who had gone overseas to fight for democracy. Therefore, though most workers did not agree with the internationalist sentiments expressed by members of the I.W.W., they did not like to see any members of the working class gaoled by the Labour Government merely for saying what they thought. Yet the Federal Government was using the censorship and the War Precautions Act against the Melbourne Socialist and Ross's, and Tom Barker had been gaoled several times for "prejudicing recruiting" along with several other members of the I.W.W. and similar organisations. Such actions, added to the tendency of Ministers to "go slow" with social reform on the pretext of winning the war, had engendered a widespread feeling of suspicion.

Into such an atmosphere Hughes flung the torch of conscription, and in a moment split the Movement from top to bottom. Yet he had had ample warning. Industrialists looked with such distrust on the War Census Act – the Australian counterpart of the National Registration Act, which, however, required particulars as to wealth and so could have been used for conscription of wealth as well as of life – that they had deliberately allowed Fisher's old seat of Wide Bay to go to the Opposition. In four of the States the Party Conferences had declared against conscription in emphatic terms, and by overwhelming majorities. The decisions of the organs of the political movement, had been backed up or prompted by resolutions of the Annual Convention

of the A.W.U., the Labour Councils in all the States and a special Inter-colonial Trade Union Congress in Melbourne in March, 1916. In defiance of the plainest possible indications of the will of the Movement which had put him in office, Hughes on his return from England in August, 1916, declared for the hated policy. In this he had the support of all the Tories and of not a few democrats and Labourites who believed that universal service was juster and more democratic than voluntarism, which was often economic conscription under another name. And there were not wanting indications that compulsory service might be less unpopular with the workers than the decisions of Conferences and Congresses seemed to indicate. Anti-conscription meetings in Sydney Domain and on the Yarra Bank in Melbourne had been broken up by mobs.

So in September Hughes decided to submit the question to a referendum, and secured the permission of the Federal Caucus to do so. The only effective protest was made by Frank Tudor, who resigned his portfolio. But the Prime Minister failed to secure the endorsement of the State Executives for his views. The N.S.W. Executive heard Hughes state his case at a special meeting on September 4th, and resolved by 21 votes to 5 to uphold the decisions of the State Conference, and require uncompromising opposition from members. The Queensland C.P.E. came to the same decision and condemned the Prime Minister on the 5th.

The other States, except Western Australia, followed suit. The decisions of the State Conferences demanded from members of the Party positive opposition to compulsion, and laid down, as the penalty for disobedience, expulsion from the Movement. The decisions of the Executives showed that they intended that the machinery of the Party should be used to secure the defeat of the proposals to be submitted to the people. But the attitude of the parliamentarians was doubtful. In the Federal Parliament only a handful resisted Hughes from the first. Others who had been in favour at least of a referendum, only changed over under pressure from the leagues in their electorates. In the Representatives only, Burns, Catts, and Mahony, all N.S.W. members, voted against the Bill for the submission of the question to the people. The N.S.W. Caucus declared in favour of a referendum provided freedom of discussion was allowed by the censor. The Premier and most of his Ministers were known to favour the Prime Minister's proposals. The Queensland Party on September 11th decided to oppose the referendum. It was notorious that the Party was by no means unanimous on the topic. Several Ministers were undoubtedly conscriptionists, but the lesson of the Kidston split had not been lost upon Caucus. The recent speech of the Minister for justice, J. Fihelly, in which he referred to England as "a land of cant, hypocrisy, and humbug," had ruled out all hope of a coalition with the Opposition. Accordingly, while Ministers there had been subjected to the same pro-war influences as in other States and the Commonwealth, and though Cabinet included equally dominating personalities, they loyally subordinated their own opinions to the dictates of the Movement and took the stump against conscription. One member alone, John Adamson, refused to abide by this decision and left the Party. He was subsequently rewarded for his treachery by a testimonial of £1,000 got up by the Tories.

In the Southern States and the Commonwealth matters took a different course. Hughes and his colleagues continued in defiance of the Conferences and Executives to advocate an affirmative vote on the question they were propounding. They had the support of the majority in the State Parties. Then the N.S.W. and Queensland Executives took a decisive step. The latter announced on the 13th that endorsement would not be given to the candidature of any member of the House of Representatives or the Senate who did not vote against the passage of the Conscription Referendum Bill. On the 15th the N.S.W. Executive expelled Hughes and Carr, Ms.H.R., for their defiance of the Conference decisions against conscription. At the same time they withdrew the endorsement for the candidature of Holman and three other members of the State Party at the forthcoming elections. The remaining members of the Party were examined by circular, and where they did not promise their services in the no-conscription cause, they were similarly dealt with. This determined stand was only partially effective. Holman and nearly all his Cabinet colleagues revolted, and were therefore expelled by the rump of Caucus, and Durack was elected leader in place of Holman. The rebels afterwards coalesced with the Tories. Those whose seats were hopeless were rewarded with Government billets, and Labour was left in a hopeless minority.

The position of the Federal members was somewhat complicated. Defence is a Federal question, and the defence policy of the Labour Party is therefore determined by the Inter-State Conference. No such Conference had been held since conscription was mooted. Both N.S.W. and Queensland had demanded a gathering after the Prime Minister made his announcement in the beginning of September, but he pushed matters on so fast that it was too late to call such a Conference. Not even the Federal Executive could be got together. So there was no decision of the Federal authority in the Party on conscription. Hughes and his colleagues denied the right of the N.S.W. Executive to expel them, and they were right technically. They also contended that they had broken no plank or rule of the Party. Here they were on slippery ground. Hughes had himself argued in 1911 that Conference not only created, but also interpreted the platform, and the majority of State Conferences had exercised the right. On the question of the extension of Commonwealth powers obedience to the decision of either a Federal or State Conference had been laid down as binding, and Hughes was responsible for that decision. It left, at any rate, no doubt as to the subordination of State members to the rulings of their own State Conference. Probably all the State Executive could constitutionally do to Hughes was to refuse him endorsement when the next election came round. Even loyal Labourites in the Commonwealth Parliament, such as Tudor, who would not remain in the Cabinet when he felt obliged to oppose publicly his chief's policy, still recognised Hughes and his colleagues as members of Caucus. Three other Ministers, Higgs, Gardiner, and Russell, who only left the Cabinet on the eve of the vote as a protest against the interference with the secrecy of the ballot by a W.P.A. Regulation, were allowed to remain in the Party. Even when Parliament re-assembled after the defeat of the referendum, Hughes was admitted to Caucus, but a vote of no-confidence was at once moved in order to bring the Prime Minister to his knees. Hughes would not tolerate dictation. Without waiting for the vote he marched dramatically out of the Party room,

summoning his fellow conscriptionists to follow him. He was then formally expelled, and Tudor elected leader in his place.

There is no doubt that his fellow-members would have been prepared to heal the breach if Hughes had cared to eat humble pie. As it was, by forming a new Party under the name of the "National Labour Party," he and his friends put themselves outside the pale. They were now expelled from Caucus, and in most cases banned by the State Executives, so that they could not run again as Labour candidates. They were not, however, outside the Labour Party beyond all question. To further complicate the position, the Party in West Australia had agreed to give its members a free hand on conscription.

To straighten out this tangle a special Inter-State Conference met in Melbourne on December 4th. At the outset this gathering was confronted with the difficulty that the Westralians, still recognising conscriptionists as Labour men, had actually sent as a delegate Senator Lynch, who had been rewarded for his perfidy with one of the vacant portfolios in the Hughes Cabinet. As he was a member of a party actually opposing the Federal Labour Party, his position was most anomalous. He was allowed to take his seat. But after the passage of the main resolution

"That as compulsory overseas military service is contrary to the principles embodied in the A.L.P. platform, all Federal members who have supported compulsory overseas military service, or who are members of any other political party, are hereby expelled from the Australian Labour Movement,"

he was asked to leave. It was felt to be improper for a member of an opposing party to participate further in the deliberations of Conference. Two of his fellow delegates from the West also left in protest against the partial disenfranchisement of their State. Still the Special Conference legitimatised the acts of the State Executives in respect of conscription. The Perth Conference of 1918 finally made opposition to conscription a plank of the platform and pronounced a decree of perpetual ostracism against conscriptionists.

On the conscription issue the workers had been once again betrayed by their political leaders, who had defied the will of the Movement and sought to dictate to their supporters. As a consequence very many of Labour's most trusted and influential guides went over to the anti-Labour ranks. Labour was left in a minority in the Federal and State Parliaments except in Queensland, and with only the less honest or less able of its former chiefs to guide its policy in the Chambers. Those leaders, on the other hand, who refused allegiance to the policy of the Movement, were rewarded by Labour's enemies with continuance in office or lucrative positions. Yet conscription was decisively defeated and the organisation of the Party was preserved intact and pure. The great principle of the supremacy of the whole Movement over any individual, however powerful, was again vindicated conclusively. It is no longer possible for any political leader to imagine that he can run counter to the decisively expressed will of the majority of the Party and yet enjoy the benefits of its support. Most of the old Labour stalwarts, who earned the name of "rat" at this time, have

since been eliminated from political life. Even at the “khaki elections” of 1917 McGowen, Cann, Griffiths, Black and Hoyle lost their seats in N.S.W., and Hughes dare not face the electors of West Sydney who had returned him unopposed for years. In 1920 even Premier Holman was defeated, and of his last Labour Cabinet only Ashford remains in the Assembly. After three Federal elections, all Hughes' ministerial colleagues have been dismissed from political life.

Several important precedents were established by the crisis. Formerly the Executives had only been accustomed to refuse endorsement to candidates who had definitely violated the platform or broken their pledge to abide by Caucus decisions. In this instance the Executives had interpreted the platform under the guidance of Conference and had anticipated the actions of Caucus, and, in fact, determined them by means of expulsions. In this their actions were endorsed by Conference and their right to review and determine the interpretations of the platform by Caucus had thereby been established. The penalty was not confined to Members of Parliament. Private individuals in the Party suffered the same fate and leagues were declared “bogus.” That has made the Executives the arbiters of Labour orthodoxy, armed with the power to expel members of the Party for what they consider heresy. Thus a number of Labourites were expelled in N.S.W. during 1919 for supporting the “break-away Socialists,” though they had not supported the latter to the extent of joining the new party they sought to form. Higgs, M.H.R., was similarly dealt with for supporting the constitutional proposals of the Prime Minister contrary to the decisions of the 1919 Federal Conference.

The results of the conscription split have not, however, solved the problem of the control of the politicians by the rank and file of the Movement. From 1916 to 1919 the industrialist section dominated the Executive in N.S.W., and they were obsessed with the idea of controlling the politicians. They were in many instances Marxian theorists who had no conception of the parliamentary game, and hence were often at loggerheads with the parliamentarians, especially the new leader, Storey. They minutely scrutinised his every utterance and subjected him to a constant criticism which was intensely galling to one in his position. For instance, because at a union picnic he advocated piecework, he was carpeted before the Executive. As we shall see, he was driven to intrigue with the A.W.U. to break down the domination of the section at the 1919 Conference. During the war the main question which exercised the Executive in N.S.W. was peace and the participation of the Party in recruiting. The Perth Conference in July, 1918, decided upon a ballot of all members of the Party on the question of the withdrawal of the Party's support until the Allies had offered peace to Germany on a basis of no annexations and no indemnities. While the ballot was pending the State Executive sought to withdraw Labour members from the recruiting stump. Storey, however, contended that his Party had been elected on promises of whole-hearted support to the Empire on a voluntary basis, and that they were bound by their election pledges. He had nevertheless to give up speaking on the same platform as the Nationalists and promise not to interfere with the plebiscite on the Perth resolutions. On the other hand, nine members of the Federal Party in N.S.W. issued a statement condemning the recommendations of that Conference. A possible

split on the recruiting question was averted by the capitulation of Germany before the results of the Labour plebiscite were made known.

In 1919 the Inter-State Conference took a step which encroached upon the prerogatives of the Parliamentary Party. They invited T. J. Ryan to resign the Premiership of Queensland, and enter Federal politics under circumstances which were tantamount to superseding Tudor, the leader elected by Caucus. An invitation to Ryan had been already issued by the State Executives of N.S.W., Queensland, and Tasmania. In October a special Conference was called together in Sydney to reconsider one sole item of business, the decision of the regular Conference on which was challenged by the State Executives – the reduction of the exemption on the Federal Land Tax. Nevertheless, the N.S.W. Executive sprang a resolution on Conference which was not on the agenda: “That this Conference endorse the invitation to the Premier of Queensland to enter the Federal arena.” The members of the Federal Parliament were seriously disturbed by this proposal. Sen. Barnes pointed out that the resolution might be held to reflect upon the present leader, Frank Tudor. Another Victorian delegate stressed this point as follows :

“They were in effect asking Mr. Ryan to be leader instead of Mr. Tudor. They were undermining the solidarity of the Movement. They could not offer the leadership to Mr. Ryan, the only position which would compensate him for sacrificing the Premiership, because that was for the Parliamentary Party.”

Yet not only was the motion of invitation to Ryan carried, but also a further one appointing him “Campaign Director.” Barnes said, apropos of the latter:

“Such a step would make Mr. Ryan a dictator. Where would the Federal Executive and Parliamentary Labour Party be if such a motion were carried? The Federal Party had already taken steps for the conduct of the campaign. Mr. Tudor was the accredited leader until the Federal Caucus displaced him. They all wanted Mr. Ryan in the Federal arena, but it was not for Conference to make him leader.”

J. H. Catts, in reply, denied that it was intended to interfere with Tudor's functions. They wanted to give Mr. Ryan status and freedom to tour Australia. Ryan accepted the position thus offered him. A safe seat was found for him in West Sydney, the selected candidate retiring, and the State Executive selecting the northerner to fill the vacancy. However, Labour was beaten at the polls, and Tudor remained leader in the Commonwealth Parliament, Ryan being elected Deputy-Leader by Caucus.

In N.S.W. the politicians led by Storey and Catts took advantage of a split between the A.W.U. and the rest of the industrial section to drive out the extremists and secure the return of a friendly Executive. The left wing left the Party and the politicians were left to frame the bulk of the platform for the State elections. The attempts to control the politicians were for the time abandoned, but the A.W.U. was left in virtual control of the Executive. This has led, as we shall see in the next chapter to grave abuses, seriously infringing the rights of the members of the Party in the selection of candidates and delegates, and has ultimately left the Party disunited and defeated.

To sum up, then, we may say that that system of control from below adopted by the Labour Party from its inception has been proved necessary by the selfish and cowardly opportunism which has distinguished the workers' parliamentary representatives. As against that disruptive force the machinery of checks and controls has succeeded in maintaining the solidarity and identity of the Party through many crises. But when it comes to a question of forcing a Labour Government to give effect to their platform or realise the ideals they have been sent into Parliament to accomplish, the organisation has broken down. Instead of directing and controlling the activities of the parliamentarians when they have got command of the Treasury Benches, Conferences and Executives and Caucus have only been able to produce revolts and splits which have exposed the workers, enervated by spoon-feeding from Labour Ministries, to the tender mercies of bitterly capitalistic Governments.

Chapter IV. The Position of the Industrialists in the Political Labour Movement.

IN our first chapter we saw that the Labour Party was the creation of the Trade Union Movement. The first Labour platform was drafted in N.S.W. by a committee of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council; that in Queensland by the A.L.F. Convention. But unionist votes alone were not then sufficient, even were all unionists solidly behind the Labour Party (as they were not) to secure the return of Labour members. On the other hand, there were many people outside the ranks of unionism who sympathised with the ideals of Labour and were prepared to support the political movement. To cater for these as well as to serve as organising centres, the electoral leagues were organised which any one in sympathy with the aims of the Party might join. These bodies owed their foundation to organisers sent out by the Labour Council or the A.L.F. In Queensland the Conference which framed Labour's platform consisted exclusively of delegates from the electoral leagues (W.P.O.'s), and in the N.S.W. Conference they had a preponderating vote, although the unions had separate representation. But by this means persons participated in the formulation of Labour policy who were not necessarily wage-earners and were therefore not always in agreement with the peculiar aims of the working class. The league membership would include small farmers, little shopkeepers, professional men, and political adventurers. The farmers and Petit-bourgeoisie, as employers of labour, had often different interests from those of the industrial proletariat—e.g., in the case of a strike. There are thus the seeds of an internal conflict within the Movement from the first, and the two sections within the Party have always watched each other jealously.

In N.S.W. a contest soon developed between these sections as to their share in the control of the Movement. The Executive had at first consisted of the officers of the Labour Council. But the second Conference of the Party proposed to limit the representation of the Council on the Executive to three members. It was argued that the functions of the two organisations were different; the sphere of the Labour Council was the relations of employer and employed; that of the Political Labour Party social reform. The Council, as the parent of an organisation founded by and for the wage-earners, objected to handing over its control to persons who were not exclusively of that class. Yet they had to compromise. The President of the Council became ex-officio chairman of the Executive of the Political League, and the Council was granted six representatives on the latter body.

In 1894 the Labour Council decided to put in force the scheme for an Australian Labour Federation, which aimed at the amalgamation of the political and industrial sides of the Movement. But the representatives of the leagues would not agree at the 1895 Conference to being merged in the union federation. A sort of compromise was arrived at by which the two bodies were co-ordinated under the name of the Political Labour League which was now used for the first time. The league was to consist of

(1) “All unions affiliated to the Eastern Provincial Council of the A.L.F. and contributing to the funds of the P.L.L.

(2)” Members of other unions with whom special arrangements have been made by the local district associations or an unattached electoral branch.

(3)” Other adult residents who shall have subscribed to the platform and constitution of the organisation.”

The Executive consisted of two officers and seven delegates elected by Conference, together with two delegates from the A.L.F. All members of the Parliamentary Party had the right to attend, but their voting power was limited to five votes. In 1899 the A.L.F. handed over its industrial functions to the Labour Council, and dissolved. The Labour Party Conference now consisted of one delegate from each of the leagues and the affiliated unions. All the Executive was now elected by Conference except for two delegates each, appointed by the Labour members in the Assembly and Council respectively.

In 1904 the unions secured an alteration in the basis of representation at Conference that gave them a more proportionate weight in its deliberations. Under the old system a little league, which might easily have only fifty nominal members, would have the same voting strength as a union with a thousand. The new system was as follows:

For 1 to 200 members, 1 delegate.

For 201 to 500 members, 2 delegates.

For 501 to 1,000 members, 3 delegates

more than 1,000 members, 4 delegates

This concession was neutralised when, at the instigation of Holman, each league which boasted more than twenty-five women members received the right of sending to Conference an extra delegate, who must be a woman, to represent the women. It was in the interests of the politicians to strengthen the league representation in comparison with that of the unions, since the latter were most inclined to be critical. A league is often quite a family affair in the hands of the sitting member. He keeps his hold on his majority in the league by the simple expedient of paying (out of his own pocket) the subscriptions of sufficient friends to ensure his re-selection and so “keep his seat warm,” that is, if it is a safe Labour seat. Yet this league, if it can show over 200 members on the books – though many of them might be dead-heads put on by the member who never attended a meeting – could cast as many votes as a union of a thousand members. On the other hand, the unionist, though he had only one vote in the selection of candidates, if he was also a member of a league, could have a sort of double representation at Conference – by his union delegates and the league delegation.

The Special Conference held in August, 1911, when criticism was becoming embarrassing to the Labour Government, again reduced the representation of the unions. In future leagues or unions were entitled –/p>

For from 50 to 1,000 members, 1 delegate.

For from 1,001 to 4,000 members 2 delegates

For from 4,001 to 8,000 members 3 delegates

and an additional delegate for every additional 4,000 members or part thereof. The additional woman's delegates from the league was retained. Thus a union with, say, 800 members, would have only half the representation of a league with, say, 100, provided twenty-five of the latter were women. The same Conference refused the Labour Council of N.S.W. the separate representation it had hitherto enjoyed. The Council's half-yearly report refers bitterly to the ingratitude of the P.L.L. in “kicking the Labour Council out of the political movement.” Signs of the cleavage between the politicians and the unionist section of the Labour Movement had already made themselves apparent. The Trade Union Congress of 1908 had considered the I.W.W. preamble, and some delegates had expressed the opinion that political action had failed. The Tramway Strike of the same year had caused some embarrassment to the parliamentarians, as it was calculated to alienate votes by the inconvenience it caused to the public and the defiance of the Arbitration Laws which it entailed. The politicians had announced that they could not countenance a breach of the law, but had assisted in the negotiations for a settlement and were blamed for the wholesale victimisation which ensued. In reply, Beeby, M.L.A., at the Lithgow Eight Hour Banquet, ascribed the strike to “the attitude of a section of the Sydney Labour Council who did not endorse the principles of arbitration. Quite possibly he went on, there might be three parties in the House, 11 as the extreme Socialist wing threatened to try and obtain representation.”¹ The possibility foreshadowed by Beeby was temporarily checked by the complete failure of the attempt of the coal miners to use “direct action” on a large scale at the end of 1909, and the prospect of a Labour Government in the State and Commonwealth Parliaments. The first action of the McGowen Government – the release of those imprisoned by Wade in connection with the Coal Strike – was also an encouragement to unionists. But they were alive to the need of making adequate use of their power in the Party.

Before the 1911 Conference of the P.L.L., the Labour Council discussed the agenda and complained about the position of the industrialists. One delegate explained that out of 644 resolutions, only a hundred emanated from industrial bodies. He thought that the industrial delegates should insist on the trade unionists retaining the balance of power, and should vote for unionists only on the P.L.L. Executive. He protested against the domination of Members of Parliament. Complaint was also made as to the smallness of the leagues in comparison with the unions and the disproportionate representation given to the former. On the other hand, A. Vernon pointed out that there were more supporters of Labour outside the unions than within them (this was

certainly true at that time). The objection raised against Members of Parliament would react, he opined, seriously on the solidarity of the Movement. He knew no one who was more qualified, or who had a better right to dominate the counsels of the Party, than a Member of Parliament.¹ The general feeling of the Movement was at the time undoubtedly in favour of giving the new Government a fair trial and so the secessionist movement made little headway. Later on in the same year the Broken Hill Labour Council proposed the formation of a Trades Union Political Party. The N.S.W. Labour Council, angered at its treatment by the Special Conference of the P.L.L., gave this proposition serious consideration, but the decision was postponed and, in fact, never made.

However, the Government's activity or inactivity gave cause for bitter disappointment to unionists. Early in 1912 the Legislative Council cut out the clause granting effective preference to unionists from the new Arbitration Act, and excluded from its benefits clerks and rural workers. Later on Caucus accepted an amendment moved by one of their number, McGarry, to exclude farmers from the provisions of the Bill to amend the Shearers' and Agricultural Labourers' Hut Accommodation Act, and in December the Bill was dropped altogether, in face of the hostility of the Upper House. The mutilation and sacrifice of this Bill was very bitterly resented by the A.W.U. which was at the time trying to organise the agricultural workers. The 1913 Convention of that union adopted the following resolution :

“That this Conference places on record its disgust at the action of the members of the N.S.W. Labour Party regarding the Hut Accommodation Act, and invites members to keep their actions in mind when the selection ballots are taking place.”

Lundie thought that it looked as if they had wasted time in putting men into Parliament, and they might have done better by adopting direct methods. Lambert declared that the N.S.W. Labour Party had grown into a kind of Liberal Party. In his opinion the trouble lay in the selection of candidates.¹

The plan for making the Labour Party more effective as an instrument for improving the conditions of the workers, suggested in the above resolution and also at the Labour Council debate, was to substitute genuine unionists for the bourgeois candidates who sustained Labour's banner in many electorates. It was thought that actual working-men would better retain the ideals of their class and fight more vigorously for it than the persons of middle-class origin who had attached themselves to the Movement. However, the previous history of the Movement did not sustain this thesis. Joe Cook, the chief of the “rats,” had been a coal miner from boyhood. The two union leaders from the Barrier, Sleath and Ferguson, had deserted the Party in 1901. In the State Cabinet of the day, the unions were amply represented. The Premier, McGowen, had been a boilermaker, yet in the 1913 Gas Strike he signed a proclamation appealing for scabs. Alf. Edden had worked in the coal mines, but he could not carry through the Bill the miners wanted for eight hours from bank to bank. J. H. Cann had worked along the line o'lode at the Hill, Donald McDonald had shorn sheep, Fred Flowers, a painter, was a unionist of long standing. With one exception all the Ministers in the Federal Cabinet had been manual labourers at some time in their

careers. So unionism had no reason to complain that it was unrepresented in Cabinet. Thus the thesis of union officials had a hypocritical appearance as though they were attacking sitting members in order to obtain seats themselves. During 1913 in the course of a controversy with Grayndler and Last of the A.W.U., G. Black, M.L.A. was at pains to show how those critics were themselves both candidates for selection, and that their names appeared on a list drawn up by the A.W.U. of those prepared to oppose sitting members.

The alternative plan was, however, now to the fore again. The Broken Hill proposal for a separate Trade Union Party was seriously considered by a Conference in July, 1913. It was supported by the Barrier delegates and the Coal Miners of the southern field. Unionists had been exasperated by the failure of the Government to prevent the victimisation of Russell, secretary of one of the miners' lodges, despite the finding of a Royal Commission in his favour, by the call for scabs in the gasworks, and the non-remission of the fines imposed on some railway strikers. But nothing came of the proposed party for the time. The idea was not abandoned, however. At the 1915 Convention of the A.W.U. Cullinan (Western Branch, N.S.W.) proposed that the union should withdraw financial support from the N.S.W. Labour Party. "Their names," he said, "stank in the nostrils of those who held to Labour principles." Blakeley expressed the opinion that an industrialist party was bound to arise to protect their interests.¹

But this was not the policy which finally triumphed. The need for some alteration was more unmistakable every day, but to attain that end it came to be decided to recommend unions to affiliate with the P.L.L. in order to obtain control of Conference. The conference of unions, called in Newcastle at the instance of the Coal Miners, in 1915, illustrates the position. Baddeley, the President, said "that the Labour platform was all right, but the present system did not give the different industrial organisations that control that would enable them to insist upon Labour members giving wholehearted support to the workers in their troubles." He instanced the cases of three collieries, the summonses against which had been withdrawn by the Labour Government because their employees ceased work. The Boilermakers' delegate argued that the present Labour Party had failed as it must fail – while it attempted to legislate for all classes in the community. They must be either for or against the workers; there was no middle course. A motion was passed "that the existent representation of Labour in Parliament was not a true reflex of the views of the workers, and that therefore the system of selections should be altered." It was further resolved: "That the time had arrived for industrial unions to affiliate with the P.L.L." ¹ Similar decisions were arrived at amongst unionists elsewhere, and the result was that a determined attempt was made to bring the Government to book at the P.L.L. Conference. In 1915, as we have seen, Holman had cunningly organised the Conference against them, and so saved his skin.

The industrialists were not to be caught a second time. They laid their plans for 1916 well in advance. The A.W.U. in October of the previous year had discussed the advisability of transferring the control of the P.L.L. Conference to "the class the

Movement represented” from that of “wire-pulling politicians.” To this end the office of the Central Branch was transferred from Orange to Sydney. At the beginning of 1916 a committee was promoted at the Trades Hall with the object of capturing the Conference. In March a meeting was held at the A.W.U. offices in which the Coal Miners' Federation and the Railway and Tramway Service Association also participated. This group resolved to aim at an amendment of the basis of representation at Conference that would secure the unions representation in proportion to their strength. A circular to this effect was drafted and sent round to all union secretaries. Eventually the A.W.U. and the Trades Hall group joined forces, and a regular committee was formed with P. Adler (Blacksmiths), as chairman, and L. Hermann as secretary. All the delegates to Conference were circularised and canvassed; a sub-committee was formed to draw up a reply to the pamphlet issued by the Premier in defence of his Administration; it was decided to launch and press home a censure motion on the Government, taking as its text the Government's failure to deal with the Upper House. But the most far-reaching move was the decision to run a “ticket” for the Executive. Members of the industrial section, as the committee of unionists came to be called, balloted among themselves as to who should run for seats on the Executive, and were all pledged to vote for those selected and to refuse nomination unless they were on the ticket chosen by this ballot. The committee was more or less secret, but all its doings were divulged by the secretary to Holman, who had corrupted Hermann.¹

The Section, though they commanded a solid bloc of eighty-four votes only aimed at capturing a majority of the seats on the Executive. But when they reached Conference, they found that many delegates, over-estimating their strength, were anxious to join in with them at the last moment so as to be on the winning side. Holman, despite feverish organising and the running of another ticket on which several industrialists were included, completely failed to out-manoeuvre his opponents. The Section nominees captured all the places on the most important committees of Conference on the first day. The moral effect of this coup was tremendous and for the rest of the time Conference merely registered the decisions reached by the industrialists in secret conclave. They achieved, as we have seen, the exclusion of politicians from the Executive, the resignation of the Holman Government, and the Movement's opposition to conscription.

The aims of the industrialists must not be mistaken. They were not, as frequently asserted, a left wing socialist movement. The Section to some extent reflects the reaction of the I.W.W. propaganda on the unions, and included men who had been members of that organisation, like MacPherson and Buckley as well as advanced thinkers like A. C. Willis (Secretary of the Miners' Federation). On the other hand, it included quite conservative craft-unionists. The industrialists accepted the Labour platform as it stood and only desired to force the Government to give effect to that industrial legislation already provided for in many planks and the sympathetic administration that the spirit of the Party demanded. The circular sent out to delegates contained a list of nineteen industrial planks ignored by the Parliamentary Party, e.g., preference to unionists, a six-hour day underground, the right to work, equal pay to

women for equal work. They were “left” in demanding that a Labour Government should legislate and administer the industrial laws in the interests of the class that was responsible for their return. For instance, they wanted the unions to be allowed to use direct action with impunity, and yet not to be deprived of the advantages of arbitration, while all the laws should be enforced against the employers with the utmost rigour. They contended that a “Liberal” Government administered the laws in the interests of the capitalists; therefore a Labour Ministry should govern in the interests of the employees. They were intolerant of the consideration shown to the farmers, e.g., by exempting them from the operations of the Hut Accommodation Act. They wanted industrial legislation in accord with the strictest interpretation of the Labour platform, and did not care what interests they alienated thereby. Finally, they were not so worried about the alleged peril of the Empire that they were prepared to see industrial legislation and social reform postponed till the world had been made safe for democracy by Sir Edward Carson and the Czar, and the capitalists and profiteers had been allowed to get a firm grip on that world. They certainly were not prepared to run the risk of industrial conscription. Yet they were not strictly internationalists or pacifists. They represented, we repeat, a genuine revolt of the unionist backbone of the Party against the time-serving and inaction of the politicians.

It was freely averred by Holman and his satellites that the Section leaders were actuated solely by a selfish desire to supplant sitting members and to get for themselves the fruits of parliamentary power. Probably this motive was not absent from the minds of many of the spokesmen and founders of the Section. The references to selections already quoted are open to this interpretation. After the conscription split many of the leading lights in the Section ran for selection, and a number of them actually got seats. Still it is idle to ascribe any important move to such low motives alone.

A highly important alteration in the basis of representation at Conference was made in 1916. In future, leagues and unions were entitled to one delegate for every thousand members or part thereof. This amendment favoured the unions as against the leagues – especially big unions like the A.W.U. which became entitled to twenty or twenty-five delegates. From this time the industrial Section became a regularly constituted organisation within the Party and formed a further check on the politicians. Any league or union might affiliate with the Section, the fee for affiliation being 5s. per thousand members or part thereof. But the Section might refuse to accept the affiliation of leagues or unions. Affiliated bodies were represented at the regular monthly meetings by one delegate per thousand members. It was governed by an Executive consisting of President, Vice-President, Secretary, and six other members. Members of the P.L.L. Executive were not eligible to sit on the Section Executive. The most remarkable provision in the constitution of this body was that the candidates on the Section's ticket for positions on the P.L.L. Executive must sign undated resignations and hand them to an officer of the Section, who would, under instructions from the Section, forward them to the secretary of the P.L.L. Executive, should its representatives not act in accordance with the instructions given them. Not content with a Conference and Executive to control the politicians, the industrialists set up a

sort of super-conference to control the Conference and Executive. The open deliberations of the P.L.L. Conference, as reported in the Labour Press, were reduced to the level of mere formal ratifications of decisions already arrived at in the secrecy of the Section meeting. Such an arrangement was a departure from the democratic ideals of the Labour Movement. It might be defended on the same lines as the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the grounds that it was impossible to convert a majority to adopt a genuinely radical policy. But as we shall see it did not work out that way, but led to corruption and personal intrigue.

By 1918 elements of dissension had appeared in the Section. The A.W.U., which had been seeking to obtain domination over the Labour Party, now showed its hand openly. Having, through the industrial Section, used the smaller unions to obtain its solid bloc of twenty-five direct representatives at Conference, it now decided to capture the Party Executive. To this end a cave was organised within the Section' and the A.W.U. ran a ticket at the ballot for the Section nominees to the Executive to secure a majority of A.W.U. men on the Section ticket. Thus there was a section within the Section ; a ticket for the Section ticket. The very men who had prided themselves on the use of covert intrigue and wire- pulling to defeat Holman's tactics and had assisted in substituting for open discussions in Conference the manipulation of that body to register decisions already predetermined by a secret junta, now found themselves the victims of like manoeuvres. As long as the main questions occupying the attention of the Movement were the issues of peace and war, this split did not manifest itself openly. But in 1919 this question had settled itself. The open breach was occasioned by a difference of industrial policy among the unions.

The Labour Council, led by J. S. Garden, and the Miners, led by A. C. Willis, aimed at the establishment of One Big Union on the industrial lines laid down by the I.W.W. with a revolutionary objective. The A.W.U. wanted itself to become the One Big Union by simply absorbing other organisations, retaining the power in the hands of the existing hierarchy of officials in the pastoral section. The O.B.U. threatened the A.W.U. organisation, and a fierce feud existed between the offices of the two organisations. The A.W.U. clique were ready to go to any lengths to discredit the revolutionary body. On the other hand, its partisans wanted to make the Labour Party the political wing of the all-embracing industrial union. Thus the dispute on industrial tactics was transferred to the political field at the Conference. The A.W.U. section was supported by the politicians under Storey and Catts, who were smarting under the continual interference of the Section, and saw that a return to political power was impossible if the revolutionary aims of the O.B.U. were included in the Labour platform. Their ranks were swelled by the more conservative craft unionists who had no time for industrial unionism.

This new bloc organised Conference carefully to counteract the propaganda of the industrialists. Secret meetings were held; delegates were circularised; scurrilous attacks were made upon the leaders of the O.B.U. An anonymous pamphlet, entitled "The Pommy takes Control," was distributed, designed to discredit the extremists because several of them happened to be English and not Australian by birth, and

alleging all sorts of malpractices against them. The policy of the Worker, previously favourable to the O.B.U., was suddenly reversed by the fiat of the A.W.U. Executive Council, and Arthur Rae, another supporter of the revolutionaries, was suspended from the editorship of the Labour News, the official organ of the Labour Party, a week before the Conference. Willis was now put in the position of having to protest against secret intrigues and sections and to advocate the election of the Executive by a method of plebiscite somewhat similar to that adopted in Queensland.

Both sides were rather evenly matched, but the hold that the A.W.U. had obtained upon the Executive the previous year and the chairmanship of W. Lambert, Secretary of the Central Branch, enabled them to carry the day. The revolutionaries were defeated by narrow majorities amid great disorder, and it is credibly asserted that Lambert permitted many irregularities. In the ballot for the Executive, the Left were utterly routed, even Willis, though representing the second largest union in Australia, being defeated. It is known that the ballot-boxes were kept in the A.W.U. rooms one night, and it has been inferred that they were tampered with then. As a climax, R. Bramston, the new Vice-President, took the chair in the absence of the President, Lambert, before the returning officer's report had been officially presented and adopted. At this irregularity the O.B.U. advocates seceded from the hall in a body, and at a separate meeting talked of forming a new party. For this the leaders of the Left wing were drastically dealt with. Before any actual step had been taken to form a secessionist party, four of the leaders were treated like Hughes and Holman, and expelled by the Executive. Many other expulsions followed. On the other hand, the rump of the Conference left the politicians practically a free hand in preparing their policy for the next elections. The industrial section was formally wound up and the politicians left apparently in control of the Movement.

But this was, it is now alleged, only apparent. For more or less open control by the industrial section was, so critics assert, in reality substituted a covert control by the officials of the Central Branch of the A.W.U. They had secured a still larger share on the 1919 Executive, and made use of their power, not to further any principles or ideals, but to reward their friends and supporters with seats in Parliament secured by faked selection ballots and forged tickets. By this means they sought to secure for themselves high places; for Bailey, the Vice-President, was already an M.L.A., Blakeley, the President, had a Federal seat, and Lambert was an alderman of the City Council in Sydney. The charges of faking selection ballots were conclusively proved in one case only, but this instance is sufficient to justify the gravest suspicion in several very peculiar cases. In regard to the Namoi selection ballot a committee of the Western Branch of the A.W.U. investigated the charge of corruption and found it proved up to the hilt. To understand the procedure it must be explained that slips are attached to the tickets taken out by members of that union each year, entitling the holder to a vote in the selection ballot for the constituency in which he resides at the time. The member has to detach this slip, pin it to his ballot paper, when that has been filled in, and post the two to the returning officer. Very often that officer is an official of the union who, owing to the undemocratic system by which the organisation is governed, is entirely under the thumb of a small junta of high officials in Sydney. It is,

therefore, an easy matter, if the bosses are willing to issue forged voting slips, for any number of "votes" to be manufactured. This is what happened at Namoi. The committee, in its report, dated February 24th, 1920, find that 250 postal votes were sent in, every one of which was attached to a forged voting slip. The names signed on the envelopes with the slips in no case corresponded to the names of the real holder of the ticket with the same number, as shown on the roll of members. The committee hunted up the real holders of tickets with the same numbers as those on the ballot slips, and found the genuine slip still on the ticket unused. All these forged votes had been cast for one man, Claude Thompson, then Secretary of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Service Association. It is supposed that the A.W.U. bosses assisted him to get a seat in Parliament in return for his influence in persuading his union to amalgamate with the A.W.U. Neither scheme came off.

The Goulburn ballot was equally fishy. There were three candidates to be elected for the large electorate where the election proper would take place under the single transferable vote system (P.R.). Among the candidates in the Labour primary were P. C. Evans, Secretary of the Executive, and J. Bailey, Vice-President of the A.W.U., and sitting Member for part of the electorate under the old system. On the votes actually polled in the district, Evans led by a substantial majority with Bailey a good second. But the final count took place at Macdonell House, the A.W.U. headquarters, where the Labour Party offices were also housed, and the returning officer was an A.W.U. organiser. In the final count 700 A.W.U. postal votes were found, and these reversed the decision of the local vote, knocked Evans right out, and left the selection to Bailey and two friends of his who were admittedly only dummies for their Vice-President. It seemed that, though there was really room for two Labour members in that electorate, Bailey was not prepared to run any risks, and wanted colleagues who would recommend the electors to give Bailey their first preference votes. Evans's complaint that the postal votes were forgeries bears on the face of it every appearance of probability. P. J. Minahan claimed, in connection with the Sydney selection ballot for the same election, that he had evidence that 250 faked postal votes had been prepared for use against him at Macdonell House. It is quite likely that similar devices were used to falsify the returns for other selections in both State and Federal constituencies.

As for the results, Bailey no doubt hoped to get a majority of members in the N.S.W. State Caucus under his power, so that he might be sure of a portfolio in the Storey Cabinet. The latter's personality frustrated this plan. In the Federal Party, however, Blakeley, the A.W.U. President, succeeded in ousting J. H. Catts from the position of Secretary to the Caucus. In municipal affairs, the Executive took the election of the Lord Mayor out of the hands of the municipal Caucus in December, 1919, in order to award the position to W. Lambert, Secretary of the Central Branch of the A.W.U. This action was quite contrary to the constitution of the Party, was bitterly resented by a majority of the aldermen, who, however, were too frightened to resist, and disadvantageous to the Party. Thus, if the allegations of the critics of the A.W.U. be accepted, the final result of the attempt by the industrialists to gain control of the Labour Party machinery has been to corrupt that machinery, vitiate the selection ballots, and hand over the Executive to an unscrupulous and selfish clique. And

whether we accept these statements or no-and despite their verisimilitude they originate in partisan sources-the fact that they can be publicly promulgated by responsible Labour men – J. H. Catts, P. Brookfield, A. C. Willis, and others – and win credence from a large section within the Party, opens up unpleasant vistas of possible perversions of an uncontrolled primary election.

In Queensland there has been no split between the industrialists and the other sections. As has been remarked, the A.L.F., having brought into being the political Labour Movement in that State, and assisted in forming W.P.O.'s corresponding in purpose and form to the leagues in N.S.W., left the new Party to determine its own constitution. The second Conference determined once for all the structure of the Party organisation. Kidston wanted the Party Caucus to have the functions of an Executive, but the 1895 Conference would not agree to that. In the scheme actually adopted the Executive consisted of nominees elected by Conference, representatives of the Parliamentary Party, and delegates from the A.L.F. Parliamentarians were never to hold a majority of seats on the Executive. By this means the unionists obtained from the first official recognition on the chief administrative body of the Labour Party.

Till 1916, however, the unions had no separate representation on Conference. That assembly was composed entirely of delegates from the W.P.O.'s, though of course unionists could join these bodies, and where there was no W.P.O. in existence, the local branch of the A.W.U. or A.W.A. could constitute itself the representative of the political movement, and issue "political tickets." The 1913 Conference gave members of affiliated unions resident in the electorate full W.P.O. rights, so that they could participate in the selection ballots and the election of Conference delegates without paying an extra subscription. But in 1916 under the influence of similar forces to those which operated in the south-the growth of class consciousness among the unionists under the influence of I.W.W. propaganda, a claim was put forward for separate representation for the industrialists on Conference. W. McCormack (who had been Secretary to the A.W.A. prior to its amalgamation with the A.W.U.) moved that delegates be elected to Conference from affiliated unions on the basis of one for the first 1,000 members, and one additional delegate for every 3,000 members thereafter, with a maximum of three delegates. He said that the industrial section was the foundation of their Movement, yet the unionists did not take any interest in it because they were dissatisfied. Another delegate thought that the W.P.O. had served a very useful purpose when there was no industrial organisation in the State. The latter movement was now of sufficient importance to have representation on any convention that might sit. On the other hand, the President, W. Demaine, who spoke as a unionist of thirty years' standing, and had been "a W.P.O. Secretary ever since there was a W.P.O. in Queensland," stated that his experience was that unionists did not stand to their guns if they were to share in the selection of candidates, they should contribute to the expenses of an election. Mr. Hall, too, opined that unionists were to blame for their position in the matter. Some union members were not Labour supporters and joined unions only to get a direct gain.

The question was referred to a sub-committee which recommended the following scheme of representation for the unions:

For unions with from 1,000 to 3,000 members, 1 delegate.

For unions with from 3,000 to 6,000 members, 2 delegates

For unions with from 6,001 to 10,000 members, 3 delegates

For unions with from more than 10,000 members, 4 delegates

This scheme did not, McCormack explained, give all unions representation, but it would get unions to take an active interest in the Party. No one could take exception to their representation. The A.W.U. had thirty-two fully-paid organisers working in the interests of the political movement. The latter wanted whole-hearted support from both the political and industrial organisations. The two sections of the Movement should be brought together. The scheme was accordingly adopted.

At the Brisbane Conference of 1918 the industrialists demanded yet fuller recognition. The A.S.E. delegate proposed to give the smaller unions representation on a basis of one delegate for from 300 to 500 members, and to increase the representation of the larger bodies to a maximum of five delegates for more than 6,000 members. In support of this proposition Kelly (A.M.I.E.U.) said that he was forced to the conclusion that there were men prepared to draw up a platform to get into Parliament on, whether they sacrificed Labour principles or not. E. Lane, Vice-President of the A.W.U., thought the political party should be essentially based on industrialism, and advocated the elimination of any one outside the unions. Until the Movement was entirely industrial they would be unable to bring about that change in society upon which the Labour objective was founded. On the other hand, the older members pointed out that industrialists could secure representation by joining the W.P.O.'s. There was no definite assurance that all industrialists were in favour of the Labour Party. Conference rejected the A.S.E. proposal.

At this Conference there was a group of industrialist delegates who sat together and voted unitedly on many questions. Their constant denunciations of politicians provoked President Demaine into twitting H. Bruce (A.W.U.) with trying to get into Parliament by abusing parliamentarians. He was, in fact, at the time a candidate for selection. This was the only attempt an industrial section ever made in Queensland. There were in that State many unionists in the House and in the Cabinet, and the Labour Government paid especial attention to industrial legislation, and in its administration showed a sympathetic understanding of the aims of unionism. Thus there was indeed no need for a revolt such as was caused in N.S.W. by the Holman-McGowen regime. NOTE-Since 1920 the main interest of Labour Conferences, at least in N.S.W., has lain in the contest between the A.W.U. and its opponents to control the Party and the Executive. No one who sat through the debates of 1921, or read those of 1922, could imagine that any question of principle was here at issue. It was a mere personal squabble between two factions, and, as the protagonists of neither side

bore unblemished reputations, may be passed over without further mention here. The most extraordinary cases of ballot faking have occurred during the same period. In the selection for the State seat of Sydney in January, 1922 – a five-member constituency – gangs of ex-I.W.W. men were employed to go round the booths with bogus A.W.U. voting slips. Then, in the name of purity of the ballot, the Executive disqualified Mr. McGirr, who had headed the list, and arbitrarily raised another candidate from the tail to fourth place. This action created such an outcry that a new ballot had to be held. Even more humorous was the Cook (Federal) Selection ballot at the end of the same year. In this case the official A.W.U. candidate was Tom Arthur. When he failed to secure the selection, the Executive quashed the ballot, and ordered a new one. A second vote gave the same result, and once more the Simon Pures of the State Executive found irregularities in the ballot. But not even a third ballot could persuade the Labourites of Cook to choose Mr. Arthur, and, in fact, his votes had seriously diminished.

Chapter V. Heterogeneity of the Elements Within the Labour Party

WE have mentioned incidentally that there was a variety of interests and elements included in the Labour Parties in each State, and it is desirable at this point to examine briefly what those elements were. From the first the Labour Party had the dual character of a trade union party and a social democratic party. The unionists of Australia had learnt from the failure of the Maritime Strike the limitations of direct action even in well-organised trades. They had experience of the power of the State when used on the side of the employers. At the same time they were advised to use constitutional means to secure the redress of their grievances, and in a democratic country seemed to have an opportunity of exercising considerable – nay, almost unlimited – political power. So unionists were persuaded to transfer from the industrial to the political field that struggle for shorter hours, better wages, safe and hygienic conditions of employment, freedom to organise, and personal liberty that the working-class has everywhere had to wage against Capitalism. In addition, there was, both within and without the ranks of unionism, a small but active group that were seized of the idea, not only of mitigating the hardships of employment for wages, but also of abolishing the wages system altogether. It was this Socialist section which, under the inspiration of William Lane, was responsible for the foundation of the Labour Party in Queensland. In N.S.W. it was due in some measure to the Socialists that the Labour Party took on its specific and isolated character. In Sydney, the Australian Socialist League had been founded as far back as 1887, and propagated its doctrines by means of meetings and a periodical called *The Radical*. The Socialists were almost all followers of Bellamy or the Fabians. They thought that once a Labour Party was established as a separate entity, it would inevitably become a Socialist party, and by the control of the machinery of Government, which they believed it would soon attain, would usher in the Collectivist State peacefully and speedily. But, of course, only the minority of unionists were Socialists.

But even if these two sections had been entirely united, their combined forces were not strong enough at the time to win an election. From its foundation the Labour Party has had to look for allies outside the working-class, and the few middle-class protagonists of the proletarian revolt. The following groups and classes were gradually attracted to the side of Labour – by sentimental bonds only, democrats and Australian nationalists; by economic interest, the small farmers and settlers, the prospectors and small mining proprietors, and the small shopkeepers; by ties of self-interest, the Roman Catholic Church and perhaps certain business interests – notably the liquor trade. Labour, simply in furtherance of its own proper aims, had inevitably to advocate the extension of popular government to its utmost limits. The abolition of the second chamber, composed of Crown nominees or persons elected on a property franchise, was a pre-condition to the realisation of Labour's more advanced aims. The extension of the franchise by the abolition of long residential qualifications and plural voting would be likely to increase Labour's representation in Parliament. These

reasons, and the fact that the Labour Party, in common with the European social-democrats, sincerely believed in democracy for its own sake, led to the inclusion of a number of radical planks in Labour's platform. After 1896 women's suffrage was added. Democratic sentiment has always been strong and widespread in Australia, and the inclusion of these planks in the Labour platform brought the Party many middle-class adherents.

Nationalist sentiment focussed itself round the banner of the Labour Party for more indirect reasons. For one thing, the Labour Movement had for a long time been continental in its scope, and not bounded in outlook by the governmental divisions into States. Inter-State union congresses had met regularly since 1879. The unions overleapt State boundaries. The great A.W.U. in its division into branches took no account of artificial barriers. The industrialists soon found that certain questions could not be dealt with effectively by the States acting separately. Australian action alone, for instance, could cope with Asiatic immigration. Thus the Labour Parties acquired a broad Australian outlook which made them ardent supporters of Federation, while the old middle-class parties, having a vested interest in the State Governments, were narrow "State-righters." In the second place, for purely economic reasons, Labour desired to encourage Australian industry which would provide increased employment, and to keep Australia for the white races, since unrestricted Asiatic immigration had been found seriously to endanger the standards of living of Australian working men. For this reason the watchword of "White Australia" was adopted from its first exponent, Sir Samuel Griffiths, a Queensland Liberal, as the watchword of the Labour Party. Thus the sentiment of Australian nationhood, which expressed itself in the Movement towards Federation, and which was reinforced by racial prejudice against the intermingling of white and coloured races, found its natural political exponent in the Labour Party. Especially after Federation, national patriotism brought a large body of supporters to the Labour Party. Of course such a sentiment was in its extreme manifestations incompatible with the internationalism of the Socialist Movement, and has produced a curious reaction on Australian Socialism as expounded by the Labour Party.

The small property-holders were even more incompatible with an extreme Socialist party; yet they were attracted to the Labour Party by real economic interests. The older parties were dominated mainly by the large landed Interest of the squatters, or the big city firms and monopolist companies who provided the bulk of their party funds. Now the small settler, the "cocky" farmer, stands in a hostile relation to the big pastoralist who monopolises the largest areas of Australian soil. The latter is not often a helpful neighbour to the selector whose holding often interferes with the rounding off of his huge paddocks. He can and did harass the settler in an infinite variety of ways. On the other hand, the city middle-man takes a heavy toll from the farmer whose product he alone can handle. The old parties offered the cocky no hope of protection from these foes, and so he was forced to look to Labour for relief. The prospector or shareholder in a small mine was in the same straits. He was hindered by the big landholder on whose demesne the lode might be and was at the mercy of a few monopolistic smelter companies who might squeeze all his profits out of him by

treatment charges. Finally, the small shopkeeper, besides being dependent on working-class customers, resents the competition of the big city stores and the extortionate charges of monopolists and wholesale trusts who can so fix prices that the shopkeeper is reduced to the position of a mere agent. The Labour Party promised to burst up the large estates by a tax on land values, to help the farmer by abolishing the middle-man in the course of setting up State Socialism. State produce agencies, State sugar mills, State treatment-works and smelters were promised as steps towards freeing the small producer from the grip of the monopolists as well as stages in the advent of Socialism. The same classes were attracted by special planks inserted in the platform for their delectation, such as assistance to mining, rural credits, advances to settlers, and so on.

The Labour Party has not been left a free field in pandering to the sentiments or interests of the above-mentioned classes. Democratic sentiment proved so strong that when the anti-Labour forces coalesced, as they did soon after the establishment of Federation, they were fain to adopt the name of "Liberal." Yet the aggressive radicalism of Labour has, in fact, forced their opponents into the role of guardians of the constitution, including privileged second chambers and the vice-regal veto, and defenders of the rights of property. The "Liberals" were only liberal in the economic sense of the Manchester school standing for the restriction of State interference with private business and the glorification of the competitive system, without, however, being able to stand out as Free Traders or to mask the real growth of monopolies, combines and cartels. Similarly, the appeal to nationalist sentiment had proved so successful that, when a section of the Labour Party coalesced with the "Liberals" after the conscription split, the new Party called itself "Nationalist." Yet they adopted as their standard the Union jack, not the Australian flag, and have stood for closer unity of the Empire, and even the subordination of Australian to Imperialist interests, while the genuine nationalists have followed the opposite line, traditionally putting "Australia first" and insisting on the reality of Dominion self-government. Thus the Party labels in Australia have become most misleading. Recently the primary producers have formed parties of their own, known as "the Country Party" or "the Progressives," to cater for the farmers' votes. Yet even these organisations represent rather the pastoralists or the biggest wheat and dairy farmers than the struggling cocky whose interests are still best watched by the Labour Party.

The other allies of Labour whom we have mentioned have received no formal concessions on the Labour platform. Yet it is notorious that the Catholic Church, as a body, supports the Labour Party quite solidly. The reasons are obscure. That Church cannot possibly support Socialism, as the Brisbane Courier was at pains to point out during the 1918 elections in Queensland. Many prominent Labour leaders were atheists or agnostics, as, for example, W. A. Holman and E. G. Theodore. Very few of the prominent Labour leaders have been Romans. The only Labour Premier in the east, at any rate, of that faith, was T. J. Ryan. No Labour Government has given any positive concession to that Church. Yet its hierarchy has consistently lent its support to the Labour Party, and a sectarian element is distinctly perceptible in most leagues. Though the second largest and politically best organised Church in Australia, the

adherence of the Catholics is a doubtful blessing. No-Popery is so strong that any Party definitely allied with the papists would be doomed to destruction. Some efforts have indeed been made to check the sectarian element in the Party. In 1915 the P.L.C. Conference in Victoria adopted a rule excluding from membership in the Party "any person who is a member of any other organisation which selects or lends support to candidates for public positions." This resolution, avowedly aimed at members of the Catholic Federation, drew from Archbishop Mannix, of Melbourne, the clearest admission that has ever been made of the hierarchy's support to the Labour Party. When the referenda were withdrawn by Hughes, this prelate announced that he was sorry the Labour Party's constitutional proposals had been withdrawn from the popular vote, as he had intended to teach the Party a lesson as to what the withdrawal of the Catholic vote meant. It has been surmised that the Church supported the Labour Party in the hope of concessions in the matter of education. The chief political aim of the Romans is certainly to secure a subsidy for their schools from the State. The hierarchy maintain that the State secular schools are unchristian, and that is impossible for the faithful to allow their children to be educated in their godless atmosphere. They have fine schools of their own, but the priests argue that it is unjust that their flock, who contribute to the upkeep of these, should be taxed for the support of the State schools, which they cannot use. They, therefore, claim a Government subsidy for their sectarian institutions. The Labour Party has never admitted the validity of this claim or shown any inclination to concede it. In Queensland and Victoria the platform specifically lays it down that education shall be "free and secular." Resolutions in favour of subventions to denominational schools have occasionally been discussed at Labour Conferences, but have always been decisively rejected, e.g., in Queensland in 1910. Just prior to the 1913 elections in N.S.W. a Catholic dignitary delivered himself of a vehement tirade against the educational policy of Labour, but Premier Holman answered him in an uncompromising fashion. Still, twenty-six Labour candidates answered in the affirmative a circular issued by the Catholic Federation asking them to promise to advocate the grant of free materials to the Catholic schools by the State. Holman recommended his supporters to ignore this document, and the signatories were severely castigated in the Worker.¹

The only obvious consideration that the Catholic Church has received from Labour in return for its support is the Bursaries Endowment Act in N.S.W. This measure, passed by the first Labour Government, permits students who have been awarded bursaries which carry with them remission of fees to hold the same at private as well as State secondary schools. The State has, of course, to subsidise the private schools in respect of the bursars who attend them. Nearly all the non-State secondary schools in Australia are denominational and most of them are Catholic, so that in this way the State comes to contribute to the maintenance of their schools. But here the connection between the Church and Labour seems to end. It is true that adherents of that faith occupy a surprisingly large number of influential and confidential posts in the public service of most States, but it is not evident that the Labour Party was responsible for placing them there. Many were certainly appointed by the other side.

The supposed alliances between Labour and certain financial interests have only come about since Labour has been within close range of the Treasury benches, and any compacts that have been made have been negotiated not with Conference or the Executive, but with the leaders of the Parliamentary Party. The most easily demonstrable alliance formed by the Labour Party with the vested interests of a section of the capitalist class, is that with the liquor trade. It was openly denounced by Rae, a man who had long been in the inner counsels of Labour at the Socialist Conference in Sydney, on August 4th, 1919. Under the Holman régime in N.S.W. it was notorious, and the strongest circumstantial evidence points to a similar alliance in Queensland.

In both of these States a local option poll is held on the same day as a general election. To fight "reduction" and "no-licence" the liquor interests have an organisation amply supplied with funds and cars working in each electorate. These organisations have been at the disposal of the Labour candidates. The advantage to the politicians is obvious. The funds of the local leagues derived from bazaars and socials are never large. The central funds derived from capitation dues from leagues and affiliated unions are also exiguous, and are almost entirely consumed in salaries, office expenses and literature. Labour has had plenty of volunteer canvassers and scrutineers who have given their services to the Movement, but few rich friends to lend it cars to convey voters to the polls. The other parties have an army of paid canvassers and a fleet of cars at their disposal, and all the advantages that money can secure. The use of the licensed victuallers' cars, of the public-houses for the display of Labour signs, and even monetary contributions has, therefore, been invaluable. Whether the use of these appurtenances has involved any grave sacrifice of Labour principles is another question. In N.S.W. the Liberals under Carruthers and Wade had engaged in a crusade of "wowser" legislation which alarmed the "trade." The latter seem, therefore, to have resolved to make friends with the Party which seemed likely to capture the reins of Government at the next election. Whether they received any definite promises in return is uncertain. Certainly Conference would recognise none. But they seem to have been able to exercise a "pull" when the time to demand something in return came. This happened in 1915. A general demand arose during the war for early closing of hotels, and the British precedent was generally quoted. This was in itself embarrassing to Holman, who was endeavouring to give the lie to the charges of disloyalty levelled at the Labour Party by the opposition, and on the other hand wanted the help of the publicans at the elections in the following year. His dilemma was made much worse when the P.L.L. Conference, that had never been consulted about any arrangement with the licensed victuallers, passed a resolution in favour of six o'clock closing. The Government maintained a policy of masterly inaction, but in July Carmichael, a Labourite and ex-Minister, had moved in the House for a referendum on the subject, provoking the wrath of the Premier because Caucus had not been consulted. On September 7th a private member secured the passage of a resolution in favour of nine o'clock as the closing hour, and had the support of five Ministers for the proposition. It was not till October that Cabinet, yielding to the growing pressure of public opinion, brought in a Bill for a limitation of the hours for the sale of intoxicants. It was a farcical measure, for it allowed bars to remain open till

ten instead of eleven as before. On a vote to replace ten by nine several Labour members remained staunch, but most of the Ministers stultified their former votes by opposing the amendment.¹ At last the Premier's hands were forced when some soldiers broke camp in February, and ran amok in Sydney. The Minister for Defence in the Commonwealth Labour Government thereupon used his powers under the War Precautions Act to close the hotels in Sydney at six. Public opinion could no longer be ignored, and Holman with obvious reluctance brought in a Bill for a referendum. The people chose the hour recommended by the Labour Conference in the previous year, and re-endorsed in 1916. The only explanation of Holman's reluctance to comply with a genuine and widespread popular demand seems to be the secret pull of the liquor traffic, especially as the demand for early closing was made by his own Party.

In Queensland the understanding between Labour members and the liquor traffic led to even more curious results, for there was a strong temperance section in the rank and file of the Party, and Plank VI. of the platform ran: "State manufacture, importation, and sale of intoxicants with a view to total prohibition." Yet as soon as the Ryan Government assumed office in 1915 they gave good cause for suspicions that they had an understanding with the liquor interests. There was the same demand for war-time closing in Queensland as in the southern State, but the Labour Government turned an absolutely deaf ear to the demands of the advocates of early closing. They contented themselves with the observation that they were bringing in a Bill for the Initiative and Referendum, and that the temperance people could avail themselves of the opportunity that that would give to ascertain the wishes of the people. But the Party refused to accept the Legislative Council's amendments to the Bill, which included provisions for the recall of members, and the Bill was declared lost – so in effect was early closing. Meanwhile the Hon. Peter Murray, M.L.C., who was regarded as the mouthpiece of the licensed victuallers in the House, had declared himself an adherent of the new Government.

The temperance party in the Labour Movement were very dissatisfied with the Ministry's policy on the liquor question, although they had, in deference to Plank VI., set up a State hotel at Babinda to be a model public-house. A series of resolutions, emanating from Buranda W.P.O., gave vent to this dissatisfaction at the 1918 Conference. Six o'clock closing stood in the forefront of these resolutions. The mover declared that there could be no alliance between Labour and liquor. The sooner Labour outlined its position the better. The politicians who had to fight an election almost at once evinced a strong dislike to the motion, but as it was evidently strongly supported, it was clearly useless for them to oppose it directly. Instead a red-herring was astutely drawn across the trail by an amendment: "That this Conference adhere to the determination to establish the Initiative and Referendum under which the six o'clock closing and all other questions can be determined by the people." The politicians, who were afraid to oppose the motion directly, were able to deluge the gathering with arguments in support of the amendment. Delegates were urged to use the early closing question as a lever to get the legislation required by the platform through the Council. They must not sacrifice a great thing like the Initiative and Referendum to give way to a panicky cry. On the other hand, Lane pointed out that,

apart altogether from the Initiative and Referendum, the liquor trade was either right or wrong, and it was no use taking refuge behind the other question. Page-Hanniffy reminded them that it was useless to expect to see the Initiative and Referendum next session. Unless Convention took up a positive attitude there was a danger of this question being used against Labour. But at the last minute the big guns were brought up by the politicians. W. N. Gillies, Minister for Agriculture, thought it strange that so many who wanted reform on this question voted for the retention of the Upper House. Then Treasurer Theodore rose. "If prepared to give the people the right to ballot on this question," he asked, "why not on other questions under the Initiative and Referendum? Labour would be sticking solidly to its platform in endeavouring to put that through at the first opportunity." By such arguments the motion for a referendum on six o'clock closing was shelved by 44 votes to 22. At the next election a fleet of cars was available to take Labour voters to the poll which had been sadly lacking at the second conscription referendum a few months earlier. It seems to have been widely known that the publicans had contributed generously to the campaign funds, but it may be taken for granted that these subscriptions were not made through the Executive, which contained many pronounced temperance advocates. At any rate, it is noteworthy that Queensland was the only State in the Commonwealth where public-houses could remain open till 11 p.m. all through the war.

Nevertheless, a resolution got through the 1918 Conference in favour of a general poll throughout the State on the question of no-licence, nationalisation, or continuance as opposed to the local options polls already prescribed. The Government was evidently timid about submitting this issue to the electors and asked the Executive for directions. A special meeting of that body in August, 1918, decided that the Government was bound under the terms of Conference's resolution to introduce, a Bill apart from the Initiative and Referendum Bill, for a special referendum on these questions. But still the Ministry took no action. The matter was not touched during the session of 1918 or in the earlier part of 1919. It was not until many resolutions of protest had been sent in from W.P.O.'s and a strongly worded complaint had been made by the Brisbane Industrial Council that Cabinet brought down the necessary legislation at the very end of the session, and even then the referendum was not held till the latter half of 1920. It was, of course, defeated.

The heterogeneous elements supporting the Labour Party have naturally led to serious conflicts of interests within it. The democrats do not necessarily sympathise with the aims of unionism, and may very well be opposed to State interference with private enterprise. Nationalism is diametrically opposed to that international sentiment which is a characteristic of the Socialist Movement. The militarist policy, which the White Australia ideal, has forced upon the Labour Party, is distasteful to many industrialists, while the Protection system adopted for the encouragement of Australian industry is the very opposite of the traditional Free Trade policy of the English Labour Party. From a working-class point of view Customs duties are the worst means of raising revenue, and even the Labour Party in Australia has always stood for high direct taxation. Even more incompatible with the aims and ideals of the industrial proletariat are the interests of the small farmers and the other sections of the petit-bourgeoisie for

whom the Labour Party tries to cater. These are notoriously the most conservative sections of the community. Short hours, high wages, early closing, strict regulation of the housing and hygienic conditions of the workers, are the last things they want. Thus they are unfriendly both to unionism and Socialism. The regulation of the hours of rural workers and the enforcement of the provision of good housing accommodation for farm hands has always been strenuously opposed by the cockies. We have already had occasion to note the results of their hostility to the latter in connection with the Labour Government's Hut Accommodation Bill in N.S.W. Similarly we have seen that a crisis was brought about in the Party in that State by the antagonism of the agricultural supporters of the Party to the leasehold principle. In the case of strikes the farmers, mining interests, and small shopkeepers are always as bitter against the strikers as the big capitalists. owing to the derangement of their business entailed in any large industrial stoppage. In fact, the big strike of 1917 was defeated by the strike-breakers, drawn from the farmer class, enraged at the interference with the transportation of their crops due to the railwaymen ceasing work. Roman Catholicism is essentially anti-Socialistic, since the dogmas of that Church postulate hereditary private property. Conversely Socialism is traditionally anti-clerical. Liquor may be regarded as one of the devices of capitalism for keeping the workers in subjection. On the other hand, brewers and publicans cannot sympathise with strikes which react unfavourably on their business.

The reconciliation of such divergent interests has inevitably meant some tight-rope walking for the politicians and has filled the Labour platform with inconsistencies. To avoid offending the little capitalists and the Catholics, Socialism has been much watered down in the Labour Objective. To retain the support of the nationalists the Labour Party has gone in for a course of sentimental flag-flapping which savours of jingoism. It has allowed the strictly economic motive lying behind the White Australia policy to be obscured by racial prejudices and has pandered to fears which have played into the hands of the militarists in a dangerous manner. To avoid giving offence to middle-class supporters Labour Governments have followed a vacillating policy and have tried to govern in the interests of all classes instead of standing up boldly in defence of the one class which put them in power.

NOTE—Some new light is thrown on the alliance between the Parliamentary Labour Party in N.S.W and liquor during the period 1919-22 referred to by Arthur Rae, by the speech of J. H. Catts, after his expulsion from the Labour Party, in the House of Representatives on July 6th, 1922. It appears from this that the Secretary of the Licensed Victuallers' Association had given a member of the State Parliament (whose name will be found in the Federal Hansard) £500 to control Conference in the interests of the trade in 1921. The same gentleman was subsequently told by official members of the State Ministry not that he must not contribute to the Party funds, but that he must cease subsidising private members. The tie binding Labour and liquor at this period was the Act carried by the Nationalist Government in December, 1920, for the holding of a referendum on prohibition with compensation. The Labour Government returned in 1921. ignored this Act of Parliament, in so far as the referendum was concerned, altogether. Their pretext was that the cost of

compensation was prohibitive in the then state of the exchequer, and that consequently the holding of the referendum enjoined by the Nationalists' Act would be only a waste of money.

Upon other sources of money open to members of a Parliamentary Labour Party when in office or in sight of office, the Royal Commission into the charges against Messrs. Dooley, Johnstone and Mutch, Ms.L.A., presided over by Pring, J., gave interesting information. Johnstone admitted the receipt of £500 towards his election expenses from one J. J. Talbot, who, with his partner, G. Georgeson, was lying under the grave charge of corruption in connection with a wheat contract! With access to such sources of income, it is not surprising that Labour Members can afford very often to ignore the directions of conferences and executives, especially when the latter are themselves open to charges of venality. The charge was made against the N.S.W. Conference by Catts in the speech mentioned, who adds that, when the supply of funds from the licensed victuallers was cut off, an agent of the same M.L.A. offered the Prohibitionist organisation - to fix the control of Conference for a few hundreds.— It was common knowledge that members of the N.S.W. Executive received large sums of money for endorsing candidates to the Legislative Council and for supporting corrupt contracts made by the Sydney City Council when it was controlled by the Labour Caucus.

Chapter VI. The Industrial Labour Movement

FOR three decades the Labour Movement has been dominated by the idea of political action. The forces of Labour have been concentrated on the effort to capture the parliamentary machine, and the trade unions have been made subservient to the political Labour Parties. But while this is the distinguishing characteristic of the period, there have been periods of revolt against the supremacy of politicalism occasioned by the shortcomings of that policy, its slowness and at last its evident bankruptcy. Such revolts on the part of the industrialists have generally manifested themselves not only in outbursts of direct action, but in a tendency to reorganise the whole structure of unionism on an industrial basis. Before, therefore, attempting to describe these signs of revolt, it becomes necessary to describe in somewhat greater detail the structure of the industrial movement in the period under review.

The industrial organisation of the Australian workers, of course, antedates the formation of political Labour Parties by some fifty years. The origins of trades unionism in the southern continent are shrouded in the mists of obscurity. When, however, it is remembered that among the early convict settlers were the Dorchester labourers transported under the Conspiracy Laws for organising for industrial action, it is not surprising that the seeds of unionism should have borne fruit at an early date in the colony's development. Under the convict system, of course, no unionism was permitted, but even before 1840 benefit societies arose among artisans resembling the embryonic organisations from which English trade unionism sprang. By that year the industrial activities of these bodies was sufficiently noticeable to induce the Legislative Council to pass a drastic Masters and Servants Act aiming at the repression of unionist activity.

The first definite union, of which permanent traces survived was a branch of the Operative Stonemasons Society, founded in Melbourne in 1850. In 1851 the Typographical Association was formed in Sydney, and during the next year prominent members of the A.S.E. who had left England owing to victimisation planted a branch of their society in their new home. The formation of other unions followed, but these were restricted to the skilled craftsman in the cities, and being modelled on and often affiliated with English organisations call for no further description here.

An extension of trades unionism occurred in 1861 when the coal miners of the Newcastle district met together to formulate claims for better wages and to demand better legislation for the ventilation of coal mines. The Hunter River Coal Miners' Protective Association then inaugurated, continued in a rather informal manner from that date. Still, that did not bring unionism to the country districts. And it was the organisation of the bush workers that formed the peculiar problem for the Australian union leaders. The vast army of bush workers, recruited from the unsuccessful prospectors and other immigrants in the days when alluvial workings no longer paid on the goldfields and were replaced by deep mines owned by capitalists and employing an army of waged workers, presented a problem in organisation which had

not previously been tackled in any country. These workers were mainly nomadic, working now in the mines, now in shearing sheds, now on railway construction works. They were, therefore, a body of semi- or unskilled, workers, but the conditions in a new country put a premium on strength and endurance, self-reliance and adaptability as much as on technical skill. The field was, therefore, a promising one.

The first successful organisation among these out-back toilers was the Amalgamated Miners' Association of Victoria. The association organised the miners employed on the several goldfields of that State. Local unions had at first arisen with the object of securing reductions in working hours and preventing the introduction of Chinese labour. These local bodies amalgamated after a conference at Ballarat in 1874, but the organisation was not put upon a sound footing till 1882. It was then reorganised and a benefit section established. From that time the A.M.A. extended its operations beyond Victoria, and successfully organised metalliferous miners in other States, including those employed along the great silver-lead lode of Broken Hill on the N.S.W. border. Later on, however, the A.M.A. restricted its sphere of operations to Victoria and Tasmania. The N.S.W. Barrier, A.M.A., and the unions formed in South Australia continued to exist as separate entities, while the bulk of the other miners in N.S.W. formed the Federated Mine Employees' Union.

The next section of the rural workers to become unionised were the shearers. Peculiar difficulties confronted those who wished to organise these workers. Miners worked at a definite field, and operations were continued all the year round, so that there was every likelihood of the miner having a more or less fixed location and address near the mine. Not so with the shearers. Men would gather from all over the continent to a big shed on the vast station of some pastoralist, stay there for from three to six weeks till the sheep were shorn, and then scatter again to different sheds. The stations are separated by enormous distances, so that organising is difficult. On the other hand, the isolation is not altogether adverse to organisation. These large bodies of men gathered together on remote runs have one topic of common interest – their industrial condition. There are no distractions in the way of churches, music halls, or race meetings to divert their minds from their grievances.

The shearers had plenty of grievances. The accommodation which the squatter provided was of the roughest sort, consisting often simply of tiers of bunks, made out of rough-hewn saplings, in a tin shed, and remember that the shade temperature out West often reaches 115 degrees. The only provisions obtainable had to be purchased from the squatter himself, who sometimes charged excessive prices. The water supply was not always adequate. The shearer was bound by contract to see the shed cut-out, though he could be discharged at any time by the owner. He was paid by piece rates – so many shillings per hundred sheep, and there were devices by which an unscrupulous employer could and often did rob the toiler of part of his earnings.

Now, many members of the A.M.A. used to work in the sheds during the season, and these spread the gospel of unionism among the pastoral workers. After many unsuccessful attempts the Shearers' Union was formed in 1886. The immediate occasion was a proposal by the pastoralists to reduce rates by 2s. 6d. per 100 at the

beginning of the season. To resist this reduction, organisations were formed at Ballarat (Victoria), Bourke, and Wagga (N.S.W.), which amalgamated in the following year under the name of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union. A separate union was formed in Queensland, the Q.S.U. In 1890, the shed-labourers or roustabouts, who do not shear but work under the shearers, picking up the wool, etc., and the station hands were formed into a separate organisation. But in 1894 these two sections of the pastoral workers amalgamated, so that the A.S.U. became a strictly industrial union with branches in N.S.W., Victoria, South Australia, and New Zealand. Finally, the Q.S.U. was absorbed in the larger organisation in 1904, and the A.S.U. changed its name to the Australian Workers' Union.

In view of the immensely important role which that union was destined to play, it will be well here to outline the scheme of organisation adopted to handle this large body of men who had no permanent work-place, but who roamed about from one end of a continent to another. The constitution of the A.M.U. took as its model Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. For organising purposes the continent was divided into eight branches, two in Queensland, two in N.S.W., one in Victoria, which also included the southern corner of N.S.W. and Tasmania, one in South Australia which took in the trans-Darling part of N.S.W., and one in West Australia. The supreme government was vested in an annual convention, which met in Sydney every January, and was composed of delegates from the branches elected by a plebiscite vote of the members on a basis of one delegate for every 2,000 members, together with a General President and a General Secretary, elected each year by ballot of the whole membership. It was for convention to lay down the general policy of the union for the forthcoming year, to receive the reports of the officers and to determine the remuneration to be paid them. The reports of the debates of Convention are published verbatim in the Worker, and a printed report is sent to every member of the union. Between conventions an Executive Council had general authority. It consisted of the General President and Secretary and a Vice-President representing each State together with one councillor from each branch. Provided three States were represented seven constituted a quorum. This Executive had considerable powers; it could suspend officers or councillors, vary or suspend rules, and strike a levy by a two-thirds majority. It was the body responsible for submitting cases to the Federal Arbitration Court.

Nevertheless a large degree of local autonomy was left to the branches. The latter were governed by a general meeting which could be called by notice in the Worker. Fifteen constituted a quorum – rather a small number considering that the branch membership might easily run into several thousand. Subject to the decisions of Convention the branch meeting was the supreme governing authority in the branch, and elected members of the branch committee. The branch officers, however – Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, and Secretary, as well as delegates to congresses, were elected by plebiscite. The branch committee, consisting of these officers and the committeemen elected at the general meeting, had power to suspend any branch officer, subject to review by the branch meeting, and to choose the branch representative on the Executive Council. The committee also had charge of disputes

with employers subject to the directions of the Executive. The remuneration of the Secretary and Organisers was to be determined by the branch meetings.

An important person in the A.W.U scheme is the “shedrep.” The first thing done when a team of shearers and shed hands foregather at a shed was the election of a shed-representative. He was obliged to communicate with the branch Secretary, and with the assistance of two committeemen would see that only unionists were working at the shed by holding a show of tickets. He also conducts any negotiations with the station owner, collects fines and levies, and forwards to the Secretary the numerous resolutions carried at the shed for submission to the Annual Convention.

The A.W.U. constitution made provision for the taking of plebiscite votes of all members on any question. There is a Parliamentary Fund not exceeding 1s. per member for organising to assist in the return of pledged Labour candidates. In fact, the union had been from the first a strong supporter of the Labour Party. Its objects included: “(d) to gradually replace the present competitive system of industry by a co-operative system,” and (g) “to endeavour by political action to secure social justice.” Many officers of the A.W.U., notably W. G. Spence, M.H.R., who was General President from 1898 to 1916, and Donald Macdonnell, who was General Secretary from 1900 till his death in 1912, have been returned to Parliament in the Labour interest, and the union has ever been closely connected with the Party organisation. It has also been a pioneer in Labour journalism, founding and owning the Sydney Worker, and, through the A.L.F., sharing in the control of the Queensland Worker. One of these papers is posted each week to every member of the union.

Successful organisation for the remaining classes of bush workers came much later. In Queensland the main impulse in that direction came from an organisation of miners about 1908 – the Amalgamated Workers' Association. This union was originally just one of a number of small unions of miners modelled on the Victorian A.M.A., but it extended its operations first to cover all the miners in the north and then to include navvies and other bodies of hitherto unorganised workers. The history of this body is, however, so closely bound up with the One Big Union Movement that it will be convenient to postpone dealing with it until a later chapter. Another section of the rural and nomadic workers of Queensland was organised about the same time.

Till 1905 the sugar industry had been worked entirely by coloured labour, but in that year the Federal Government began deporting the kanakas who had hitherto worked in the cane-fields in the interests of a White Australia, and so white labour came in to take their places. The cutting of the cane and its milling is seasonal work, the two operations being carried on contemporaneously. The harvest lasts from July to October, and within this period the cane must be cut and, as soon as possible, crushed into raw sugar. Any interruption in the process seriously threatens the value of the crop, and, therefore, growers have sought to ensure continuity of work in their contracts with the cutters and labourers. The former work in a gang which is paid by the piece, so much per ton of cane cut, but both cutters and mill hands sign contracts as a rule for the whole season, and the conditions imposed by masters accustomed to servile coloured labour were extraordinary. However, as soon as black labour had

begun to disappear, attempts were made to organise the sugar-workers. That was especially difficult, inasmuch as many of them just came up from the south for the season to engage in other occupations. By 1908 the Bundaberg Union had about 400 members, and that at Mackay, further north, some 468. Thereafter the several local unions joined forces in the Amalgamated Sugar-Workers' Union. By 1910 that body claimed over 2,000 members.

It was, however, obvious that the attempt to organise such migrants into sectional unions was almost impossible and profoundly uneconomical. They had no fixed trade, but were cane-cutters one month, miners another, and shearers or navvies in a third. To cater for such migrants a composite body was needed, and to the leaders of the A.W.A. belongs the credit of seeing this. The A.W.A. extended its sphere of operations, taking in all classes of general labour and absorbing the A.S.W.U. en bloc. It was no longer necessary for the bush worker to join half a dozen unions in earning his living through the year, as he passed from the cane-field to the railway construction works, and thence, perhaps, to the mining camp or the saw-mills. One ticket covered all these occupations. At the same time a single organiser could look after the cane-cutters, navvies, miners, lumbermen and others working in a single district, which formerly several distinct organisers had to traverse in the interests of their several distinct unions, each attending only to one section of the workers whom they met.

The success of this experiment in Queensland proved that the type of organisation set up by the A.W.A. was the only one really adapted to cater for the nomadic bushmen. Hence, at a later date, the A.W.U. took in not only the Queensland A.W.A., but also the several sectional organisations of bush workers formed in the south – the Rural Workers' Union – harvesters, wheat porters, etc. The Australian Carriers' Union, the Rabbiters' Union, and later still the Railway Workers' and General Labourers' Union in N.S.W., and the United Labourers' Union of South Australia – navvies and construction workers – and the F.M.E.U. the metalliferous miners. But these developments will be described in a later chapter.

While a special form of union organisation was being thus evolved for the bush workers of Australia, the introduction of compulsory arbitration exercised a profound influence on unionism in general. In the first place it gave a notable filip to the formation of unions. In N.S.W. in the two years following the passage of Wise's Act (1901) no fewer than 111 new unions were registered as compared with twenty-six in the preceding ten years! Many of the new unions were created to assist the worst-paid and hitherto unorganised workers in approaching the court. A large accession to the number of women unionists was incidental to this process. On the other hand, the legal recognition of unionism by the Arbitration Act prompted the employers to promote “yellow” unions to keep the bona fide organisations of the wage-earners from the court, or to secure the registration of agreements favourable to the employers. We have already referred to the most notorious of such bogus unions – the Machine Shearers' Union – which kept the A.W.U. from securing registration under the N.S.W. Act for several years. But the safeguards contained in the laws have

generally been sufficient to prevent such “boss-controlled” organisations getting a footing, save when the genuine unions have put themselves out of court by participating in illegal strikes, e.g., after the 1917 debacle. On the other hand, the popularisation of arbitration has of late years led to the formation of unions among purely brain-workers, such as journalists, teachers and bank clerks.

The creation of the Commonwealth Court of Arbitration and Conciliation in 1904 exercised a further modifying influence on trade union structure. Under the constitution this tribunal can only take cognisance of disputes extending beyond the limits of a single State. As a consequence Federal or Inter-State unions are in a better position to approach the Commonwealth court than those which confine their activities to a single State. Since, therefore, at that time some States had no wage-regulating machinery at all, the existence of the Commonwealth court stimulated the formation of all-Australian unions. These in most cases took the form of federations of existing State unions, which still left the State branches with considerable powers of local autonomy, since they had to conform to the several rules of the respective State Trade Union Acts whose protection they still desired to enjoy.

Hence we may distinguish four main types of unions in Australia, each of which might be sub-divided according as the organisations comprised under it are purely local, Statewide or Federal in their scope.

(1) Craft and occupational Unions (boiler-makers, clerks, etc.). Industrial unions. Composite or mass unions. Single shop unions.

The first type need no further exposition here. It is found all over the world, though in Australia the sub-divisions of occupations, especially in cases where they are based not on a diversity of apprenticeship training, e.g., in N.S.W., Municipal and Shire Employees, Local Government Overseers and Local Government Clerks', Australian Clerical Association, Public Service Association, have been carried rather far in some instances.

Industrial unionism is the rule on the railways, in mining, in the meat trade, and to some extent among boot-workers. On the railways, in addition to the usual clashes with the Locomotive Engineers, and the employees of the shops as well as small sectional organisations, industrial unionism has to contend with peculiar difficulties in certain States. For instance, in N.S.W., the railways and tramways are under the same management, and, therefore, the industrial union formed to embrace all the employees of the Railway Commissioners – the Amalgamated – had to include also tramwaymen. But the trammen were organised in a federal union of their own, which, as far as the employees of other tramway systems are concerned, aims at a Commonwealth award. The railwaymen being employees of a State instrumentality could not come under the Federal court, and so in N.S.W. the two unions inevitably clashed. In Queensland, on the other hand, the Railway Commissioner is also charged with construction of new lines, and the Q.R.U. has come into conflict with the A.W.U. as to the disposal of these construction workers. In N.S.W. there are at present thirteen different unions catering for railwaymen, not counting the craft unions, whose

members work in the repair and construction shops. When the Queensland Court of Industrial Arbitration desires to make an award for all the employees of the Commissioner no less than twenty-six different unions have to appear before it!

In coal mining the organisation is based on a federation of local lodges. Originally there were three local federations in N.S.W., one for each of the great coalfields of the State. These linked up in 1908 into a federation of federations, and later on the whole was reorganised so as to take in the miners of Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland. The Barrier Branch of the A.M.A. has also affiliated with this federation, which is known as the Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. There are, however, even in this industry, a number of craft or sectional organisations outside the federation, such as the engine-drivers, the deputies and shot firers, and others.

The Amalgamated Meat Industry Employees' Union is a Federal union which allows great local autonomy to its several State branches. This is essential, owing to the diversity of conditions in the industry from State to State. In N.S.W., for instance, most of the killing is done near the big cities, and is carried on all the year round. In Queensland, on the other hand, there is an enormous seasonal export trade which requires the concentration of a special army of workers round the big export works who may drift away again at the end of the season. In the latter State the A.M.I.E.U. is a strictly industrial union covering all classes of meat workers, wholesale and retail, as well as fellmongers, and all the various types of labour employed in the big canning and freezing works-tinsmiths, packers, freezing-room hands, as well as slaughtermen, the only exceptions being the members of the A.S.E. and the F.E.D. & F. Less perfect industrial unions exist for painters, furniture trades employees, boot-workers, and a few others. But in general the movement towards industrial unionism, except in the first two instances, has been associated with a conscious movement away from political action, and will, therefore, be described later.

The same remark holds good with regard to the formation of composite or mass unions as exemplified in the A.W.A. in Queensland, and in the A.W.U., after its amalgamation with the last-named body. The structure of that union has already been described.

The single shop union is very often a yellow union. For instance, the employees of the B.H.P. Co.'s steel-works at Newcastle have been formed into the Australian Steel Industry Employees' Union, which is definitely a tame union attached to the one firm mentioned. Its rules contain special provision against a strike under any circumstances. But though several other unions of the same type have similar ends in view, that does not hold good in every case. The Lithgow Small Arms Factory Employees' Union, while formally falling within this class, is not really a bosses' organisation. In some cases unions of this type merge into industrial unions – as, for instance, the Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage Employees' Union in N.S.W.

Such a variety of forms of organisation naturally creates a state of chaos in the industrial world. The 581,755 unionists of the Commonwealth are divided up among

394 organisations. In N.S.W. alone it takes 217 unions to organise 243,176 members. Often two different unions cater for exactly the same class of worker – as, for instance, the Amalgamated and the Progressive Societies of Carpenters and Joiners (these have at last amalgamated in 1921). Craft and industrial organisations cause endless overlapping, while sectional and occupational unions fight among themselves – the A.C.A. opposed the registration of the Bank Officers, and still fights with the Public Service Association. There has been no central authority in the trade union world to control the formation of unions or check these abuses. On the industrial field Labour has failed to achieve anything like unity even within the borders of a single State. Between the States there is no co-ordinating force whatever.

Yet for thirty years Labour in Australia has been trying to achieve the same unity on the industrial front as it has achieved in the arena of politics, but it has so far signally failed. This endeavour has followed two main lines – through federations or through amalgamation under the inspiration of the One Big Union idea. The first line of policy has meant no break with the tradition of constitutional and political action, and has, in fact, been bound up with that policy. The amalgamation movement, on the other hand, is definitely associated with a revolt against the traditional policy, and signifies an inclination to break with the conservative compromising methods of the Labour Party, and the subordination of unionism to politics. Before proceeding, therefore, to give an account of the latter movement, it will be well to summarise briefly the organs created or projected with the object of co-ordinating the forces of unionism without affecting the ideals or methods of the Labour Movement.

Chapter VII. The Co-ordination of Union Forces by Federations

THE first institutions which attempted to bring some order into the trade union world in the Australian colonies were the Trades and Labour Councils in the several capital cities. In these the unions early began to meet together, and when sites were granted for Trades Halls joint committees of the unions were formed for the management of the institutions. In 1884 the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, founded originally for this object, enlarged its scope so as to be able to deal with general questions of common interest to unionists. In other States Labour Councils were established apart from the board or committee administering the affairs of the common hall. These were the first, and are even to-day the only, permanent organisations which exist to co-ordinate the forces of unionism. But they are only consultative bodies, and their decisions cannot be enforced upon the constituent unions. Nor are they fully representative, since it is seldom that more than half the unions in any State are affiliated. Finally, they are essentially urban bodies, so that only unions which have offices in the metropolis can effectively be affiliated. That is, however, a smaller disability than might at first appear owing to the extraordinary centralisation of industry in the capital cities.

These remarks will be made clearer by a brief account of the Sydney – or, as it has been called since 1910, the N.S.W. Labour Council. This assembly meets every Thursday night in the Sydney Trades Hall. Its objects are to improve the conditions of labour, to discuss and put in force approved schemes for the better guidance and extension of Labour organisation, to prevent, if possible, disputes between unionists and employers, to uphold the rules of affiliated unions, and, in cases of need, to find ways and means for the support of the union concerned. Provision is also made in the rules for the direct representation of Labour in Parliament and the establishment of a Labour daily. District Councils may be set up and affiliated councils exist at Newcastle, Goulburn, Lithgow, and Broken Hill, but they can seldom be represented at the Sydney meetings. Affiliated unions are allowed one delegate for every 300 members or part thereof, but the maximum delegation from any one organisation is three. This limitation in practice discourages large unions like the C.&S.E.F., the Railwaymen, and the A.W.U., from affiliating inasmuch as these huge unions object to being limited to the same voting power as a relatively tiny craft union of some 750 members. The Council is governed by an Executive of eleven, assisted by a paid Secretary. All these are elected annually, though in point of fact the Secretary is always re-elected until he gets a seat in Parliament or some other position. Financially the Council is very weak. The affiliation fee is only 3d. per member per quarter, unions need not pay for more than half their total membership, and the maximum liability corresponding to the limitation in the representation granted, is £3 15s. per quarter. Thus the Council, when its Secretary and office staff have been paid, has little left over for other purposes. Even so the salaries paid were not large. J. Cochran, in

1908, received £3 10s. a week, his successor, E. J. Kavanagh, in 1911, got £5, while in 1921 Garden is paid £8.

The Council has no power to strike a levy on members of affiliated societies, still less can it call them out on strike. The Council, therefore, cannot offer any very material benefits to its component unions, and so cannot back up very forcibly the recommendations which alone it has power to make. It is, therefore, not surprising that affiliation is a matter of indifference to many unionists, and that the decisions of the Council are often ignored by individual unions. It attained its maximum strength in 1916, when 124 unions out of 199 were affiliated to it, but even then three of the biggest organisations, the Coal-miners, the Railwaymen, and the A.W.U., held aloof.

Still, the Council has from time to time attempted to exercise a restraining influence on the internal policy of unions. Several efforts, for example, have been made to prevent the formation of overlapping unions. During 1908, for instance, affiliation was refused to the Builders' Labourers' and the Rock-choppers' Unions on the grounds that their members could join an already existing organisation – the United Labourers' Protective Society. But this decision did not seriously embarrass either of the bodies affected. In fact, in that very same year when the Rock-choppers were on strike, the Council was compelled to give them moral support, and by 1913 they were affiliated, while the Builders' Labourers were admitted in the same year.

During the first half of 1911 the Council was called upon to consider a dispute between the Federated Millers and Mill Employees, which, as an industrial union, claimed to admit to membership all employees in the flour-milling industry, and the Federated Engine-drivers and Firemen. The Council in this connection went into the whole question of craft versus industrial unionism, and declared by 86 to 14 in favour of the former. It, therefore, became the duty of the Council to oppose the formation of industrial union which might conflict with existing craft associations. Yet it was powerless to prevent the formation of a branch of the A.M.I.E.U., which was even admitted to affiliation in 1916. But this was a strictly industrial union, and the Secretary had criticised it as such in his report for the first half of 1914. Several other instances could be quoted in which the Council was flouted - notably the celebrated recommendation to unions to ignore Wade's Industrial Disputes Act of 1908, and again to refuse to furnish returns under Beeby's Arbitration Act of 1918.

But despite the incompetence of the Labour Council to enforce its decisions upon its constituent unions, its moral influence has been considerable. It has given valuable service in providing a nucleus organisation by means of which industrial disputes may be guided. Any industrial trouble which an affiliated union cannot settle amicably is under the rules to be reported to the Secretary of the Council for submission to the Executive. The latter is empowered to attempt to secure a settlement, and if other unions are likely to be affected, to call them in for consultation. The Council reserves the right to withhold assistance from an affiliated body striking without first consulting the Executive or rejecting its advice, and may even suspend the offending body. But as its powers of help are small the threat is rather ineffectual. The assistance it can give is threefold.

It can, and generally does, call in the representatives of unions likely to be affected by any trouble with a view of securing their co-operation in the event of a strike. Of course, the Council cannot compel concerted action in support of a strike, but the solidarity of Labour is so real a thing in Australia that compulsion is unnecessary, and one section of the workers will readily come out to help their comrades when called upon. For example, in 1908 the Sydney Wharf Labourers, in support of their fellows at Newcastle, refused to handle the cargo carried by the recalcitrant shipowners, the Newcastle and Hunter River S.S. Co. and the Illawarra S.S. Co. The steamship owners in reply took on non-unionists, and as a result caused the whole 3,000 unionists to withdraw their labour from the wharves. The Council decided that the dispute was to be confined to the coastal shipping companies and secured the co-operation of the other maritime unions. The seamen, marine engineers, and officers left their ships. The painters and dockers and other engineering unions declined to work on the coastal companies' boats, and the trolley and dray men refused to cart their goods. By these means the Wharf Labourers' dispute was brought to a triumphant conclusion.¹ Similar co-ordination in action was secured in the Hoskins strike of 1911. This trouble began at Lithgow, but iron made by non-union labour was sent to Sydney. On the motion of the Lithgow unionists the Council decided to declare this iron "black." The Executive convened a conference of the iron trades and a defence committee under the chairmanship of the Council's President was set up, representing A.S.E., Blacksmiths, Boilermakers' Cokeworkers, Engine-drivers, Moulders, and Stove-makers.

But if, in these and other disputes, the Labour Council was successful in enlisting the active support of other allied workers in support of a union on strike, that was not uniformly the case. In 1908 the Council promised its support to the Tramway Union on behalf of two conductors who were believed to have been unjustly dismissed from the Government service as a result of reports sent in by plain clothes spies employed by the Commissioners. The drivers and conductors ceased work at 10 a.m. on October 23rd, completely paralysing the traffic of the metropolis. But the promised support of the Council did not materialise. Some 250 of the men employed at the power-house indeed ceased work, but they did not succeed in cutting off the current completely, and eventually returned to work. An attempt to involve the Locomotive Engine-drivers ended in a fiasco, and the Council itself, after an inquiry, exonerated the association on the ground that they had not been consulted before the stoppage. The Government was able to keep some sort of service going by blackleg labour, and the strike ended on the 31st with a panic rush back to work. Here it was generally held that the support given by the Council was incommensurate with its commitments to the Tramway Union, and bitter recriminations resulted. In the Big Strike of 1917 the utter inadequacy of the Council's machinery to handle a big dispute was terribly demonstrated, as we shall see anon.

In addition to rallying the forces of unionism to the support of a striking union by direct participation, the Council is the recognised medium by which financial assistance from other bodies and other States can be secured for strikers. Although itself having no funds for that purpose, appeals, backed by the Council, are sure of support from labour organisations all over Australia. For the Lithgow Strike of 1911

the Council raised by this means £2,370, from which single strikers were paid £1 per week, and married men 30s., together with 2s. 6d. for each child. The Council also paid the fines that were not remitted by the Labour Government. To the Barrier Strike of 1909 the Council contributed £4,873, while it raised £22,277, and a loan of £1,000, free of interest, from the A.S.E., for the 1917 strikers. In 1914 the northern miners, who were not affiliated to the Council, found it necessary to obtain the endorsement of that body before they could raise money in other States.

Thirdly, the Council could act as mediator between the opposing forces in an industrial dispute. The intervention of its officers has often resulted in a settlement being reached where the unaided efforts of the individual union had failed. So in 1908 their intervention secured the iron-workers' assistants the right to refuse to work with non-unionists. Again, in 1913, Kavanagh, the Secretary, was able to settle a dispute at Tooth's Brewery advantageously for the men. In the same year his decision in a case of alleged victimisation of an undertaker was accepted though adverse to the men, and he was able to settle a demarcation dispute between the boilermakers and the shipwrights at Cockatoo Naval Dockyard, for which act the Council was formally thanked.

However, the decisions of the Council's officers were not always acceptable to the unions. A dispute between the Musicians' Union and the management of one of the Sydney theatres was referred to Mr. Kavanagh for adjudication in July, 1914. He found for the management. The union rejected his decision, and for a long time resisted the plan of settlement subsequently brought forward. Even when the musicians had to accept this scheme, and all the strikers had been reinstated, a resolution was tabled for the union to withdraw from affiliation with the Council, and it took a deputation from the latter body to secure the rejection of the motion.

In addition to these services, the Council in May, 1914, established an Industrial Arbitration Department to advise unions about cases for courts or boards, prepare documents, and even conduct cases for them. The Department was well patronised at first, and gave the unions efficient assistance in the complicated legal actions which were coming to take up more and more of the time of their secretaries, and did all this more cheaply than any private lawyer. But in April, 1915, Mr. Henwood, the ex-Secretary of the Saddlers' Union, who had been officer in charge at £5 a week, resigned to set up business on his own account, and took much of the department's business away with him. After this the volume of business diminished, and the department came to an end with the 1917 strike.

The Labour Council has since been responsible for the establishment of a Labour College in opposition to the W.E.A. and also for the initiation of a Labour Research and Information Bureau. But its most important function has remained the provision of a centre where the opinions of organised labour can be formulated and a channel through which they may find expression. Though its decisions are sometimes rather academic, they have, nevertheless, considerable weight industrially. Thus the passage of the peace resolution through the Council in 1918 was the direct occasion which led to the famous Perth Resolutions of the A.L.P. Unfortunately, however, a sort of party

system has developed within the Council, and now the left and right wings of the Labour Movement meet there as two distinct forces, generally voting in divisions on strict party lines, and observing a sort of Caucus system in their tactics for manipulating the decisions of the assembly.

The most obvious defect of the existing force to co-ordinate industrial activities is its inadequacy. Although loyalty to the principle of solidarity is generally sufficient to ensure the co-operation of all affected unions in any dispute through the ad hoc committees which the Council sets up, this step is generally delayed too long, and a union may find itself thus dragged into a strike, on the merits of which it was never consulted. But a much greater cause of weakness is the absence of any permanent organisation to co-ordinate the forces of labour from State to State. A large number of unions are Federal in extent; the Commonwealth Arbitration Court makes awards for all the States; many industrial disputes, from their very nature, must affect more than one State – e.g., on the water-front or in the pastoral industry, and the effects of a strike in one State may react disastrously on the workers in another – for instance, a stoppage in the coal production of N.S.W. soon leads to the closing down of the factories in Victoria, which draw their coal supplies from N.S.W. But despite the real nexus that patently cements the industrial interests of the workers in the several States, there is absolutely no regular or permanent body to control their forces or direct industrial action between State and State.

Unionists have long been conscious of this defect, for they had, as we have already seen, a very lively sense of the community of interest among the workers throughout Australia. Between 1879 and 1891 Inter-Colonial Trade Union Congresses were held regularly, and from 1884 schemes for closer organisation between the States were discussed. The earlier ones remained in the air, but in 1889 a plan for an Australian Labour Federation was approved, and again endorsed at Ballarat two years later.

The A.L.F. scheme provided for the division of Australasia into seven provinces corresponding to the seven colonies. The provinces might be further divided into districts. District Councils were to be set up to administer the latter. Over these came a Provincial Council consisting of delegates from the District Councils, and above all, there was to be a General Council. This was constituted of delegates from the District Councils – one for each 5,000 members or part thereof. The General Council would elect a President, Secretary, and Treasurer, who formed an Executive with power to interpret rules and convene meetings of the General Council. The scheme was to be financed by a levy of 4d. per month per member on affiliated union. Of this sum 1d. was to go to the General Council, 2d. was to be used for a district defence fund, and the balance was to be divided between the District and Provincial Councils for organising expenses. The powers of the several Councils were mainly deliberative, but important powers were conferred upon the District Council to ensure united industrial action.

In the event of an affiliated union being involved in a dispute which it could not settle amicably by itself it must submit the question to the District Executive. If the latter also failed to effect a settlement, the District Council was to be consulted. But the

latter would not have a free hand, save in cases of extreme emergency, but must consult the constituent unions. If the latter approved by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast at a plebiscite, the Council might pledge its aid to the union concerned. In this case financial assistance up to £1 per week a member might be granted to those locked out or on strike, a levy might be struck, and the active co-operation of other unions sought. The District Council might censure in the name of the Federation any employer who showed himself a bitter enemy of labour. This censure was to be communicated to the Provincial Executive, and practically meant the declaration of a boycott against the offender. A union striking without consulting its District Council was not entitled to the support of the Federation.

This scheme never was applied as a whole, but the northern province was declared to be organised in Queensland in 1890. This body was soon able to prove its effectiveness. The shearers and shed hands refused to work with non-unionists or accept a proposed reduction of rates. The pastoralists of the Darling Downs resolved to fight, but the Council of the A.L.F., on January 11th, 1891, resolved to support the pastoral workers. When, therefore, Jondaryan shone with non-union labour they intervened. The transport workers of Brisbane under the A.L.F. refused to handle the non-union wool. A steamer was held up in consequence, and eventually the shipowners put pressure on the pastoralists to meet the union leaders and negotiate a settlement. Thus on its first test the A.L.F. secured a big victory for the bush workers.

In the same year, however, the A.L.F., in common with the majority of the Australian unions, became involved in the Maritime Strike and suffered severely from its collapse. Thereafter the Federation remained numerically very weak till the period of the general revival of attention to industrial organisation which began in Queensland about 1909. In the interval the A.L.F. had to rely chiefly on the A.W.U., the Waterside Workers' Unions, and the Boot Trade Employees. The principal craft unions preferred connection with the urban trades councils fearing to be outvoted by the big unions if they entered the Federation, and objecting to the high dues it demanded. But despite the fewness of the unions affiliated, the A.L.F. has played a magnificent part in the history of unionism in Queensland. It started the first labour paper in Australia – the Worker, which William Lane edited. It initiated the political Labour Movement, and sent out organisers all over the State to establish W.P.O.'s in every populous centre. A number of unions owe their formation to its activities. In 1890 it appointed an organiser to form a union of the women in the clothing trades, and great success attended her efforts. Similarly, the A.L.F. was able to revive the Bakers' Union and set up several unions for bush workers. In 1908 the accession of the newly-formed A.M.A. gave the A.L.F. a great impetus. At this time it was composed almost exclusively of bush unions, the only exceptions being the Boot Trade Employees and the Progressive S.C.&J.

In August, 1910, the first Queensland Trade Union Congress was held in Brisbane, and this assembly of unionists decided that the A.L.F. was too useful an institution to be allowed to die out. The principal resolution, emanating from the Boot Trade Employees, ran:

“That the time has arrived for the complete federation of all the workers of Queensland, and that as a means to this end steps be taken to secure the affiliation of all industrial organisations with the A.L.F.”

This was supported by Theodore, A.W.A., who declared that in the north they had found the A.L.F. equal to every emergency. Crampton, A.M.I.E.U. and McCosker, Printing Trades, spoke in a similar strain, pointing out how successfully the several crafts in these industries had been organised into a single body.¹ A similar resolution was again carried at the second Congress held in the next year. It is interesting to note the reasons advanced at this gathering for the failure of unions to join the Federation. Harry Coyne said that in most cases the point was raised that affiliation would mean encroaching on the unions' funds, and they wanted to provide accident, out-of-employment, superannuation, mortality, and goodness knows what other funds. He never saw a great union that could be true to unionism that provided all these funds. McCosker stated that the A.S.C. & J. and other unions could not afford to affiliate because they were amalgamated with English organisations, and had to pay levies of from 1s. to 4s. a week.²

By this time, however, the A.L.F. had again given a practical demonstration of its power in connection with the big Sugar Strike, organised by the A.W.A. as soon as it had absorbed the Sugar Workers' Union. Conditions in that industry had been terrible. Labourers were only paid 22s. 6d. a week for a ten-hour day in the tropical sun. The A.W.A. demanded 30s., an eight-hour day, and a modification of the oppressive agreement demanded from the cane-cutters. The A.L.F. gave the new amalgamation every assistance, appointing special organisers, opening subscriptions, and helping to organise camps of strikers. But unskilled labour could be imported from other States, and the industry was not completely paralysed. So the strike dragged on for three months. Then the A.L.F. convened a conference of Inter-State transport unions. The seamen, marine engineers, waterside workers, and storemen and packers agreed to declare sugar “black.” That would have meant either that the raw sugar was abandoned in the north or that the coastal shipping of Queensland would be paralysed. This decision was announced on August 12th, and on the 14th the strike was settled by an agreement granting a forty-eight hour week, with a maximum working day of nine hours and a minimum rate of 30s. a week, with time and a quarter for overtime for all sugar workers.

Perhaps in view of the victory thus gained the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council, in obedience to the resolution of the T.U.C., suspended operation on September 22nd, in favour of the A.L.F. The rules of the A.L.F. at this time were on the whole those already described. On the Provincial Council unions were entitled to one delegate for the first 500 members or part thereof, and an additional delegate for every further 1,000 members, with a maximum of four delegates, or on District Councils one for every fifty members with the same limitation. Affiliation fees were 4s. per member per annum. Of this 3s. went to the Worker, and entitled members to receive a copy of the journal by post every week. The powers originally assigned to the District Council were in the main exercised by the Provincial Council. It was to the latter that a union

must appeal in the event of a threatened dispute. If the trouble was likely to affect other unions the Council was bound to arrange a joint meeting of the unions concerned. It was empowered to support an approved strike financially, either by striking a levy on members of the Federation or issuing an appeal.

The power of the newly-revived Federation was tested in the following year by the Tramway Strike. Then the A.L.F. called a general strike of all the unions in the State and received a magnificent response. It managed the great stoppage very creditably on the whole, and its failure cannot well be ascribed to any formal defect in organisation. But fail it did, and that failure spelt the death warrant of the organisation. In 1913 the Provincial Council decided to increase the Worker dues from 3s. to 5s. per annum. The new fees were too heavy for the smaller unions, crippled financially by the cost of the strike. By 1914 eleven unions had seceded, and as a result the Federation was formally dissolved. This result was hastened by the attitude of the A.W.U., which since its fusion with the A.W.A. had become the apostle of One Big Unionism and amalgamation instead of federation. The control of the Worker was accordingly taken over by the latter in conjunction with the A.M.I.E.U. So ended the Australian Labour Federation.

But the Federation had never been, as intended, Australian. In 1894, indeed, an attempt was made for form a branch in N.S.W., but it did not find unanimous support and was dissolved four years later. Other attempts have been made periodically to set up some sort of permanent body to co-ordinate the forces of unionism throughout Australia, but inter-State jealousies, the apathy and meanness of unionists and the problem of establishing really effective and continuous contact between centres so widely separated as the State capitals have always wrecked these excellent plans. It would be a matter of only academic interest to describe all these unsuccessful efforts, and we will therefore refer the reader to the interesting compendium of proposals collected in the appendix to Sutcliffe's "History of Trade Unionism in Australia." Here we will content ourselves with a reference to one of the latest schemes, because its failure is so obviously due to the reaction against the conservative tradition that it forms a good introduction to the study of that revolt.

In 1913 the New Zealand workers were involved in a terrific struggle, and it appeared likely that the trouble would spread to Australia. A conference of the unions exposed to the danger – the Maritime Workers, Coal-Miners and A.W.U. was accordingly summoned to consider the position. It seems to have been the object of the promoters of the conference – especially W. M. Hughes, the President of the Waterside Workers' Federation – to restrict the aid rendered by Australian unionists to their New Zealand comrades, to monetary contributions, and to prevent a sympathy strike breaking out in the Commonwealth. That was at any rate the policy adopted. Out of this conference arose a plan for an Australian Unions' Federation. The preamble refers to "the octopus-like grip of Capitalism over the whole civilised world and the consequent inadequacy of the loose system of local control to struggle successfully against these combinations of capitalists. To meet this situation a Federation of unions or federations of unions was to be set up, the management of which would be entrusted

to a Council of Twelve elected biennially by the Conference of the Federation. The Conference was to be constituted on a basis of one delegate for every 5,000 members up to a maximum of four. The voting power of each union delegation would be proportionate to the number of members in the organisations they represented, but no single union might exercise more than one-third of the aggregate number of votes to which the affiliated organisations are entitled. An annual affiliation fee of £5 was to be paid by each union, and Per capita fees might also be imposed.

The most important rule was the following:

“Every affiliated organisation shall, at the earliest opportunity, notify the General Secretary of the Federation of any dispute which may involve an industrial disturbance, or any proposed alteration of existing industrial conditions in the industry in which such organisation operates. The General Secretary shall make a record of all such matters in a special book kept for that purpose, and immediately on receipt of such notification, refer all such matters to the Council, who shall determine the course to be taken by the organisation immediately concerned, as well as by all affiliated organisations ; and such decision shall be binding upon the organisation immediately affected, and upon all other organisations affiliated.

“No cessation of work or disturbance of existing conditions (which may involve an industrial dispute) by an affiliated organisation, shall take place unless, and until the matter has been laid before the Council, and the Council has so decided.

“In the event of any industrial disturbance, or dispute or alteration of industrial conditions in which any organisation or organisations not affiliated with the Federation are concerned, the Council shall take official notice of the matter, and shall discuss and decide the attitude to be adopted by the Federation, and every affiliated organisation, and no affiliated organisation shall act, or refuse to act, in regard to such dispute except as decided by the Council.”

That pretty clearly betrays the real objects of the proposed Federation.

To what extent this pretentious scheme ever functioned is uncertain. The coal-miners and some of the waterside unions seem actually to have affiliated, and J. H. Catts, M.H.R., was appointed as Secretary. He wrote to the A.W.U. Convention of 1915 soliciting the support of that union. The comments of delegates throw an illuminating sidelight upon trade union psychology at the moment.

Harry Coyne said that the scheme was a sort of checkmate on the industrial ardour of men. Under it a big union could be prevented from taking action. Mr. Hughes had taken a clever point in this, and when he could prevent the waterside workers from coming out, he would always do so. The scheme was loaded. Grey remarked that Mr. Hughes and his apostles were seemingly going to run an apostolic government of the industrial side of labour so that peace would be preserved purely in the interest of the political side of the Movement. Lambert described the proposals as “a cunningly devised scheme by a few wily politicians to hobble, bind and shackle the unions. It

was not a good thing to allow politicians to get too great a grip upon the control of industrial organisation. The day was fast approaching when a stand would have to be taken.”¹

Catts' letter was allowed to lie on the table, and nothing more was ever heard of the Australian Unions Federation. In the future the plans of Labour leaders for closer unity from State to State ran rather on the lines of amalgamation than federation. So in thirty years the industrial Labour Movement has not been able to evolve any permanent unifying organs even of a consultative nature such as the political movement has achieved.

Chapter VIII. The Growth of the Reaction Against Politicalism

THE remarks of the A.W.U. delegates, with which we concluded the last chapter, are symptomatic of the change which had come over the outlook of industrialists since the beginning of the century. To understand this change it will be necessary to go back several years; for the roots of the revolt against politicalism go back as far as 1907. The movement of thought in this period is not continuous, but oscillatory, varying with the political and economic circumstances of the time. Its beginnings may be associated with the realisation that the increases of wage secured by Arbitration Court awards were being neutralised by the rapid increase of prices from 1908 onward. But at this time militancy was checked by the prospect of the return of Labour Governments in the chief industrial States from which, so far untried, great things were expected, and by the disastrous results of experiments in direct action under hostile Ministries which recalled the lessons of the 'nineties.

Secondly, when a spell of Labour Governments had failed to bring any relief to the workers, but real wages continued to fall, a more marked drift to the Left manifested itself in the movement for big amalgamations on industrial lines led by the A.W.U. This tendency took on a third and accentuated phase when the popular idols of labour deserted to the enemy and Labour was left hopelessly defeated on the political field. This phase culminated in the Big Strike of 1917, and, in the light of the lesson then received, passed into a fourth when the industrial leaders came out with a definitely revolutionary programme under the banner of the One Big Union.

But as the original inspiration of political action had come from Europe, so the new industrial movement is traceable to American influences. These were the propaganda of the Industrial Workers of the World. It was this body which once more revived the doctrines of revolutionary Socialism on the industrial field which the small bodies of orthodox Socialists, who had split off from the Labour Party, had failed to keep alive on the political field. Now it is convenient to distinguish three periods in this propaganda:

Firstly, a rather academic advocacy of industrial unionism through the medium of I.W.W. Clubs and the S.L.P., guided rather by the principles of Detroit than the more extreme doctrines of Chicago.

Secondly, there came a time when the phraseology at least of these industrial unionists was taken up by recognised leaders of Australian unionism in the furtherance of amalgamations and the creation of industrial as opposed to craft unions.

Thirdly, the Chicago I.W.W. established locals in Australia and conducted an intensive campaign throughout the continent, paying no respect whatever to the established shibboleths of the politicians. This period ended with the formal dissolution of the organisation under the Unlawful Associations Act of 1916.

These three periods correspond very approximately to the first three phases of the revolt of the unionists against the domination of the politicians, but of course these phases and periods must not be taken as separated by any hard-and-fast lines. They melt insensibly into one another and frequently overlap. Nor again must too much stress be laid on their parallelism with economic changes. It is probable, that despite the statistical fall in real wages, the general level of comfort and prosperity enjoyed by the workers as a whole rose steadily throughout the whole period during which they were moving to the Left. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind the change in the character of the workers included in the unions which came about during the epoch. This change was the organisation of the nomadic unskilled or semi-skilled workers who roam about the country districts of a new land. Now, it was just this class that the I.W.W. had been founded to organise in America, and this circumstance partly accounts for the changed outlook of the industrial movement.

The channel through which the new doctrines of industrial unionism first reached the Australian proletariat was the Socialist Labour Party, which as a socialist body dated back to the nineties, and had little practical influence. Still it was from it that the I.W.W. doctrine began to permeate the Australian unions. The leaders of the S.L.P. were among the founders of the I.W.W. in 1905. Two years later I.W.W. clubs began to spring up in Australia under the auspices of the S.L.P., but preaching industrial unionism. Among the coal-miners around Newcastle and in Melbourne these preachings had an appreciable influence. There were two points in the I.W.W. creed which were seized upon by the Australian unionist – the futility of craft unionism which divided the workers up into small sections, each out for their own hands and regardless of their mates; and the denunciation of palliatives such as wages boards and arbitration courts.

The I.W.W., even before the Chicago split, had regarded it as the aim of unionism to fight the master class. The union must be a fighting machine and nothing else. They regarded benefit funds and such like adjuncts as cumbersome and useless paraphernalia which only hindered the onward march of the toilers. Craft or sectional unionism they looked upon as organised scabbery and nothing less. The ideal union would be such that “all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, can cease work whenever a strike or lock-out is on in any one department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.” The class struggle formed the cardinal point in their creed, and it could only be ended by the workers uniting politically and industrially to take and hold what they produce. To this triumphant culmination of the struggle palliatives were only a hindrance. The diversion of working-class energies into political channels for the attainment of such was therefore deplored as a waste of time. Arbitration Courts, which served at best to maintain the status quo and offered no ultimate hope of emancipation, checked the creative militancy of the proletariat and consequently hindered progress.

The circumstances of the period predisposed the toilers minds to a receptive attitude towards these teachings. The legal delays of the Arbitration Court procedure and the frequent defeats of the workers, even when they had at length obtained a good award,

on appeals to the higher courts caused many to look for better results from the old direct method. The failure of the Labour Parties to gain tangible results, despite all their concessions to the middle classes, after fifteen years induced a feeling of pessimism with regard to reformist tactics. On the other hand, the older unionists, who remembered the dark days of the 'nineties and were able to recognise the positive advances gained under arbitration in comparison therewith, looked askance at the direct actionist propaganda of the I.W.W. The craft unionists, too, saw their hard-won privileges imperilled by the plan of industrial unionism; the officials of small sectional unions feared that it threatened their jobs; and above all the influential politicians deprecated revolutionary theories that would make vote-catching more difficult.

It was not, therefore, to be expected that the I.W.W. would get much countenance from the official leaders of Labour as represented on urban trades councils or at union congresses. In 1907 the Sydney Labour Council refused to hear Scott Bennett lecture on industrial unionism. One delegate said: "Those men can be heard any day, abusing trade unionism, the Labour Party, and the Council. Their object is to wipe out trade unionism and substitute their own ideas." 1 Melbourne Trades Hall Council, however, proved more open-minded in the following year. The Executive was asked to report on a motion:

"That in view of the fact that Arbitration Courts and Wages Boards have failed to give the protection to the workers that they so much desire, the Trades Hall Council be requested to consider the advisability of organising on the lines of the I.W.W."

The Executive brought in an exhaustive and reasoned report. They denied that Arbitration Courts and Wages Boards had failed to give "protection and relief to sweated and other workers." On the contrary, they had "created conditions that could not have existed otherwise." "The true ideal of the workers is not possible under Capitalism, and therefore they are bound to use that machinery which secures the best results for the time being, recognising that each step upward is a foothold not previously gained. Arbitration Courts are but aids, not finalities, in the march of industrial progress." After enumerating the achievements of unionism the report continues: "The constitution of the I.W.W. is but another phase of the unionist movement. The distinctive badge of craftism is merged in the greater humanity." To attain success the forces of labour should be knit into one great organisation. "When the millions of unionists are disciplined, undivided, and mobile towards achieving their ends, craftism will have ceased and brotherhood will be paramount. That this is possible your Executive is assured." But owing to the difference in condition on the two sides of the Pacific, the Executive did not agree that the constitution of the I.W.W. was applicable in globo to Australian problems. They contented themselves with recommending a conference of the unions for the modest aim of creating a central fighting fund.

In Easter of the same year a Trade Union Congress was held in N.S.W., and thereat the following resolution was moved on behalf of the Newcastle Labour Council:

“That whereas it has been demonstrated that our present system of craft unionism is hopelessly impotent to prevent the exactions of concentrated capital; and whereas the position of the workers is year by year becoming more insecure; and whereas it is absolutely necessary that the workers should be organised industrially in order to cope successfully with combinations of capitalists, be it therefore resolved that this meeting adopts the constitution and preamble of the I.W.W. as follows”: (here follows the preamble of that body as originally adopted in 1905).

In support of his thesis the mover pointed to the success of a recent coal strike in Newcastle, which he attributed to the fact that the union was organised industrially. Another delegate declared that craft unionism had outlived its usefulness. Individual unions were beaten almost every time. Palliatives had failed. The exploitation of the labour of women and children showed an alarming increase. Effie (Coal Trimmers) declared straight out that political action had failed, but Harry Holland (Tailoresses) declared that the motion did not mean the abandonment of political action. (As a matter of fact the first I.W.W. preamble expressly states that “the toilers must come together on the political as well as on the industrial field,” but adds later, “without affiliation with any political party” – probably, however, referring simply to Republicans or Democrats, as the more syndicalist preamble of 1908 expressly omits the word “political.”) The supposed syndicalism of the I.W.W. was the chief objection advanced against it. Nulty, of the Barrier A.M.A., afterwards a red-hot centre of industrial unionism, asked: “After so many years of hard work, do you propose to knock the political Labour Party on the head? To adopt the preamble would kill it. Its principles originated in America which is fifty years behind the times as far as the Labour Party is concerned. It is the objective of the Socialists who are always trying to divide the ranks of labour.” W. G. Spence, M.H.R., President of the A.W.U, spoke in a similar strain. If they liked, the unionists could elect a Labour Government, and if they joined together as they should they could get what they wanted. The I.W.W. preamble meant strikes and nothing but strikes, and in some cases to take possession. But when they took possession, what then? They must capture the law-making machine. Division would only please the capitalists who were getting alarmed at the progress of Labour in politics. Morrish, an ex-Socialist, also contrasted Australian and American conditions. In the U.S.A., he pointed out, there was no Political Labour Party. On the other hand, E. J. Kavanagh, Secretary of the Labour Council, maintained that there were only two known ways of closer organisation-by federation or by a labour council. He recommended the unions to affiliate with his Council. The I.W.W. proposition was in the end turned down by a two to one majority, and a resolution carried in its place in favour of a Federation of Labour. Nevertheless, the I.W.W. idea was still working. In July the coal-miners in N.S.W. and Victoria federated. Previously there had been three separate federations in N.S.W. – the Northern on the Newcastle-Maitland field, the Western with its headquarters at Lithgow, and the Southern on the Illawarra coast. Each of these worked under separate awards or agreements, so that low wages under a two-years'-old award in one district could be used as an argument for keeping down wages in another. Again, during a strike on the northern field industry might be kept going by coal from Lithgow or Illawarra. The Federation would be a far more formidable fighting

machine, and that is what its founder, Bowling, intended it to be; for he was a professed adherent of the I.W.W. The Tram Strike in Sydney is further evidence of the effect of I.W.W. propaganda. At least Holman attributed the strike to the intrigue of an I.W.W. section who wanted to compass the fall of the Labour Party.

Next year there was quite a body of opinion filled with the idea of a general strike, and the I.W.W. influence in the northern miners' lodges was unmistakable. The Broken Hill miners were on strike or locked out that year, and their leaders had been arrested for sedition and committed for trial. Now Wade transferred the scene of the trial from the Barrier to Albury. The unionists regarded this action as evidence of an intention on the part of the Ministry to secure a conviction by hook or by crook, and the northern miners desired to resort to direct action to prevent a perversion of justice. At the Trade Union Congress, which opened in Sydney a few days before the trial, Peter Bowling secured the suspension of the standing orders to protest against the change of venue. Having carried the protest, Congress went into camera to consider a further motion of Bowling's that in the event of a conviction all Labour bodies should be asked to cease work until a fresh trial in fairer circumstances was granted. In supporting this motion for a general strike, Biggers (Northern Coal Miners) said that the men in prison looked not to the Parliamentary Labour Party, but to the industrial organisations. They wanted One Big Union. However, Congress would have nothing to do with the general strike. Later on, at the same gathering, Bowling made a bitter attack on the Labour Party. That Party, he said, exercised a deadly influence. The legislation they aimed at would create small farmers and middle-class capitalists - the biggest obstacles that were known. Members of the Labour Party dare not come out on the platform as advocates of the cause of Labour. In the Tram Strike they had led the union men to turn traitors. Their policy was always peace at any price. The P.L.L. started out as a socialist movement and then went back and back. Until the workers were organised industrially, they could not have a true reflex in Parliament. To the substantive motion in favour of closer unity between the industrial and political movements he moved as an amendment:

“That at the present stage of industrial unionism, it is undesirable for it to be asked to take part in any political movement that exists to-day.”

This amendment was not seconded, the Chairman ruling that in the principal motion political movement did not necessarily mean the P.L.L.

But the feeling in favour of direct action which was growing up soon found expression in a great upheaval in the coal-mining industry. The opposition of the industrial unionists to arbitration was seconded by the northern colliery proprietors who had fought the Industrial Disputes Act in every conceivable way. Even justice Heydon had complained of their determined obstruction.¹ A number of unionists had been victimised, and the best places were, it is alleged, given to blacklegs. So to settle these and other grievances the Northern Colliery Employees' Federation decided on a strike on November 7th. The decision took the public by surprise, but the plans of the men had been well laid. There were two mines on the field whose owners were not in the association or “vend” with the remaining proprietors. The Federation had arranged

for the continued working of these two mines on a co-operative basis, the miners sharing in the enhanced price to be created by the shortage and using their earnings for the support of their striking comrades. An agent, probably of the miners, is supposed to have made a contract with one of the “vend” proprietors for 670 tons of coal on November 3rd, and subsequently resold this coal during the strike at 50s. a ton, thus earning a substantial profit on the transaction.

On November 10th only the two co-operative mines were working, the supplies available were strictly limited, and the men seemed in an invincible position. On Tuesday a conference was held between the miners and the waterside workers, led by Hughes, to complete the hold-up. On the same day the Premier, Wade, proposed a conference between the parties, the men returning to work in the interval. That proposition the miners immediately rejected. The proprietors treated similarly a subsequent proposition for a conference without resumption of work. Then Wade began to show the direct actionists what political action could do. First the railways were instructed to refuse to haul coal except for locomotive purposes. That made it impossible to realise on the coal cut from the two co-operative pits and cut off the strikers' source of revenue. On the 30th the Government commandeered all coal at grass in the State at a fair average value – i.e., without taking into account the increment in value due to the shortage created by the strike. So the miners' clever plan for providing themselves with the sinews of war was effectually checkmated. At the same time industries were closing down and throwing men out of work owing to the lack of fuel. The use of gas and electricity was rigorously restricted. Moreover Bowling and two fellow officers of the Federation were arrested for conspiring to cause a strike contrary to the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act.

The last-named event brought to a head division, which had long been brewing, in the strike congress of miners and transport workers which was sitting. Hughes, in view of the near approach of the Federal elections, was working for peace and was doing his best to keep the watersiders and other unions from direct participation. Bowling, on the other hand, wanted a general strike. On December 12th these quarrels came to a head. Hughes said some bitter things of Bowling, and thereupon the miners walked out of the congress and announced that they would continue the fight on their own.

Wade seized the opportunity to take exemplary action. On December 16th he secured the suspension of the standing orders, to allow of the passage through both Houses of Parliament in a single sitting of a Bill to amend the Industrial Disputes Act. The Coercion Act, as this hurried amendment was called, was indeed a remarkable piece of legislation. Strikes or lock-outs in connection with the production or distribution of a necessary commodity – i.e., water, coal, gas, or any article of food necessary to human life, were placed in a special category. Any meeting to instigate, aid, control, or maintain such a strike was declared unlawful. Participation in such a meeting exposed one to a penalty of twelve months' imprisonment. (This clause was clearly directed against the strike congress.) The police were authorised to break into any building where they suspected that such an unlawful meeting was in progress. Furthermore, for instigating or supporting an illegal strike or lock-out a penalty of

twelve months' imprisonment might be imposed. The administration of these clauses would be in the jurisdiction of the Industrial Court, and under the principal Act no appeal from its findings or sentences lay to any higher court. Hence the accused under this section was deprived of the right of trial by jury-there was no jury in the Industrial Court – and might be sentenced to a long term of imprisonment without the right of appeal to the verdict of his peers. This wonderful measure was passed through the Assembly by the aid of a liberal use of the closure. Labour members were thus deprived of the chance of supporting Mr. Bowling, and had to content themselves with marching out of the Chamber in protest.

As soon as the Bill became law, the strike leaders were again arrested, and this time bail was refused. So they had to stay in gaol till they were sentenced to eighteen months each. Under these circumstances the strike gradually collapsed. The political action of the employing class had proved more effective than the industrial action of the workers. The politicians, led by Hughes, scored a distinct victory over the I.W.W. in the defeat of the workers. The debacle damped the enthusiasm of the direct actionists and encouraged unionists to concentrate once again on capturing the Legislature. Thus the Coal Strike marks the close of our first phase of revolt as far as the southern States are concerned.

It was not till Labour Governments had begun to demonstrate their incompetence to fulfil their own promises that the I.W.W. again began to spread. And when it did, it was a new I.W.W. – an Australian branch chartered straight from the extremist section at Chicago. But before dealing with that phase we must describe the events that had been taking place in Queensland.

Chapter IX. The Amalgamation Movement

WE must now turn back a few years to examine the course of events in Queensland. In 1907, after the failure of an unorganised strike at one of the mines on the Irvine Bank field in North Queensland, a small union under the name of the Amalgamated Workers' Association was formed. At first it was closely modelled on the Victorian A.M.A., but after a short time the benefit section was omitted, and the union became simply a fighting organisation. Then it began to go ahead rapidly. Branches were formed on two adjacent fields: Stannery Hills and Herberton. In May, 1908, the enterprise of E. G. Theodore, a young man already widely versed in Socialist literature, effected an amalgamation between the A.W.A., and the unions of the workers at O.K. Smelters and the Mungana Mines, also in the same district. The six branches of the organisation were represented on an executive which met at Irvinebank. So far the union was just an organisation of miners, but it soon enlarged its sphere of membership with fruitful results. In the August of the same year there was much discontent among the navvies engaged in building the Chillagoe Railway. Hearing of the trouble, Theodore, the organiser of the A.W.A., hastened to the camps, got all the navvies to join the A.W.A., and in return secured for them the support of that union in a strike for better conditions. After a month's stoppage the A.W.A. officials negotiated a settlement, giving practically all the men demanded.

This victory demonstrated the value of a composite organisation. Alone the navvies would probably have been easily starved out; with the financial and moral support of the miners they were remarkably successful. When the first annual conference of the amalgamation met at Chillagoe, on February 10th, 1909, four new branches had been formed, and the membership stood at 1,348. But the Executive had been forced to move from Irvine Bank to Stannery Hills, owing to the victimisation of the Honorary Secretary. The paid organiser, Theodore, had to stay at head office doing the clerical work instead of travelling about enrolling fresh members. Conference, therefore, decided to make the Secretary a fully paid officer "beyond the reach of victimising mine managers." W. McCormack was elected to the post at a salary of £200.

In the following year this enterprising organisation set up a Labour daily in Cairns, the seaport that gives access to the far northern mineral fields. The main energies of the organisation were, however, devoted to putting its organiser into Parliament. It is said that Theodore and McCormack tossed up to see who should run for the Woothakata seat. Theodore won both the toss and the seat. But in July, 1910, an epoch-making step was taken that transformed the A.W.A. from a small miners' union to a powerful organisation pregnant with novel ideas. In North Queensland there were a number of small and not very strong unions operating among bush workers – the Amalgamated Sugar Workers' Union, two local bodies of miners and general labourers, each called Amalgamated Workers' Unions, at Charters Towers and Townsville respectively, and the Western Workers' Association covering the same class of toilers around Hughenden. Theodore and McCormack conceived the plan of amalgamating all these bodies into one.

On July 23rd a circular was sent out as below:

“PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE ALL UNIONS IN NORTH QUEENSLAND.

“Benefits. – It will enable us to keep in touch with the nomadic workers of the north who are continually roving from one industry to another, which makes it difficult for unattached unions to cater for their necessities or gain the full advantages of their continuous membership.

“The large expense of management of so many different unions would be considerably curtailed by having one effective control. We could employ permanent organisers who would be able to concentrate their efforts at the various centres at the most opportune times.”

This circular indicates the spirit in which the A.W.A. leaders approached the question. They were eminently practical men and accurately gauged the feeling of the workers of the north. Their scheme was not based on any abstract theory, but it did, in fact, resemble the efforts of the industrial unionists of America, and in support of the plan the arguments and literature of the I.W.W. were used.

The amalgamation scheme was endorsed by the A.L.F. in Brisbane, and they sent an organiser to co-operate with the A.W.A. officials in popularising the proposals. On September 21st a further circular was issued from Chillagoe, over the signatures of W. McCormack, General Secretary, A.W.A., and A. J. Fraser, A.L.F. Organiser. It betrays American influence quite clearly as the appended extracts will show:

“Recognising the difficulty of handling large bodies of men who are divided up among a number of small unions, each acting independently, and that the majority of the members of these small unions are engaged in the mining, railway construction, and sugar industries, and as general labourers, it is proposed to amalgamate the whole into one composite body whose power through amalgamation to enforce better conditions will be increased a hundredfold.

“The formation of trusts to control markets shows clearly that our opponents are organising their forces into one composite body, and if we are to have a chance of success in resisting attacks and conserving our rights, we must have our forces organised likewise.”

The arguments about economy and simplicity were also repeated. Theodore used his member's pass to preach the doctrines of industrial unionism. The same gospel was propagated by Crampton and Anderson of the Butchers' Union. Thus Anderson writes to the Worker, of November 26th :

“Many workers are asking, Why all this talk about forming one grand union of unions? ... Craft unionism is now of no avail. Towards the end of 1908 the Ironworkers' Assistants went out for a reasonable wage. While they were out the rest of the employees, organised in craft unions of their own, remained at work materially

assisting the iron-masters. Were they not scabbing on the Ironworkers' Assistants just as flagrantly as if they had stepped into their jobs? So with the Moulders' Strike which has now lasted sixteen weeks, while engineers, ironworkers' assistants, and boilermakers, have been working all the time."

The amalgamation conference met on December 10th, 1910, and endorsed the proposal. The unions paid 80 per cent. of their assets after meeting all liabilities into the general fund. The constitution of the new composite union largely followed that of the A.W.U. Queensland was divided into three districts, afterwards sub-divided so as to make five in all. The districts had a sort of organisation of their own, but on the whole the tendency of the organisation was towards the centralisation of management. The highest authority in the union was the annual conference consisting of a President, elected annually by plebiscite, a General Secretary similarly elected, whose term of office was, however, three years, and delegates elected from the districts on a basis of one for every 1,000 members, with a maximum of four. Conference controlled the general policy of the union, and elected two Vice-Presidents, who, with the President, General Secretary, and District Secretaries formed the Executive.

The latter was vested with enormous power. It could suspend the rules or policy of the Association, impose levies, and had the management of the General Fund, into which 80 per cent. of the revenue obtained by the branches from the sale of tickets was to be paid. It also had control of strikes. The members of the A.W.A. were pledged to stand by any member victimised, but only provided the Executive approved the action for which he suffered. All industrial agreements required the endorsement of the Executive, and it alone could provide financial assistance for a strike, which must come out of the general fund or from a levy. No members were permitted to strike without the consent of the District Committees save in trifling matters or emergencies when a branch meeting might, by a two-thirds majority, take action without awaiting the sanction of the District Committee. Similarly, the resumption of work must await the sanction of the District Committees. Some power was indeed left to the branches which would be formed in centres such as mining townships, camps, and so on. They could, for instance, retain up to 20 per cent. of the proceeds of the sale of tickets. But the district organisation, though nominally representing the branches, was entirely subordinated to the General Executive, whose endorsement was even required for the nomination of the District Secretary before his name could go to the poll of members of the district.

The membership dues were fixed at £1 per annum, but the tickets of certain other unions were recognised. No coloured alien, except a Maori or American negro was eligible for membership. Provision was also made for the issue of political tickets to persons not eligible for general membership – e.g., farmers or housewives.

Such a scheme of organisation plainly left great power in the hands of the Central Executive, who had almost absolute control of the funds of the organisation and might act autocratically with little cheek from the rank and file. But as a fighting machine it was highly efficient. Yet its aims were not revolutionary. Besides "protecting the interests of the workers in the regulation of conditions of labour," the A.W.A. only

professed to “assist in the movement for the socialisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange,” and “to gradually replace the competitive system of distribution by a co-operative one.” In not one clause of its Aims or Constitution does the Amalgamated Workers’ Association betray serious I.W.W. influence. Its scheme of organisation was highly empirical, and took as its model not the industrial unionism of the States, but Robert Owen’s Grand National Consolidated as already adapted by the A.W.U. So likewise Messrs. Theodore and McCormack did not worry about prefixing pompous Marxian statements to their practical efforts, but accepted the traditional Socialism of the Australian Labour Party and the A.L.F., on the strength of which they hastened to get into Parliament. Still the A.W.A. actually pursued a militant policy and exhibited a great spirit of solidarity, which was well exemplified in the Sugar Strike of 1911.

Contemporaneously with the reorganisation of the A.W.A. went the expansion of the Butchers’ Union into the Amalgamated Meat Industry Employees’ Union. That body traced its history back to 1880, but its operations had been limited to the retail butchers and slaughtermen in the metropolitan area. In 1906 it joined the Inter-State organisation, and appointed Gilday as permanent Branch Secretary. Just about that date the meat export industry of Queensland was being opened up, and the butchers conceived the idea of organising all classes of labour, skilled and unskilled alike, employed in or about the meat works, into one body. During 1907 it had enrolled some 800 members in South and Central Queensland, and had secured for them improved conditions by conference with the masters. Then Crampton was elected organiser. He proceeded to the big new meat works in the north and did magnificent work. Unionism was then weak in that part of Queensland. In the meat works it was absolutely taboo. When the managers refused Crampton admission to the works he splashed across the tidal flats and crawled in through the thick jungle. Conditions inside were indeed bad, but the men and boys followed the union organiser barefooted across the mud to hear the gospel. Through such efforts a new state of affairs was established in the north. By 1910 Crampton was able to announce that the contract system was abolished at the two big works. He reported that the tendency was towards the breaking down of sectionalism and the adoption of a form of organisation that would include all branches of labour in one fold on the lines of the A.W.U. and the A.W.A. At the Trade Union Congress in Brisbane he announced that his society had 98 per cent. of all classes of workers in the trade within the union. The skilled or “aristocracy of labour,” he added, came forward to help their unskilled fellows. A system of limitation of work was then inaugurated. At the Annual Conference amalgamation with the A.W.A. was suggested, but as the union was already affiliated with the A.L.F. the question was postponed for the time.

By the end of 1912 the butchers had secured an agreement with the meat export companies providing for preference to members of the union. And, in fact, once organised, the meat workers were in a strong bargaining position, for, as we have seen, a stoppage during the operation of the works means the almost total loss of a considerable quantity of valuable and highly perishable products. The use of the power thus placed in the hands of the workers was in the hands immediately of the

“Board of Control” established at each meat works. This apparatus is the best and most efficient instance of organisation “on the job” to be found in Australia. The Board consisted of delegates from each department of the works – slaughtermen, tinsmiths, freezing-room hands, and so on-together with a President, Vice-President, and Honorary Secretary. It could be speedily called together at any time, and had full authority to deal with any dispute which would affect only the particular works under its jurisdiction. It could even make agreements with the management, but its actions were subject to a certain general oversight by the State Executive. The departmental delegates were responsible for the maintenance of union’s rules in their section of the works, and also for the collection of fines and levies, of which they were allowed to retain 5 per cent.

During the operation of the preference agreement, all labour required at the works was engaged through the union, who sent men in turn according to their position in the unemployment roll. When a new band was sent down by the union office to the works he would report not to the foreman, but to the departmental delegate. Similarly, if a worker was going to take a day off, he was compelled to report it to the delegate. The latter through the works representative notified the District Secretary by ‘phone, and he sent down next day the next man on the unemployed register. These Boards of Control were able to usurp the functions of management to quite a large extent. But in practice their exercise of control was purely negative-restriction of output and other defensive measures-they never showed any inclination to assume the responsibilities of management.

The Board of Control was thus the basic unit in the structure of the A.M.I.E.U. Above it came a District Council consisting of the representatives from the boards at the several works and the other sections – fellmongers, retail employees, etc.– together with officers elected by plebiscite, and above these State and then Federal Executives and Delegate Conferences.

There were thus two militant unions in Queensland organised on industrial lines – the Amalgamated Workers’ Association, and the Amalgamated Meat Industry Employees. There remained the Australian Workers’ Union. This body was also, as we have seen, an industrial union confined to the pastoral industry. These three organisations formed the mainstay of the Queensland A.L.F. during the period 1910-1913. But in that period the question of a fusion of these three bodies became the central issue for industrialism. Even at the 1909 Convention of the A.W.U. A. Rae had moved a demand for the amendment of the Federal Arbitration Act under which the shearers worked, to enable a union embracing different occupations to register. That, he explained, would enable the union to fulfil its original intention of 1892, and to take in farm labourers, navvies, and other allied workers. The majority of A.W.U. members were general labourers when not following the pastoral industry (which, of course, is seasonal), and it seemed anomalous that they had union protection for a part of the year only. The General Secretary, however, thought that it would be impossible for one man to obtain a knowledge of all sections and yet do justice to the whole. Still Rae’s motion was carried by 14 votes to 10.

Nevertheless the effective overtures for amalgamation did not actually come from the A.W.U. The hands of the latter were forced by the wildfire spread of the A.W.A. after the expansion of 1910. That body distributed broadcast pamphlets on industrial unionism, and the work of Theodore, McCormack, Lane, and Crampton created a fervour of industrial solidarity and class-consciousness throughout the northern State. It infected the shearers and shed hands till the A.W.A. officials were able to threaten the older pastoral union with the absorption of the Queensland branches of the A.W.U. if the latter did not join hands with them first.

The general atmosphere is illustrated by a resolution moved by Sherry (Queensland Railway Employees' Association), at the second Queensland Trade Union Congress in August, 1911:

"That it be a recommendation to the Australian Labour Federation to alter its constitution so as to put the principle of the solidarity of labour into actual practice by supplanting the federation with an industrial workers' organisation.

"Under the A.L.F. constitution," he remarked, "sectional or craft unions could affiliate with it, and at the same time it allowed complete autonomy to those unions. Would not the result of that policy be the tying up of those unions by various agreements? He wished to see an organisation which would abolish all trade or craft barriers like the A.W.A.— to see the distinction between skilled and unskilled workers removed."

H. Coyne, on the other hand, reminded Sherry that there would be no A.W.A. then but for the A.L.F. having sent out C. Collins to organise. But Anderson, too, thought that the great object was to amalgamate into one great union under the A.W.A.

However, delegates were still under the spell of federalism, and that principle carried the day against amalgamation.

But while the spirit of militancy was thus expressing itself formally in the amalgamation movement, it also found material embodiment in a great industrial upheaval. The unsuccessful issue of the latter incidentally gave its deathblow to the A.L.F. and left the way clear for amalgamation to become the sole principle for industrial reorganisation. The historic Brisbane General Strike arose as follows:

The city of Brisbane and its suburbs are served by an electric tramway system owned, not by the State or Municipality, but by a company. The local manager was an American named Badger, who displayed the most intense hostility to unionism. However, during his absence in 1911, the Federated Tramway Employees' Association, which was trying to establish the existence of an "inter-State dispute," so as to come before Mr. Justice Higgins in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, formed a branch among the employees of the Brisbane trams. But on his return Badger began to take steps to smash the union. The exhibition of a notice at the depot forbidding employees to wear the union badge while on duty brought the conflict to a head. This issue was included in the plaint already filed before the Commonwealth Court, but the tramwaymen of Brisbane felt it necessary to offer immediate resistance

to Badger's attack, and at a meeting on January 15th, 1912, resolved to continue to wear the badge in defiance of the management, after receiving assurances of support both from the Federal Council of the Association and from the Australian Labour Federation. On the 17th this decision was put into effect. The manager promptly dismissed the men, whereupon all the tramwaymen left their posts, sometimes leaving their cars standing in the streets. But the number of highly skilled men affected was small, and most of the strikers could be replaced by non-unionists. Within a week Badger had a small and heavily overcrowded service running in spite of hostile demonstrations.

So the A.L.F. had to display its support in a practical manner. After a preliminary meeting of the Council on the 21st a general meeting of unions was held in the Trades Hall on Monday, 28th. Amid the greatest excitement the thirty-six unions represented came to a decision which was announced to the public through Press notices the next morning.

“IN THE MATTER OF THE BRISBANE TRAMWAYS BRANCH OF THE
FEDERATED TRAMWAY EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA.

“To WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

“The Combined Unions' Committee of Brisbane and District, at a meeting held on Monday, 28th inst., 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 Statute Law, Federal and State, resolves:

“ ‘That a GENERAL CESSATION OF WORK take place on TUESDAY, THE 29TH INST., at 6 p.m., unless a satisfactory settlement be arrived at; and further:

“ ‘That this resolution be forwarded to the manager of the Brisbane Tramways Co. at once.’

“The Committee desire the public to know that they are anxious, and will in every manner assist to have hospitals, benevolent, and such institutions fully provided with stores and other requisites necessary to effectually carry on same during this dispute, and carters, etc., supplying these may obtain the necessary permits on applying to the undersigned.

“We also desire it to be known that we will not in any way interfere with the measures taken to safeguard the public health of the community, such as sanitation, etc., but all work in which the above 43 unions are engaged must cease in the terms of the above resolution.

“On behalf of the Combined Committee,

“J. HARRY COYNE, President. J. A. MOIR, Secretary.

“TRADES HALL, BRISBANE,

“January 28th, 1912.”

This proclamation created considerable alarm among the business community, but left Badger unmoved. Accordingly on the appointed day the General Strike began. Next day the shops and warehouses remained closed and the waterfront was deserted. There was a general rush to the Trades Hall for permits to handle perishable goods. The strikers held a mass meeting, when Coyne emphasised the necessity for preserving order and obeying the law, and then marched in procession round the city. The trams had ceased running, but the hold-up of a non-union carter provided a lively incident.

On this fatal day the Strike Committee made the really decisive blunder. They called upon the railwaymen, or, at least, allowed them, to come out. Up to this point the Government, for all its real hostility, had been preserving an attitude of almost benevolent neutrality. So far had they gone, indeed, that the Railway Commissioner had agreed not to ask railwaymen to sacrifice their union principles by handling the coal belonging to the tramway company stacked at Normanby. That almost meant joining in the boycott of Badger’s firm. Moreover, they had exerted pressure on the manager to meet the men, and had even managed to get Badger and the union officials into the same ministerial office. But when the Queensland Railway Employees’ Association withdrew the porters, shunters, and signalmen, the Ministry saw that public support would be lost to the strikers, and so came out into the open.

Announcing their intention of preserving order, the Government brought in mounted police from the country districts and enrolled special constables from among the ranks of the infuriated bourgeoisie and the farmers who were cut off from their markets by the transport hold-up. Public houses were closed and police patrolled the streets. A few trains were kept running during the day, but at night the service was entirely suspended. The strikers, on their part, preserved excellent order. A Vigilance Corps was organised by the Committee to prevent pillaging or disorder. The permit system was extended and improved, and the Courier foamed at the mouth over the spectacle “of respectable business men craving permission from a surly boot-maker to carry out certain necessary operations.” The delivery of victuals was, of course, entirely suspended, but suitable provision was made by the Strike Committee for the supply of necessities – e.g., 40,000 loaves “baked under strictly union conditions.”

On Thursday the Strike Committee decided to call out unionists in the country. On the same day the Police Commissioner informed the Committee that no further processions of strikers would be allowed, but that the Traffic Act would be enforced. So next day, when the strikers assembled as usual, the leaders, in accordance with their policy of keeping within the law, discouraged any attempts at a march. Still a clash between the police and the huge crowd was not to be averted, and the former found some excuse for a baton charge. Some damage, both moral and physical, was inflicted upon the crowd.

Encouraged by the success of the proceedings of “Black Friday,” as the day of the baton charge was named, the Government decided to put a stop to all public gatherings of strikers, and issued a proclamation on February 5th prohibiting “unlawful assemblies.” With regard to the Vigilance Corps the Police Commissioner informed Mr. Coyne that the police were the proper guardians of order and would tolerate no interference in these duties from other bodies. The railway shopmen at Ipswich, who had been called out on the 2nd, were given till the 5th to return or else forfeit all their rights as civil servants. Meanwhile the Employers’ Federation had been busy and had got together sufficient scabs to overcome the total paralysis of the city’s life that had been achieved during the first days. On Monday at noon, welcomed by cheers from the disgruntled professional c asses, the trams started once more to run over the rusting rails.

The strike was now in reality defeated. On Wednesday, February 5th, the shopmen at Ipswich decided to return to work while the Strike Committee told the country unionists to go back and earn money for the support of the strikers. But it was not until the 16th that the Strike Committee ventured to make overtures for a conference with the employers. In the Strike Bulletin they then announced that they were actuated by the following considerations:

“(1) The vital principle around which the whole battle has been waged, viz., the recognition of the union, has been practically secured.

“(2) A proper respect for the Arbitration Court.

“(3) An earnest desire to see business operating once more in all directions.”

These “reasons” were so palpably false that it is not surprising that the Employers’ Federation recognised in the Committee’s overtures a confession of defeat, and flatly refused to meet the men. After that nothing could stem the rout. On the 18th the Typographical Society and the hotel and café employees returned to work in a body, and on March 4th even the miners voted to abandon the struggle. Next day the strike was formally declared “ off.” The nett result of the General Strike, therefore, was the crippling of unionism in Brisbane, and the defeat of Labour at the next elections. The tramway unionists were indeed awarded absolute preference, and the right to wear the union badge by justice Higgins, but by that time Badger had eliminated all unionists from his system, and the union had died in Brisbane.

Historically it is more significant that the A.L.F. was discredited by this disaster, and the unions so weakened that they could no longer afford to pay the Federation dues. This indirectly gave a filip to the negotiations between the A.W.U. and the A.W.A. These negotiations had already resulted in the adoption of a resolution at the instance of Bowman for a plebiscite of the A.W.U. on the question of “enlarging our field of operations by embracing all kinds of organisations.” The mover cited to the 1912 Convention the success of the Railway Workers and General Labourers’ Union in N.S.W. and Victoria and the United Labourers’ Union in South Australia. Another delegate complained that at present he had to join as many as four unions in earning

his living through the “off” season. Lambert, too, wanted the whole of the bush workers in one solid organisation. Blakeley and others, however, desired to restrict the amalgamation to primary producers and exclude bodies like the A.W.A. and the UX.U., which included navvies and such classes of labour.

The A.W.U. consulted eminent counsel, and were advised that the amalgamation was now quite possible without endangering their legal status before the Arbitration Court, thanks to an amendment of the Act passed by the Fisher Government. Accordingly a conference of unions was summoned to meet in the Trades Hall, Sydney, on July 6th, 1912. The bodies represented were the A.W.U., A.W.A., Rural Workers’ Union, Carriers, and Rabbiters. The last three were struggling organisations, and the vested interests of their officials did not amount to much. On the other hand, the A.W.A. chiefs, Theodore and McCormack, were already provided with safe seats in the Legislature, and were devoting themselves to the pursuit of political rather than industrial ambitions. Thus the most formidable obstacle to any amalgamation, the vested interests of paid officials, did not stand in the way of this particular plan. But it soon became evident that the A.W.U. delegates were terrified lest they should endanger the position of that union under the Commonwealth Arbitration Act and imperil the pastoral award. They were indeed satisfied that they could safely include other pastoral and rural workers, but boggled at miners and navvies. But Theodore was determined that the A.W.A. must be taken in as a whole. He denied that the latter would want to go for an award covering all its sections. “The miners in Queensland,” he went on, “have no desire to go to the Court for an award. They are entering into this amalgamation to assist in closer unity, and more to make for industrial solidarity than for any particular gain through legislation.” The A.W.U. delegates continued to harp on the arbitration question. “Unless,” said Barnes, “there was something to safeguard the interests of those working under an award, it would be unwise for the A.W.U. in any way to jeopardise what they had won from the Court.” Grayndler pointed out that outside Queensland the miners and meat workers had already separate organisations, and a departure from the principle of only bringing in allied callings might lead to complications. A conflict with the southern unions might lead to the cancellation of their award. At last McCormack declared:

“While arbitrations might be good, it was not entirely great, and that position should be considered. He would not decry wages boards or arbitration, but the Arbitration Act had not done such a vast amount of good that they should block the organisation of certain workers because, on account of technicalities, these workers could not come within the limits of the Act. With the exception of the sugar workers, he did not know any section of the A.W.A. that contemplated an appeal to the Court. They must consider the general labourer, or some other body would. If the three sections were not included, the A.W.A. would have to drop out.”

“Lundie, too, argued that while the miners might not be immediately allied with the A.W.U., they were all fellow wage- slaves, and there was a community of interest right away. Many shearers work at mining during the off season. He had no false ideas

about the Court, and if the workers could get what they wanted without its aid, good luck to them.”

“Grayndler admitted that all workers had identity of interests, but feared that the time had not yet come for the beautiful scheme of the I.W.W. First group workers in allied industries into amalgamations; if allied industries were departed from, it was open for registered organisations to object.”

A further difficulty was in respect of organisation. All were agreed that a uniform ticket, giving admission to all industries at one price, would be an irresistible attraction and a real boon. But as to details there were wide divergencies. President Spence wanted as little alteration as possible. Theodore, on the other hand, was convinced that an alteration of the A.W.U. methods was essential. “Finance was the vital matter. The A.W.U. branches had control of finances and only paid a capitation fee to head office. The A.W.A. branches merely retained a small amount and paid the bulk into the Executive.” He and McCormack had worked out a hierarchical scheme of General Conference, General Executive, State Boards of Management, District Branch Committees and Industrial Branch Committees. Conference would consist of the General Secretary and President, both paid and elected by plebiscite of the whole membership, one delegate appointed by each State Board of Management and delegates elected by each District on a basis of one to every 2,500 members. The Central Executive would consist of the paid officers and the representatives of the State Boards of Management. The latter would be composed of a Chairman, appointed by Conference, the State Secretary, elected by plebiscite, and the Branch Secretaries, who would in turn be elected by plebiscite within the branch. The novelty lies in the industrial branch which would have jurisdiction over all members of the union employed in a particular trade or industry. Such branches would not be local, but were to work in harmony with the district branches. Financially 20 per cent. of the revenue from the sale of tickets was to be retained by the sub-branch in any centre. The balance to be handed over to the branch. Of this sum a district would retain 5 per cent., an industrial branch 25 per cent. The surplus would go to the State Board which must hand over quarterly to the General Executive 5 per cent. of the gross revenue from the sale of tickets within that State.

The whole scheme, as worked out by Theodore and illustrated by circular diagrams, clearly betrayed I.W.W. influence. Still it was a hybrid between the established system of geographical divisions and the industrial departments of the I.W.W. Its details came in for much criticism, but in principle the A.W.A. won all along the line. Conference eventually disbanded without settling anything, but after agreeing to take a plebiscite of the members of the unions concerned on the general question of amalgamating on the basis of a uniform ticket.

The Conference reassembled on January 6th, 1913. The ballot had resulted as follows:

..	A.W.U.	A.W.A.	R.W.U.	
Carriers For	18,417	3,349	55	684

Against	7,060	24	6	24
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The new Conference was enlarged and included the following bodies:

Union.	No. of Delegates	Members
A.W.U	9	46,000
A.W.A.	3	13,000
R.W.U.	2	5,000
Carriers	2	2,500
Timber Workers	1	18,000
A.M.I.E.U.	1	9,000
R.W.&G.L.U.	1	5,000
Fell, Wool and Basil	1	1,800
Rabbiters	1	1,800

In his opening address President Spence traced the history of the A.W.U., and explained how the recent amendment of the Federal Arbitration Act enabled them to expand their organisation. How far they could go he did not yet know, but he wanted to interfere as little as possible with the working machinery of the A.W.U.

Theodore complained that the President believed in the maximum of local autonomy. His experience in the A.W.A. led him to believe that the more power in the hands of the central body the greater the general success. He then referred again to finance and went on. The A.W.A. had organised the employees of the Chillagoe Railway, but it would have been absurd to give such a group full autonomy. The A.W.A. had organised many callings – e.g., the shop assistants and carters – who were organised separately in other States. The advantage they were able to offer was the backing of a solid union operating on the spot, though in other industries. This had given the unionists confidence and power in enforcing their demands. He agreed to autonomy for a body like the A.M.I.E.U., but not for all organisations. On that basis the cooks and the shed hands in the A.W.U might want autonomy as separate bodies.

The carriers, however, demanded autonomy, pointing out that they were not always purely wage-earners as in many cases they provided their own plant. So, too, the timber workers' delegates stressed the difference in circumstances between the several States. Lundie, on the other hand, objected that the industrial spirit of the age was in favour of the broader expression of unionism, the rank and file were in favour of it, but there were officials who kept them back. That was the case in South Australia. Still McCormack probably came closer to the mark when he said that "the great appealing force" would be the "uniform ticket."

The details were left to a sub-committee, and their report was a clear win for the A.W.A. The latter was allowed in practically intact, and merely augmented by the pastoral workers of Queensland. The three A.W.U branches previously working in that State were fused into one, sub-divided into five districts as in the old A.W.A. Unlike

other branches of the A.W.U, it was to have a complete set of officers of its own and a separate branch executive, while instead of the annual general meeting of the branch, provision was made for a delegate meeting in Queensland. So the whole framework of the A.W.A. organisation was embodied in the constitution of the A.W.U as far as Queensland was concerned. In the other States the old machinery was retained.

Thus the first step was taken towards the creation of a pan-Australian amalgamation of unions. The A.W.A. had launched the A.W.U on a course of practical One Big Unionism. The President expressed the opinion that the amalgamation would lessen the risk of industrial troubles since employers would be more circumspect in dealing with a vast body of 100,000 organised workers than they would be with isolated organisations. He told the A.W.U Convention, which met immediately thereafter on the 22nd, that the importance of the step just taken could not be over-estimated, for it showed that the union had a good idea of the true position and of what would in the near future have to be faced by organised labour. "Powerful organisations must displace the craft unionism that had prevailed in the past. The huge combinations that were now arrayed against the people must be met by powerful organisations on the part of the workers. Combine must be met with combine. All talk about 'the old good relations between employer and employee' was bunkum. Just as there could be no harmony between good and evil, so there could be no actual harmony between people whose interests were in conflict and who were therefore utterly opposed to one another. The worker had nothing in common with Capitalism, and the fight, begun long ago, would continue until Capitalism as an institution was overthrown." He went on to forecast the absorption of other unions in the A.W.U.

All of which looks as if even Spence had discovered the I.W.W. Theodore, too, told the winding-up conference of the A.W.A., that the new amalgamation would not be governed by the Arbitration Court.

As there was some jealousy among the officials of both unions in Queensland, Dunstan had to be brought from South Australia to take the Queensland Secretaryship.

Once launched on its career as the One Big Union, the A.W.U. forged ahead rapidly. The timid and conservative officials soon found that their forebodings about the Court were unfounded, and that their jobs were not imperilled, but their prestige and power increased. Next year the butchers made overtures. The Queensland Branch at the January meeting approved the step. Crampton urged amalgamation in a lengthy report. After dwelling on the dangers to the workers from the approach of the beef trust, he continued:

"I do not ask that you should organise to prevent the development of the combine-that is impossible. But I ask you to span the gulf that separates one industry from another and assist industrial democracy to march stride for stride with the ever-conquering and irresistible combine. My idea of organisation is that a man should unceasingly strive to break down craft barriers, embrace every opportunity to link up the forces of labour, and pay no attention to the industrial humbug who raves about a union losing

‘prestige’ through being swallowed up in a larger whole. . . . Skilled workmen should not clamour for the cream of industry and compel the unskilful to bear the burdens.”

In this spirit the branch rejected a proposed agreement with the federated engine-drivers for common action, and recommended the latter to join the A.W.U. The Federal Conference of the butchers endorsed the amalgamation plan and ordered a ballot of the members. Meanwhile a conference was held between the A.M.I.E.U. and the A.W.U. on May 15th, and drew up a draft scheme of organisation. Practically the plan outlined by Theodore in 1912 was adopted-the creation of an industrial branch. It was proposed within each local (State) branch to set up a Meat Industry Section governed by a sectional Council, and an independent Secretary. The Section would also be separately represented on the branch executive, but not on the Annual Convention. Sections were to enjoy local autonomy, subject to the supervision of the branch executives. At the Annual Conference of the meat workers (A.M.I.E.U.) in June, 1915, it was found that the voting had been as follows:

..	Queensland	N.S.W.	Tasmania	Victoria	S.A.
For amalgamation	2,286	1,407	91	404	126
Against amalgamation	71	370	4	219	161

Conference decided to permit those branches which had voted in the affirmative to join the A.W.U. But at the last moment Crampton and his colleagues stopped the Queensland branch from entering the amalgamation which they had energetically advocated eighteen months before. They had discovered that the A.W.U. was merely a machine for getting officials into Parliament.

However, the timber workers, bakers, and shop-assistants in Queensland actually did link up with the A.W.U in that year. In 1915 the great union included among its aims: “To strive for One Big Union of the Australian workers.” In 1916 the Federated Mining Employees’ Union proposed to amalgamate. This union had replaced the old Amalgamated Miners’ Association in the southern and western States, except at Broken Hill-and, of course, on the coal-fields. The first agreement prepared by the officials provided for the formation of a Mining Industry Branch with the right to hold independent conferences, make its own bye-laws, and secede, after a ballot, upon three months’ notice. The A.W.U. Convention, however, refused to ratify this scheme, delegates complaining that the miners wanted to retain all their present powers in a kind of federation with the right to draw out. The A.W.U stood for amalgamation, not federation. On the other hand, the Railway Workers and General Labourers’ Association in N.S.W. was admitted with the status of an industrial branch. Even this meant a considerable modification of the existing geographical structure of the A.W.U. You now had an industrial division cutting across the established regional branches, and separately represented at Convention and on the Executive. The navvies were given just those privileges as had been enjoyed by a territorial branch, and so got rather less than the miners had demanded. But even so some delegates objected that

this was federation rather than amalgamation. But they had to agree to the argument that you had to give away something in order to get the O.B.U.

Some time later the F.M.E.A. came in, not, however, as an industrial branch, but as an industrial section within the branches on the same terms as had been offered to the A.M.I.E.U. But dark rumours of corruption hang about this amalgamation. At any rate the Barrier A.M.A. refused to accompany the other metalliferous miners, but decided instead to link up with the coal-miners in the C. & S.E.F.

The year 1916 marks the culminating point of that phase of the amalgamation movement which was headed by the A.W.U. The last big union to come in was the F.M.E.A. Thereafter the movement, which in 1914 had looked as if it would quickly absorb the majority of the unions in the continent, was abruptly arrested. The check was due to the very same force which had given its initial impetus to the amalgamation-the I.W.W. The impulse to One Big Unionism in the years 1908-16 was increasingly due to the doctrines of industrial solidarity associated with the American organisation. Coming actually into Australia, that body exerted a still stronger influence, for instance, over members of the R. W. & G.L.A. in N.S.W. But after the 1916 Conference of the A.W.U. the Australian organisation of the I.W.W. openly threw its whole weight against the Big Union. To understand this we must go back a few years and trace the events which dictated this hostility and which gave it such weight.

Chapter X. The Work of the Industrial Workers of the World in Australia

THE most momentous event in the political industrial history of Australian labour, since the historic decision in favour of political action in 1890, was the establishment of locals of the I.W.W. No body has exercised a more profound influence on the whole outlook of labour in Australia. Yet its beginnings were insignificant.

Two years after the foundation of the parent society in America in 1905, small I.W.W. clubs were founded in several industrial towns in Australia. These bodies were closely affiliated with, and indeed subordinated to, the Socialist Labour Party. The latter exercised a strict oversight over the activities of the clubs and overshadowed their industrial propaganda with its own political campaigns. There was, in fact, nothing outwardly to distinguish these clubs from the numerous small Socialist sects that are dotted all over our industrial centres, eking out a precarious existence in trying to convert the workers to dogmatic Socialism. However, the industrial unionists, especially after the split in the I.W.W. of 1908, found their subordination to the political aspirants of the S.L.P. irksome. They resolved to launch out on their own and become not merely clubs, but locals – i.e., branches – of the One Big Union.

Hawkins, Secretary of the Sydney club, condemned this proposal as “insane.” “One of the conditions,” he wrote in a letter to the Adelaide Secretary, “of a successful revolutionary union, is the existence of a proletariat awakened to a very considerable degree of class-consciousness.” There was much spade work to be done ere that condition of affairs could be realised in Australia. Still the South Australians resolved to apply to headquarters for a charter. The preamble of 1908 was only accepted after a struggle, the adherents of the S.L.P. preferring the preamble preserved by de Leon and the other secessionists from the 1908 Convention. Nevertheless the Chicago preamble was supported by former members of the Australian Socialist Party and carried the day. The Adelaide local received its charter in May, 1911, from Chicago, and later in the same year was granted a charter as the Continental Administration for Australia with the right itself to charter locals. The Sydney branch received its charter from Adelaide on the application of members and ex-members of the S.L.P. and A.S.P. who were “tired of the tortuous methods of the politicians.” The first Secretary, however, G. G. Reeve, was a follower of de Leon rather than of Trautmann, and did not, therefore, promulgate the doctrines of “go-slow” and “the propaganda of action” characteristic of the Chicago I.W.W. In fact, he used to denounce such methods at the Sunday meetings. But as in America, an extremist section was organised to capture the Sydney local at the end of 1912 and during the first months of 1913. One day (according to Reeve) a meeting was packed with new members, and the Secretary was voted out of office. Shortly afterwards the Continental Administration was transferred from Adelaide to Sydney, which became thereafter the headquarters of the I.W.W. in Australia.

Hereafter the characteristic doctrines of sabotage and “go-slow” were vigorously preached and illustrated by the propaganda of action and organisation “on the job.” The society was reinforced by exiles from New Zealand after the collapse of the Waihi strike and deportees from South Africa, and soon made remarkable progress.

The programme of the I.W.W. had been mainly drawn up to meet the needs of the semi-skilled nomadic worker of the Western States. In Australia, too, there was a precisely similar class which, with the formation of the A.W.A. and kindred bodies, was coming to play an important part in the organised industrial movement—the unskilled worker who roved about the bush to mines, railway-construction works, to harvest the cane and grain or fruit of the farmers, or take casual employment in meat works or shearing sheds. This class of worker approximates far more closely to the ideal proletariat described by Marx than any other section of the Australian working class. The artisan, the State servant, the coal-miner, has a relative certainty of more or less regular employment. He has the chance to subscribe to benefit societies, to save money, quite often to acquire his own little home, or even to purchase a little shop and retire as a petty capitalist, or alternatively of spending his money so as to get a quite appreciable amount of fun out of life to banish care. In a word, such workers have something to conserve and are, therefore, not likely to be the revolutionaries Marx assumed. The unskilled worker, the navvy or general labourer, has almost literally nothing to lose but the chains that bind him, and nothing to sell but his simple labour-power. He lives from hand to mouth with the spectre of unemployment ever at his side, deprived of the solaces and distractions provided cheaply in a big city. He has no incentive to thrift, for his position is too precarious; the nomadic life forced upon him prevents the formation of home ties and precludes the possibility of settling down close to a regular job. To such it seems really more sensible to have a good time when they have money than to hoard savings that are sure to be exhausted as soon as the period of slackness comes round, and cannot well be turned to the same channels as those in which the more fortunate class of toiler can invest them. At the same time the nomadic life fosters a spirit of hardihood and self-reliance which would not be found in a mere slum proletariat. To this class the so-called benefits of modern civilisation, which might be impaired by a catastrophic change, are of small moment, beyond their reach, while the loosening of the bonds of customary morality in wanderings exposes them to permeation by revolutionary propaganda. Moreover, comradeship in the hardships of life in camp or mine engenders a realisation of the solidarity of the proletariat. Thus there were closely analogous conditions for the spread of I.W.W.ism on both sides of the Pacific. But it is important to note certain distinctive differences.

The biggest is that sectionalism is much less rigid and exclusive in Australia than in the States. It is true that Australian craft unions act in most cases independently and sometimes even in opposition to one another. But there is not the same degree of aloofness that seems to prevail in America. Despite the absurd multiplicity of unions they do generally manage to present a united front to the boss. Examples of one union continuing at work or even replacing another at the time of a strike are excessively rare. Cases can indeed be raked up during the strikes in the Maryborough ironworks, for instance, in 1908 and 1911, and when the Sydney power-house staff remained at

work during the Tramway Strike of 1908. But these are isolated and exceptional examples. The development of the doctrine of “black” goods and the unifying influence of the Labour Councils have usually prevented anything in the nature of “organised scabbing” by one union on another. On the contrary, instances can be multiplied in which the skilled men have come to the aid of the unskilled—for instance, the support given by the seamen, ship painters, engineers, etc., to the Sydney wharf labourers in 1908. Again the distinction between skilled and unskilled—for example, in rate of pay is much less marked in Australia than in the States. In the former the ratio between the average rates paid to skilled and unskilled workmen is as 100 : 82; in the States the unskilled man barely averages 59 per cent. of the wages of the artisan. The living wage doctrine finally established by Higgins J. in 1907 inevitably tended to level up working conditions and bridge the gulf between skilled and unskilled. It was the latter who received most protection from the courts and wages-boards. In America, on the other hand, the general labourer was downtrodden to a degree, and the craft unions in the A.F.L. really did little to alleviate his wretched state. The American I.W.W. was above all successful in organising the unskilled workers, outcasts from the craft and sectional societies affiliated with the American Federation of Labour. In these circumstances its slogan of “solidarity” had a meaning and cogency to the oppressed outcast that was really wanting in Australia.

In the second place the brutalities meted out by the employers in the U.S.A. were never reproduced on the same scale or with the same nakedness on the other side of the Pacific. As E. G. Theodore put it, “the doctrine of the I.W.W. was preached in a country where the industrial workers are ground under the iron heel of Capitalism, where the worker has no liberty, and very few rights.” Not only are the whole forces of law available in defence of the employers in time of strikes, their operations are actually suspended in the interests of the masters, who are at liberty to import armed strike-breakers, whose Pinkertons and gunmen are granted almost unlimited immunity to maltreat and murder strikers, while the latter can be herded into “bullpens” or railroaded into deserts in cattle trains. Such lawless brutality combined with the inhuman conditions, under which the workers are exploited, encourages brutality on their part in reply. Force and fraud are met by force and fraud. Australia did not reproduce these conditions. The capitalist was not sufficiently firmly installed for public opinion to tolerate American methods. The legal status conferred on trade unionism by the arbitration system was a serious obstacle to their application. The existence of Labour Parties, which might at any time elevate union leaders into legislators with all the influence and patronage a parliamentarian can exercise, had a restraining effect upon the police and legal authorities. We have, indeed, quoted cases where unionists suffered severely at the hands of the police or the minions of the employers. But the reaction of such incidents on the political parties responsible was not calculated to encourage their repetition.

Finally, political action—apart from the successes it had actually achieved in ameliorating the lot of the workers had become to many toilers “almost a religion.” At the same time it had become a profession which opened to many a hard-worked and underpaid union Secretary—and even to a rank and filer, if he was a fluent and bold

talker-an easy and comfortable mode of exit from the ranks of the proletariat. Hence the I.W.W. preacher, in addition to the capitalist class, in addition to the adherents of craft unionism with their prejudices and their jobs, had also to face the hostility of ingrained faith or reasoned decisions in favour of political action, and the cupidity of those who relied for a livelihood on the workers' votes. And the strength of the political machine was such that this was no mean task.

Nevertheless, the new doctrines spread like wildfire. In 1914 there were four locals – Adelaide, Sydney, Broken Hill, and Port Pirie. Early in 1915 locals were opened in Melbourne and Brisbane, and in the following year branches were established on the Westralian Goldfields, at Fremantle, and in North Queensland, till they numbered a full dozen. Probably the membership rarely, if ever, exceeded a couple of thousand, but the circulation of their paper, started in 1914 under the splendid title of Direct Action, went up as high as 16,000 weekly. But the influence of the organisation was entirely disproportionate to its numerical strengths. These facts are the most eloquent testimony to the insight into proletarian psychology of its founders and propagators and the direct appeal of its doctrines to the toilers.

The I.W.W. did not rely exclusively on high-flown appeals to lofty moral sentiments. It was quite prepared to appeal to base motives. “Fast workers die young”; “A little sugar in the concrete will make a few more jobs for the unemployed” – Such are some of its aphorisms. True to the teachings of Bakunin and Netchaieff, the organisation was not afraid to admit members of the so-called criminal classes. Anything tending to the overthrow of the existing social order was in itself useful, and the so-called criminal was, after all, only one who set at defiance the law and morality of the capitalist class. He was akin to the class-conscious unionists, inasmuch as they, too, were at war with capitalist society and bound to repudiate bourgeoisie morality. Hence there was an additional reason for the alliance than that advanced by the early anarchists; for the I.W.W. recognised the class war, and were not afraid to draw the inevitable corollary. As W. M. Hughes well expresses it: “The association, in fact, sets up two codes of morality – one to be observed towards its members and those who think with it and that to be observed towards all persons who do not think with it.”

The organisation was not indeed without ideals, not even without a constructive programme, but in order to arouse the class-consciousness necessary to make its ideals real, it harped freely on the negative aspects of the class struggle. Thus it attracted to itself, besides those who were in glorious revolt against the injustices heaped upon themselves and their fellow wage-slaves, others actuated by motives intellectually lower. Loafing on the job appealed to man's natural inertia. “The Right to be Lazy” had an attractive sound. Sabotage provided a relatively safe means of venting one's spleen on the boss or his hirelings, and gave a spice of excitement to the dreary monotony of daily toil, without exposing one to unreasonable risks. Men who were too mean to pay a real union subscription might salve their consciences by paying 6d. a month to the I.W.W. and claim to be unionists at a third of the cost of an A.W.U. ticket. The extreme anti-militarism of the organisation during the war provided a specious excuse to cowards who were not really class-conscious idealists.

The I.W.W. took a leaf out of the Salvation Army's book and used crude songs with catchy tunes to draw a crowd and attract converts. Their songs are remarkable for their coarseness and brutality, but are all the more proletarian for that; they take their diction from the real everyday life of the camp, the factory and the mine. Street meetings were livened up with these in true Salvationist style. The union rooms offered members the advantages of a club.

But it must not for an instant be thought that the members of the I.W.W. were all or even largely recruited from loafers, cowards, or criminals. They displayed enthusiastic and unflinching energy. Members were entirely careless of their personal safety; the propaganda of action, for example, sometimes took the form of free- speech fights, in which comrades were called upon to surrender their liberty in flocks. So the I.W.W. secured the right to sell literature in the Sydney domain by simply exercising it in defiance of the existing regulations. A few members were gaoled for so doing, but their comrades soon demonstrated that there were plenty of other recruits to hand on the lamp of life, and the Labour Government had in the end to climb down. In a similar way, by simply "singing through the streets" of Sydney in defiance of traffic ordinances, this enterprising body secured the right – long ago accorded to the Salvation Army, but hitherto denied to the Socialists – of speaking in certain streets at night. In June, 1914, the free-speech fight at Port Pirie was more serious. Some thirty comrades went to prison defying the traffic police, but the local announced its ability and readiness to fill every gaol in South Australia, and in the end the authorities had to give way. Early in 1915 a similar campaign was conducted in Newcastle. The method adopted was to put up a young member to speak right under the nose of the "cop," and as soon as he was hauled off struggling to put up another until the police were tired.

Some of the "agitators" may have lived on the game and found it more congenial than dull manual labour, but at least they were game enough to act and speak boldly in defiance of the law and take long terms of imprisonment as the penalty. Tom Barker, the editor of *Direct Action*, did several long sentences, and all the rest had to take their courage in both hands every day. As they defied the law, so they faced mobs of soldiers and patriot roughs undismayed. Before "No Conscription" became a popular watchword, while the Labour Party was still toying with militarism, the I.W.W. steadily and unflinchingly denounced the curse and prepared the field where the Labour Party afterwards reaped.

On the other hand, the leaders generally discouraged martyrdom. Open defiance was only to be used when underground working became impossible. Members, when before the courts, always asked for time to pay the fines imposed on them, though they never had any intention of paying, and when the time had expired they never gave themselves up; they did not believe in saving the policemen trouble. So, too, they applied their methods of go-slow and sabotage most freely where they could do it most safely – against the State or against the most lenient employers. The application of these doctrines to the State enterprises, which under a Labour Government tend to become refuges for militant unionists, was naturally peculiarly embarrassing to such

Governments. This circumstance may partly account for the intense bitterness displayed by Theodore against the I.W.W. in Queensland.

In January, 1914, the I.W.W. published in Sydney a paper under the striking title of Direct Action. Its contents were worthy of it. The first leader contains the following passages:

“For the first time in the history of the working-class movement in Australia, a paper appears which stands for straight-out direct-actionist principles, unhampered by the plausible theories of the parliamentarians, whether revolutionary or otherwise. We are, therefore, free from those handicaps which bind the working-class aspirant for political 'honours,' who sees before him a safe and sure means for advancing his material interests and consequently, since economic determinism is such a powerful factor, cannot logically be blamed if he advances those interests quite regardless of the workers' welfare. . . . Our age-long tendency of putting our trust in princes has been a most potent factor in our enslavement.

“Every contributor, every supporter, is a member of the wage-earning class, who is conscious of his slave status in modern society, who is imbued, therefore, with motives stronger than mere sympathy or sentiment in voicing the aspirations of his fellows. . . . Parliamentarians who, from motives of timidity or self-interest, are content to move within the circle which the legal and moral code of capitalism allows . . . have been the real stumbling-blocks to revolutionary education.”

The theoretical argument against political action based on the dogma of economic determinism here adduced is later supplemented by more concrete contentions. So on May 25th we read:

“When the Governor-General of South Africa, in the so-called riots last July, called upon the military, without consulting Parliament, to assert by force the supremacy of cosmopolitan capitalism on the Rand and the right of the capitalist class to exploit unmercifully and without interference, he was giving only a bloody and material significance to the oft-expressed opinion of revolutionists that the ballot is the greatest fraud ever perpetrated on a long-suffering and over-patient working-class.”

Political action was futile, because at best the State was only the managing committee for the bourgeoisie. The labels of the committeemen made no difference. Even Labour Ministers would have to uphold middle-class laws and administer capitalist justice. In so doing they would be in conflict with the working-class, and must assume the attitude of the employer and cast off that of the wage earner. So Direct Action glossed the issue of 800 summonses by Labour Minister Cann against the miners of Maitland for illegally striking in June, 1914. Sentiments, pity, gratitude or loyalty – were puny and unreliable; in the test only economic motives would count.

While thus pouring contempt upon the pretensions of political emancipators, the I.W.W. ridiculed no less the Labour Party's ideal of “emancipation” by the gradual and peaceable buying out of the capitalists. They denied, indeed, entirely that

nationalisation meant Socialism. It would not even end the exploitation of the workers, but only meant that the State relieved individual capitalists of the trouble of themselves extorting surplus value from their slaves, paying them instead that surplus value in the form of guaranteed interest on the purchase-money. The State enterprises of Messrs. Holman and Griffiths are worse than puerile:

“The State makes a hell for every worker employed under it by placing its time-servers and toadies in the most desirable positions of authority, by systems of pimping and espionage, while superannuation schemes and sliding wage-scales are used to sap and demoralise whatever militant spirit there may be among the men.”

The I.W.W. asserted that the Sydney trams, owned by the State, were the worst in Australia in respect of working conditions. It certainly is a fact that George Boss, whose business Labour Minister Hall bought to be a State bakery, had always employed exclusively non-union labour, and continued to do so when he managed the bakery as a Socialistic undertaking under a Labour Government – he told me so himself!

That pet creation of political Labour, the Arbitration Court, was anathema to the revolutionists. Tom Glynn writes:

“The Arbitration Court has bled the pockets and befogged the minds of the Australian working-class, and it has filled the pockets of the patriotic gang of legal luminaries who are the noblest product of Labour Parties and antiquated craft unionism.”

The strike, on the other hand, it was held, by its concrete expression of solidarity and the spirit of comradeship in the struggle which it engendered, setting as it did the master class and the working-class in opposite camps in open physical antagonism, embodied and symbolised the unseen struggle of the classes, promoted the class-consciousness of the proletariat, and so promoted the revolution.

Not only was the Labour Party, on this view, doomed by economic laws to futility; its vote-catching policy made it an absolute hindrance to the necessary industrial development of Australia. It aimed at creating small landholders and “cocky” farmers, at assisting the workers to own their own little cottages and become small blockholders, and at encouraging the little shopkeeper and the cockroach capitalist generally. These are notoriously the most conservative and reactionary classes in the community. The Marxian regards them as economic throwbacks, since they contradict the law of concentration of capital; to protect and foster such a class, if feasible, would only be to retard the development of the conditions postulated by these economists for the revolution.

An even graver error in the eyes of the I.W.W. was that the Labour Party stood for nationalism as against the internationalism of the proletariat in their world-wide struggle against cosmopolitan capitalism. Capitalism knew no boundaries of space or race, but organised internationally; yet the A.L.P. pandered to nationalist aspirations and fomented race prejudices in enunciating its White Australian policy. Even worse,

it supported the jingo imperialism of Great Britain and her allies-and called on the workers of Australia to murder their fellow-workers of Central Europe in the interests of the capitalist class. The I.W.W. maintained that the employers and financiers should be left to wage their own wars. Direct Action thus described the famous “last man and last shilling” pledge, enunciated by Federal Labour Leader Fisher to win votes in the war-time election of 1914:

“When George the Least, by the Grace of God and ignorance of the working-classes Emperor of the Britains and a million-pound shareholder in the American Steel Trust, wants a great European war to create a vast demand for steel, Mr. Fisher and his gang and all their toadies rise to the occasion, and are prepared to give our last man and our last shilling to see Georgie and his cobbers through the business deal.”

That sums up the I.W.W. attitude to the war.

Naturally their hostility to war and later to conscription brought them into conflict with the military authorities. The Australian War Precaution Act and the innumerable regulations thereunder contained the familiar clauses about prejudicing recruiting. For breaches of these regulations several I.W.W. men went to gaol. Tom Barker, the editor of Direct Action, was sentenced on no less than three occasions, but in each case the Fisher Government had in the end to release him under pressure from the leagues and unions or from fright. It was during his third incarceration in 1916 that incendiarism as a means of intimidating the authorities was first tried.

Finally, the I.W.W. perceived the dangers of the alliance between the political Labour leaders and certain sections wholly disconnected with the industrial workers. Direct Action exposed and denounced the thinly-veiled intrigues between the Labour members and the liquor interest and their coquetting with the Catholic Church.

In a word, then, the I.W.W. were revolutionaries. They did not believe that the transformation from Capitalism to Socialism could be brought about by the gradual process of reformation advocated by the Labour Party. The transformation would be cataclysmic and probably violent, inasmuch as the possessing would seek to oppose it by force. To this extent, however, the I.W.W. was only repeating the oft-reiterated phrases of the A.S.P. and the S.L.P. But they were revolutionary in a further sense. They definitely advocated violence both to carry the revolution through and hasten it on. Here they definitely broke with the Socialists. Both believed in the inevitable and abrupt collapse of Capitalism as predicted by Marx. But the I.W.W. proposed to facilitate its collapse by doing everything in their power to make the capitalist system unworkable here and now. This was the philosophical justification for “go-slow” and “sabotage.” This ideal provides the inner motive for the so-called criminal acts perpetrated by prominent members of the association. For instance, J. B. King, Morgan, Goldstein and others, carried on the business of forging £5 notes (for which they were convicted), not with the idea of enriching themselves, but with the deliberate intention of accelerating the debacle of bourgeois society by deprecating the circulating medium. It is true that in the execution of this plan the conspirators had to make use of men of a different calibre – ordinary criminals – but the prime movers

were not actuated by a desire for gain, but by the ideology of the class war. The same holds good of the fires and the murder of a policeman at Tottenham. The I.W.W. believed in making the established system unworkable, and had no scruples about the means they employed to that end.

At the same time these activities would develop class-consciousness among the toilers by openly embroiling them with the bourgeoisie authorities, and thus contribute positively to the constructive outcome of the revolution. For once class-consciousness was developed in it, the proletariat would arise in its might, and in blind mass action sweep away the master class and take possession of the means of production. Class-consciousness was more important than own momentum would carry through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. On this theory preparatory skirmishes in the way of strikes, riots, and acts of defiance towards the established social order generally, had an intrinsic educative value whatever their outcome.

In many ways I.W.W. philosophy foreshadowed the Bolshevik dictatorship of the proletariat. They did not consider it possible or necessary to convert a numerical majority of the population or even of the workers to their creed; they believed that a class-conscious minority could carry along with them the inert mass of unorganised “boneheads” just as the small block of intelligent and wide-awake militants who are usually left to conduct the business of unions can rely on the support of their fellow members if an open struggle is precipitated. They envisaged the new social organism on the model of just such a union. To attain their end it was necessary to band together all wage-earners into one single organisation, centrally controlled and capable of acting unitedly in defence of its members. This was the positive constructive side of I.W.W. philosophy.

The one great union of their dreams was to be not only the weapon of the workers in their continuous struggle against the master class, and in the end the instrument of revolution, but also the organ of the new social order to be brought into being by that revolution. As the 1908 preamble finely puts it:

“The Army of production must be organised not only for the everyday struggle with capitalism, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

Plainly, then, the I.W.W. was not a strictly syndicalist or anarchist body. It was, indeed, syndicalist in the sense that it repudiated political action and the machinery of the middleclass state as an instrument of proletarian emancipation. With the revolution the political State would be superseded by an economic organisation. Bourgeoisie democracy, representative of unreal local interests, would give place to an industrial democracy representing real economic interests. In place of the middle-class Parliament, purporting to represent the consumers, but in fact only reflecting the general will of industrial magnates and financiers, a union Executive would arise, composed of the delegates of the producers grouped in the several industries. But with the destruction of the political State the industries and factories were not to be left

unco-ordinated and autonomous. All the producers were to be gathered into one union on whose directorate the various industries would be represented. Instead, therefore, of the chaos of warring interests which seems possible under syndicalism proper, the I.W.W. offered a highly centralised organisation of society, modelled, indeed, on unionism and restricted to “producers,” but transcending the limits of individual industries, just as it overleapt craft divisions.

For the same reason the form of organisation recommended by the I.W.W. differed vastly from what is called “industrial unionism” in England. In fact, there is no hard-and-fast line dividing industry from industry, and industrial unionism in the narrow sense can assign no logical limits to the industrial units it wishes to establish. This breakdown of all attempted limitations is particularly obvious in new countries. For instance, railway construction is proceeding almost continually, and the navvies building the new lines are often, as in Queensland, employed by the Railway Commissioners. Should these men belong to the Railway Union? Clearly they have more in common with the builders of roads and dams than with engine-drivers, porters, or even permanent-way men; by downing tools the construction workers could not really assist in paralysing the traffic of existing lines which would be the object of a railway strike. (This contest has actually been fought out in Queensland, both the Q.R.U. and the A.W.U. claiming the construction men. In the end the Railway Union surrendered them to the A.W.U, which on its side gave up all claim to the navvies employed permanently on repairs, etc.)

Industrial unionism as preached by the I.W.W., and as now generally understood in Australia as also in America, does not attempt to make the individual industry its basis. It is, indeed, an all-grades movement that ignores craft and sectional divisions, but it recognises the industries only as departments within a larger union. The I.W.W. scheme provided for six such departments, viz.: (1) Agricultural Land, Fisheries, and Water Products; (2) Mining; (3) Transportation and Communication; (4) Manufacturing and General Production; (5) Construction; (6) Public Service. Within the departments room was left for industrial unions in the narrower sense – e.g., in (3) for unions of railwaymen, seamen, waterside workers, carriers, post and telegraph employees, etc. But these latter unions were to be subordinate to the departments, and they in their turn under the rule of the General Executive Board. This structure the I.W.W. sedulously preached as the unique scientific form of industrial organisation. The departments and unions, however, only existed on paper; no attempt was made in Australia to create these members; only the skeleton of the organisation – locals and the General Executive Board in Sydney – ever existed there.

It was inevitable that the propaganda of this body should incur the hostility of all the recognised officials of labour in Australia. We have already seen what craft unionism said of the I.W.W. The politicians were even more outspoken. They had been spending years trying to convince timid voters that their Socialism did not mean revolution or violence. Now the capitalist press was not altogether unsuccessful in coupling the Labour Party with the revolutionary aims of the industrial unionists. Those, too, who really believed in “socialistic enterprises” saw the success of the

existing experiments, from which the whole fabric of competitive industrialism was to be socialised, menaced by the “go-slow” doctrines inculcated among their employees. So every political leader of Labour came out with a denunciation of the I.W.W. W. M. Hughes, who was then writing a series of articles entitled “The Case for Labour” in the Sydney Daily Telegraph, devoted a whole article to a criticism of the new doctrine. E. G. Theodore, the founder of the militant A.W.A., and now Acting-Premier of Queensland, speaking both as a political and industrial leader, issued the following statement:

“The Industrial Workers of the World are a body of irreconcilables who stand for direct action and sabotage in industrial matters. They will have nothing to do with arbitration courts or any kind of legislation for the betterment of the workers.”

Then, after contrasting conditions in America with those existing locally, he concludes:

“It would be nothing short of rank lunacy for the workers to discard these advantages and adopt the illogical and unreasoning phrases of the I.W.W. I believe that any person in Queensland who exhorts his fellow-workers to adopt any phases of sabotage is an enemy of unionism, should be treated as an industrial pariah, and refused admission to intelligent unions.”

But perhaps the most sweeping denunciation is to be found in the Presidential Address of W. G. Spence, M.H.R., to the 1916 Convention of the A.W.U.:

“A bastard kind of political philosophy has been imported from foreign parts. The real object of this egregious lunacy is concealed. I refer to the syndicalists. Against new lines of thought on progressive lines I have nothing to say; but from this line of thought has sprung direct action. This method stands for rule by minority. Reason and judgment have small part in the syndicalist philosophy. They expect when they have a general strike to get possession of everything and institute what they term industrial government. The I.W.W. want a perpetual state of war. They preach the immoral doctrine of not keeping agreements. A democratic community implies truth and honesty. A contract must be recognised. The I.W.W. set up shibboleths of class-consciousness and economic determinism. Whatever the I.W.W. do in America, I consider that the position in Australia, which is on democratic lines, is entirely different. Why resort to these things if lawful means are available? The I.W.W. is a throwback in unionism to the dark ages of the destruction of labour-saving machinery. Thirty years ago the A.W.U. contemplated organising all the workers, so there is nothing new in the One Big Union. Australia is committed to a Socialist policy. Parliament may be a cumbersome machine, but it moves just as fast as the people make it, sometimes faster, as the defeat of the Constitutional Referenda has shown. The syndicalists are the tools of the capitalists.”

Volumes could be filled with the denunciations of the I.W.W. by all the respectable Labour leaders in Australia, yet the organisation had immense influence. On the union movement it left an indelible mark. As already indicated, the impulse to amalgamation

had been based largely on I.W.W. theory which was accepted by many unionists who were unwilling to subscribe to the doctrines of violence and sabotage. Perhaps its maximum of power was reached in the latter part of 1915. Then its individual supporters within the A.M.U. seem to have made a bid to capture control of that organisation. It was alleged that an I.W.W. ticket was run for the Executive posts that year. Certainly McNaught, who opposed Spence for the Presidency, was an avowed supporter of the I.W.W. At the 1916 Convention he defended the association against the President's attack :

“The I.W.W.,” he declared, “is endeavouring to point out the fallacy of craft unionism. When the A.W.A. had amalgamated with the A.W.U. there were great hopes of the one big union, but the President had expressed himself against the methods which would bring it about. The A.W.U. has failed in organising in North Queensland, and the union has been split up by arbitration which previously the A.W.A. would not stand for.”

And the same Convention, under the same influence, discussed a motion having for its aim the abandonment of arbitration. Several speakers were found, even at that highly conservative gathering, to endorse the method of direct negotiation, but of course they could not carry Convention with them. Yet at that time shearers had good cause to be annoyed with the interminable delays of court procedure. The old award granting 25s. per 100 had expired, and in the interim the A.W.U. Executive concluded an agreement with the pastoralists for the 1916 season granting 28s. 6d. per 100. However, as this was far from covering the increase in the cost of living since the previous award, the I.W.W. were strong enough within the union to foment outlaw strikes in several sheds in northern N.S.W. where the pastoralists were forced to concede 30s. a hundred before shearing could proceed. The union officials did their best to prevent these stoppages. In the Coonamble district they succeeded in getting the unionists to shear at the agreement rates, even though other sheds near by had won the higher rate. In the end the I.W.W. gave up the A.W.U. in despair, and went so far as to publish a booklet entitled, “Why the A.W.U. cannot become an Industrial Union.” It complained inter alia that the A.W.U. were willing to launch their amalgamation “only provided they got the consent of the master class of the registrar of the Arbitration Court” and that many of the members of the union were small farmers when they were not shearing, which was certainly true.

With the miners, the I.W.W. were more successful. The Barrier A.M.A. officially recognised their tickets, allowing I.W.W. members to work in the mines alongside the established unionists. This was not an unmixed advantage for the I.W.W. It meant that men, too mean to pay the high fees of the A.M.A., took cheap I.W.W. tickets, so that an undesirable type was attracted to the organisation. To prevent this Paul Freeman even proposed that the price of their tickets should be raised even higher than that of the A.M.A., but this self-denying ordinance was defeated, and Freeman had to dissociate himself from the industrialists.

The I.W.W. reached the zenith of their power at conscription time. It was, as already shown, largely to the untiring warnings of the I.W.W. speakers and the activities of

their members and sympathisers within the leagues and unions that the emphatic decisions against conscription by the A.W.U. Convention and the N.S.W. and Victorian Labour Party Conferences were due. Even after the Labour Parties had declared their attitude, anti-conscription propaganda was long left mainly to the I.W.W.

They succeeded in making a tremendous noise about it, and produced the impression that they were a formidable and desperate body that would resist to the utmost any attempt to impose compulsory service. This impression was heightened by the crop of incendiary fires that roughly coincided with the return of the Prime Minister. It is quite possible that Hughes was intimidated by the threats and deeds of this revolutionary organisation and, over-estimating their strength, feared to impose the system he desired by executive act or ordinary legislation unconfirmed by the popular vote. He probably could have carried the proposal through Parliament, and his apparent weakness in submitting the issue to a referendum may perhaps be best explained by a fear of a serious revolutionary uprising engineered by the I.W.W.

Be that as it may, the association was officially recognised by the bodies established by orthodox labour to organise the “no” vote. The I.W.W., for instance, was admitted to representation on the special Trade Union Congress called to devise means to oppose conscription, and this time Theodore had to sit with I.W.W. men as recognised co-delegates. Their propaganda was redoubled. Stickers and hand-bills were printed without permission of the censor:

“Do You want Conscription? While you are TALKING about what you will do at the BALLOT-BOX Hughes is ACTING and will have you called up next month and put under MILITARY LAW.

You must unitedly refuse to go up. If you are arrested, refuse to take the oath or drill.

If you do not help yourselves now, you will not have a chance afterwards.

Thousands of your mates will refuse.

Do not scab on them. REFUSE ALSO.”

The terror which the I.W.W. inspired in the authorities is clearly enough shown by the methods employed for their ultimate destruction. They had broken the laws freely. To force the release of Tom Barker, imprisoned for prejudicing recruiting, some members of the organisation resorted to the device of starting fires in warehouses or factories. A chemist named Scully, who was prominent in the society, prepared the fire-dope (P in CS₂), as the inflammatory material was called. A wet rag soaked in the solution would soon burst into flames through the spontaneous combustion of the phosphorus, which would be left finely divided as soon as the solvent had evaporated. A number of fires had been started by these means, though they did not get far, and even after Barker had been released the incendiarism was continued. Whoever in the organisation was

really responsible, it seems certain that the police had enough evidence to justify action nearly two months before the arrests in Sydney were made.

Other members of the organisation, as we have seen, were engaged in printing and uttering forged £5 notes to hasten the collapse of capitalist economy. At Tottenham, a mining and wheat-growing centre where the I.W.W. were powerful, a policeman was murdered in a peculiarly cold-blooded manner. The constable had just arrived in the town and had announced his determination to “clean it up.” One night two members, one only twenty years old, shot him through an open window while his back was turned – some say, signing a warrant for their arrest.

But the police stayed their hands till the middle of the referendum campaign. The forgers were dealt with first, and this charge was used as a lever to extract a statement from the Goldsteins. Then Scully, against whom the police had ample evidence, turned King's evidence. Armed with these confessions the police raided the I.W.W. Hall one Saturday night. They arrested those who were supposed to be leading lights in the association, confiscated all books, papers and documents, and carried off the printing press. Donald Grant was arrested at Broken Hill, and brought overland to Sydney. The sequel has become history. An attempt to implicate the prisoners in a treasonable conspiracy against the Empire - in which the king-pin would have been Franz Georgi, an escaped German internee, whom the I.W.W. probably succoured, broke down owing to the staunchness of the German; but a charge of seditious conspiracy and conspiracy to commit arson was worked up against the twelve prisoners.

It cannot reasonably be doubted that some members at least of the organisation were implicated directly in the incendiarism. Still the evidence brought against the twelve, and on which they were ultimately convicted, might have served to convict almost anybody. The Crown's case rested exclusively on the evidence of informers who were entirely in the hands of the police. These witnesses were easily shown to be perjurers and utterly careless of the truth. And even so, Donald Grant and one or two others could only be connected with the “conspiracy” by the flimsiest threads of evidence. All the usual laws about contempt of court were ignored while the twelve were awaiting trial. The trial and the charges arising out of it were freely used by Hughes and the capitalist press all over Australia to discredit the anti-conscriptionists and connect them up with disloyalty, arson, murder, German gold, and revolutionary violence. The unscrupulous use made during the campaign of material which was to serve as evidence against the accused, inevitably prejudiced their chances. Finally, on the eve of the trial, James, M.L.A., who had been briefed for the defence, threw up his brief in order to take a portfolio in Holman's Coalition Cabinet. These circumstances, combined with the severe sentences-ranging from five to fifteen years' hard labour eventually imposed, and the obvious political motives inspiring the whole proceedings led many to believe that the charge itself was a “frame-up.”

That is most unlikely. The inner circle of the I.W.W. was confessedly responsible for the fires, and some of those sentenced may quite possibly have been connected with the plan or its execution. But it is quite another matter whether the police picked the

most guilty men. Probably the chief conspirators were Morgan, who got away altogether, and Scully, who escaped punishment by turning informer.

The arrests robbed the organisation of its best speakers, its printing press and much of its literature. Yet the Sunday after the raid the Domain meeting was held as usual. Direct Action never suspended publication, though it went off in brilliance. Some measure of decay infected the union. An inferior class of members was admitted, and jobs were created for prominent spirits, but the organisation lingered on for nearly a year.

But as soon as Parliament met after the referendum campaign, Hughes, still Prime Minister, though no longer a Labour man, introduced special legislation to suppress the I.W.W. The Unlawful Associations Act, as this astounding measure was called, made it an offence punishable by six months' imprisonment to belong to the I.W.W. or other association to which its provisions might be extended. If the offender was an alien by birth, he might be deported after the expiration of his sentence. Hughes justified this piece of special legislation on the ground that society could not tolerate in its midst an organisation which arrogated to itself a special code of morality in conflict with that of the whole. He detailed at length the "criminal history" of the association, and even tried to implicate the Labour Party and its officers responsible for his expulsion with the organisation. The Labour Caucus was so much alarmed by these attempts that it decided to support the Bill. Tudor, their leader, declared himself absolutely opposed to "go-slow, sabotage, murder, and arson, which seemed to be the policies advocated by the I.W.W." His only criticism was that, granting that the I.W.W. was all that Hughes said of it, the penalties imposed in the Bill were inadequate. Even Frank Anstey, who had championed Tom Barker, in his earlier imprisonments, was now at pains to repudiate the I.W.W. and all its works. So the monstrous measure was passed into law with the infamous blessing of the Labour Party.

Hughes probably hoped that the mere threat of such penalties would cause the organisation to melt away. It speaks highly for the courage and idealism of the members that, despite its illegality, the I.W.W. continued to exist and carry on its public work. A certain number of prominent members were occasionally gaoled, but it was not until the time of the Big Strike in 1917 that a thorough round-up of the members took place, and in the meantime they held meetings and published Direct Action as usual. But then the Federal authorities, fearing the intervention even of the rump of this militant organisation in that great upheaval, arrested several scores of members, and had them sentenced to the maximum terms of imprisonment under the Act. Tom Barker and other leading lights, after completing their sentences, were deported, and the organisation was finally crippled.

During 1917 the main work of the I.W.W. had been to agitate for the release of the twelve prisoners. A majority, both of the Labour Council in Sydney and of the rejuvenated Labour Party, let themselves be persuaded that the twelve were victims of a capitalist conspiracy. They certainly were prisoners of the class war-so also were the note forgers – and with a section of the workers this fact alone was a reason for their

release whether they were guilty or not. But that would weigh with a section only. No powerful or official support could be expected for the release of incendiaries or forgers. The latter were abandoned to their fate-the longest sentence any of them had received was five years-and the champions of the imprisoned men concentrated their energies on proving the innocence of the twelve. When the I.W.W. was finally put out of business, the N.S.W. Labour Council and a number of unofficial bodies carried on the agitation.

E. E. Judd took a prominent part in this work, though as head of the S.L.P. in Sydney he bitterly hated the Chicago organisation and all its teaching. Scully was unearthed, and with his aid Judd and Boote, editor of the Worker, went through all the evidence on which the conspirators had been convicted. Boote published in the Worker a most convincing exposure of inconsistencies, contradictions, and absurdities in the Crown's case, and from the end of 1917 the "frame-up" theory was taken up enthusiastically by the official Labour Movement, industrial and political, which henceforth demanded a re-opening of the cases. In 1918 as a result, of the charges made by Brookfield and Mutch, Ms.L.A., in the N.S.W. Assembly, a Royal Commission was appointed with a rather restricted scope to inquire into the conduct of the police in connection with the cases. The mass of evidence presented at this inquiry tended to show the unreliability of Scully and the Goldsteins, the principal surviving witnesses for the prosecution, and to discredit the detectives; but Street, J., the Commissioner, did not recommend a re-opening of the cases. The agitation was, however, redoubled, and a fresh inquiry was made a principal issue in all industrial constituencies at the 1920 elections. The result of that inquiry was to clear all the prisoners but one of the charge of arson, and Ewing, J., recommended the release of the eleven who, with the exception of the forger King, were thereupon released by the Storey Government. King served out his full five years for forgery, and the twelfth, Reeves, was ultimately released by Mr. Storey's successor, Dooley.

The I.W.W. has now disappeared as a separate entity from Australia, but it has left an indelible mark behind it. It can claim the credit for the defeat of conscription, and its antiwar propaganda prepared the way for the A.L.P. peace proposals of 1917, the Labour Council's resolutions against recruiting and the Perth Conference decisions of 1918. The Leftward movement in the Labour Party, culminating in the formation of the industrial section in N.S.W., was partly inspired by I.W.W. propaganda. A. W. Buckley and at least one other leading spirit in the section were ex-members of the organisation. To the same influence must be attributed the increasing militancy of industrial labour in the period 1914-19. It partly inspired both the great Coal Strike of 1916 and the General Strike of 1917. The widespread ramifications of the latter stoppage are best explained by the existence of a general spirit in favour of mass action – a sort of "let-us-try-a-general-strike" feeling. The crudity and ineptitude of its execution, however, was not the fault of the I.W.W., who had they been on this side of prison bars, would never have countenanced the utterly unscientific extension of that dispute.

But philosophically the interest of the I.W.W. lies in the fact that it was the first body to offer effectively to the Australian workers an ideal of emancipation alternative to the somewhat threadbare Fabianism of the Labour Party. Accordingly its most permanent achievement was the birth of an industrial union agitation, framed on scientific lines as contrasted with the swallowing process of the A.W.U. amalgamation, and this time supported by many official leaders of unionism throughout Australia.

Chapter XI. The One Big Union

THE most permanent and solid result of the three years' intensive propaganda of the I.W.W. was the creation, on a new basis, and backed by the official leaders of labour, of a movement towards industrial unionism. The attempt to make the I.W.W. itself the One Big Union by a policy of "white-anting" existing organisations was from the outset doomed to failure; for it incurred the hostility not only of political and industrial "bosses," but of genuine industrial unions as a whole, like the Coal and Shale Employees, the Railway Unions, and so on. To have any chance of success, movement for closer unionism must have support from some of the official spokesmen of the industrialists. Even in America the I.W.W. itself sprang from the Western Miners' Union. In Australia there was no inherent reason why industrial unions like those just named should not support a general scheme for closer unity. The success of the A.W.U.–A.W.A. project, although purely empirical and following unscientific lines, showed the possibilities of amalgamation. But their exploitation required both the fertilisation of I.W.W. theory and the dissipation of the I.W.W. threat to established organisations.

In fact, as early as 1916, a positive step towards the creation of an all-embracing industrial union was taken in N.S.W. On September 2nd a conference met in Sydney Trades Hall, presided over curiously enough by Phil Adler, Secretary of the Blacksmiths. The leading spirits in this plan were also prominent members of the industrial section of the Labour Party. Claude Thompson, Secretary of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants' Association, proposed the substantive resolution:

"That this Conference affirms the principle of One Big Union for the whole of the workers."

To this Pattinson, representing the southern coal-miners, moved as an addendum:

"based on industrial and allied trade lines."

Mass unionism, he said, had been a failure wherever tried. By "mass unionism" he meant presumably the system of amalgamation then advocated by the A.W.U. A.C. Willis, Secretary of the Miners' Federation, was also against mass unionism.

"Every unionist should be a member of an industrial union, though the trades should be departmentalised. The wages board system had been useful to smaller organisations, but on the whole had only provided enough oil to keep the human machine in working order."

But it was soon obvious that the delegates held very divergent views. O'Reilly (Hairdressers) moved an amendment recommending the industrial grouping system. The delegate of the Canister Makers said that federations and amalgamations had failed. Over all the differences, however, emerged a weariness of the tactics of

politicians, natural in view of their treachery on the conscription question. In the end Thompson's resolution was carried by 58 votes to 2 with ten abstentions.

A committee consisting of Willis, Bowling, and Pattinson (Miners), O'Brien (Furnishing Trades), Lenehan (Progressive Carpenters), Rutherford (Saddlers), and Mrs. Kate Dwyer (Women Workers), was elected to formulate a concrete scheme. As might be expected the committee never came to any conclusion. Lenehan was a conservative representative of a conservative craft union. Mrs. Dwyer was an old battler in the political movement, who had little sympathy with the newer unionism. Willis and Bowling were irreconcilable personally, and O'Brien was looking for a seat. But the advantage of a solid organisation and the crying need for closer unity received practical demonstration during the next twelve months.

In November, 1916, the most efficiently organised, daringly defiant, and completely successful coal strike was carried through without a hitch by the C. & S.E.F. The issue was clear-cut; the eight hours from bank to bank, to which were added minor demands about wages; the men knowing what they wanted, decided to get it, and stand no compromises; the moment was well chosen as there were no large reserves in sight; the stoppage was complete, every coal miner in Australia downing tools simultaneously; the whole thing had been carefully worked out in advance, and was intended to demonstrate the efficiency of the recently-formed federation.

The men were not to be sidetracked by talk of patriotism or German gold. They scornfully rejected the first offer made by Hughes at a compulsory conference which he convened by the powers of the War Precautions Act. The Prime Minister then offered an immediate hearing of the miners' grievances by the President of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court if they would go back to work in the interim. The federation's officers, however, knew Higgins, J., and what they could get from him, and would not hear of going back on the eight-hour shift. Eleven days later a special tribunal was appointed under the W.P. Act, with judge Edmonds, of N.S.W., as chairman, and vested with power to raise the fixed selling price of coal as well as to adjust the hours and pay of the miners. The men's leaders undoubtedly knew what the decision would be before they accepted the tribunal, and even so they did not resume work till the judge had given a favourable decision on the hours question, so that they only resumed on the hours that they demanded.

Later on the judge awarded increases of from 10 to 15 per cent. to the miners, and allowed the coal-owners to increase the selling-price of coal to a somewhat larger rate. The awards of the special tribunal were by regulation given the same force as awards of the regular courts under the Arbitration Act. In fact, the tribunal was just a screen. It preserved the form of arbitration, but its award was, in its main features, merely the registration of an agreement secretly arrived at between the parties and the Government. In this case it had taken the miners about three weeks to prove their power, and in that time they had paralysed industry throughout the eastern States. The war emergency no doubt helped them, but probably they would have had the community at their mercy in any case, as the stocks were low. This conflict was a dramatic illustration of the value of direct action in the hands of a solid and all-

inclusive organisation effectively led. The victory gave Willis immense prestige; for he was supposed to have planned the whole campaign.

The antithesis – the uselessness of a strike, however widespread and popular, when the forces of labour lack organisation and unitary control – was cruelly demonstrated the next year. In the Great Strike of 1917 there was as much solidarity as in the Coal Strike. The craft unionists and the unskilled fought loyally side by side. But there was no directing plan animating the whole, and the solidarity was often misapplied. The whole affair is most complicated and mutual recriminations, charges and counter-charges after the defeat have hopelessly distorted the true details. It is now impossible to disentangle from the conflicting accounts of participants and eye-witnesses any reliable story of the inner events of the struggle. Fortunately that is irrelevant. A brief sketch of the external happenings will indicate where the main lessons of the upheaval are to be found.

Even before the N.S.W. Labour Government had “ratted,” the Railway Commissioners had sought to introduce a “jobcard” system into the tramway workshops at Randwick. The object of the cards was to show the exact time taken over each specific job. There had been, no doubt, a deliberate slowing down and reduction of output at these shops under the influence of the many I.W.W. sympathisers in them. But the men regarded the cards as part of a speeding-up device, and an instalment of the notorious Taylor system. The union representatives had secured from the Labour Government the withdrawal of the objectionable system. But in 1917 there was no longer a Labour Government in office, and Holman had left his Chief Secretary, George Fuller, a member of the old “Liberal” Party, as head of the Cabinet. So despite the protests of the engineers, the same old card system was unearthed and introduced at Randwick on July 20th.

After deputations to Commissioners and Ministers had proved useless, the men determined to strike. The leaders of the unions concerned informed the Executive of the N.S.W. Labour Council that they were unable any longer to control their members, and therefore the Council refused formally to take the lead in the negotiations. The unions concerned met among themselves on July 31st, and resolved to cease work unless the card system was immediately withdrawn. Fuller replied to this ultimatum next day with a bellicose statement. The Government, he said, intended to govern, and would not allow any outside unauthorised bodies to dictate to them. So on Thursday, August 2nd, 1,100 men at Randwick ceased work, while the majority of those employed in the railway workshops at Eveleigh, to the number of 3,000, marched out. Some shop-men at Newcastle and in other depots on the northern line also downed tools.

A defence committee, consisting of the metal trades unions, the A.R. & T.S.A., and the Tramways Union, was now set up. To make sure of the conflict Fuller came out with a yet wilder statement on the 3rd, which we may quote in parts:

“There are in this State a limited number of men for the time being in control of several trade unions, who have lost all sense of patriotism and responsibility, and who

are deliberately contributing to the success of the enemies of civilisation...

“Nine-tenths of the men do not know what the strike is really about, but are being blindly led into this appalling conflict by a few dangerous leaders. I now solemnly appeal to every workman in the State to consider seriously the direction in which he is drifting and to stand by the Government in its determination to resist to the utmost the challenge which has been so wickedly made by thoughtless leaders... .”

Next day the fuelmen at Eveleigh downed tools apparently without orders. As a counterstroke the locomotives were loaded by clerks and officials, so that participation by the Federated Locomotive Engine-drivers and Firemen became inevitable. The Defence Committee offered to let the men return on the conditions existing on June 1st, and to submit the whole question to a Royal Commission. The Government replied that their employees were in revolt, and they could not consider negotiations until the men returned to work unconditionally.

The capitalist press branded the strikers as pro-Germans and, on the other hand, set out to minimise the extent of support the strike was receiving. Its testimony is therefore worthless, but there does, in fact, seem to have been a lack of unanimity among the unionists directly concerned, and after the first few days men began to scab. At the same time there was a vague desire broadcast among unionists for a general strike. The brilliant victory of the miners and minor successes by other unions had inspired a general belief in the efficacy of direct action, while the older unionists, who remembered the dark days of the 'nineties, were overborne by younger men or recent arrivals.

On Saturday the L.E.D. & F. resolved to cease work – a decision rendered inevitable by the strike of the union fuelmen - and on Monday the other traffic employees on both trams and trains were called out, and left their jobs at midnight. The electricians at the power-house, too, ceased work this time. Yet despite a tremendous spirit of solidarity the stoppage was half-hearted and traffic was not completely paralysed except on the first day. The men who were not in the A.R. & T.S.A. did not all leave work, but took a ballot. On the 7th, Fuller, in the name of the Government, issued an ultimatum to the strikers. They must return to work by Friday, or be dismissed from the public service, losing all their privileges. On the other hand, he guaranteed full protection to those who remained “loyal.” The Defence Committee replied by repeating their offer to resume work without the card-system. Next day the Strike Committee was reinforced by delegates from the A.W.U., C. & S.E.F. (Coal Miners), A.M.I.E.U. (Meat Industry Employees), Seamen, Waterside Workers, and Gas Employees. Most of these unions were impulsively anxious to strike, and some of the mines on the northern field had been already laid idle through a sympathetic strike of the engine-drivers.

Rail-borne goods were now regarded as “black” and few unionists cared to handle them. The wharf labourers knocked off on the 9th, and the same day the coke-workers at Port Kembla refused to handle rail-borne coal. A number of carters and other transport employees on their own account began to boycott the railways. So, too, the

boilermakers and other engineering unions working at the Commonwealth Naval Dockyard refused to use the electric current because it was generated by the Railway Department, and so walked out. On the other hand, a certain number of the original strikers on the railways, especially in the traffic branch, returned to work on the 10th in compliance with the Government ultimatum, while the authorities scoured the country for scabs to fill the vacancies.

On Saturday the seamen struck, and on the following Monday as a result, the ship painters and dockers in Sydney and the waterside workers in Melbourne failed to resume work. On the 11th all the unions connected with the food-supply met to discuss the situation, but postponed the question of a strike till the following Friday. However, the Defence Committee declared rail-borne wheat and flour “black.” The employees at the Government Dockyards of Cockatoo and Garden Islands, following the lead of the painters and dockers and their comrades at Newcastle, as well as many of the employees of private yards, ceased work on the 14th.

On its side the Government had imposed stringent restrictions on the use of coal, gas, and electricity, and took power to commandeer all kinds of vehicles. An amendment of the Coal Mines Regulation Act, to allow inexperienced miners to work at the coal face, was bludgeoned through Parliament in one sitting. A camp of strike-breakers brought down from the country – they were largely the sons of farmers and suchlike persons – was established on the Agricultural Society's show grounds, and later on another at the Zoo site at Taronga Park. In these the scabs were treated royally, even being fed, clothed, and housed by the State, supplied with free beer, and described by Ministers and the daily Press as “loyalists” and “patriots.” Three members of the Defence Committee, Hon. E. J. Kavanagh, M.L.C., Secretary of the Labour Council, Claude Thompson, of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Association, and A. C. Willis, of the Miners, were arrested and charged with conspiring to cause sedition. To these were joined A. W. Buckley, M.L.A. The Government seemed to hope that the arrest of the leaders would check the spread of the strike. As a matter of fact the three first-named, at any rate, had done their best to restrict the area of the dispute, so that the arrests only complicated the issue and increased the general bitterness.

Now the slaughtermen section of the A.M.I.E.U. struck work on the pretext of a dispute of their own without consulting the Defence Committee. On August 20th the Barrier A.M.A. declared all coal “black,” and decided to cease work until the arrested members of the Strike Committee should be released. Further sections of the A.M.I.E.U. and several other smaller unions or groups also came out. On the other hand, the Defence Committee now offered to recommend a general resumption under a modified card-system provided there was no victimisation. Cabinet refused to make any modification in the cards or to guarantee re-employment to the strikers, since it was pledged to retain the “loyalists” in the service. Next day, therefore, further unions came out at Broken Hill and the retail butchers ceased work in a body.

On the 23rd the Arbitration Court cancelled the registrations of the striking railway unions. Judge Heydon declared it must be one thing or the other - the Act or no Act. By striking, the unions implicitly said “No Act,” and so they would get no Act any

more. The latter had argued that the card-system constituted a “change of working conditions,” and therefore should not have been introduced without the necessary variation of the awards having first been obtained from the Court. But technically such a system was regarded as a mere detail of workshop management which could not come within the purview of the Court under the State Act as interpreted by Heydon, J.

On this same day the Government issued a Proclamation taking over the coal mines in terms of a small Act hastily rushed through the Assembly. They announced their intention of working the mines with non-unionists under police protection, guaranteeing the owners against all loss. Four days later the work of producing coal by strike-breakers was actually begun. Strong camps of these were established on the Maitland Field, and at Newcastle in the Sailors' Home. On August 24th the Acting-Premier announced that he would carry on no further negotiations with the Strike Committee or their intermediaries. “These negotiations,” he added, “were being carried on solely with a view to encouraging the unions to believe that the Government would yield.”

The Federal Government now intervened more drastically. On the 29th Regulations were issued under the War Precautions Act, empowering the Governor-General to de-register from the Commonwealth Arbitration Court any union participating in the strike, and making it a criminal offence to impede the shearing or the transportation of wool. This had instant effect. The heads of the A.W.U. determined on the 31st that the union should not participate actively in the strike, but confine its energies to contributing to the strike funds. However, on the last-named date the gas-workers announced their intention of refusing to handle non-union coal.

This further extension was suspended, however, to allow of fresh negotiations for a settlement. The Defence Committee being excluded from access to the Government, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, R. D. Meagher, who had been expelled from the Labour Party over conscription, but was anxious to return to the fold, now offered himself as mediator. After consultation with the Defence Committee, he suggested that work should be resumed on the conditions prevailing at the date of cessation-i.e., under the card-system-but that an independent tribunal be immediately appointed to investigate the grievances of railway and tramway men, and after three months to report on the workings of the card-system. In the meantime certain safeguards were to be afforded the men to prevent an abuse of the cards. Cabinet, however, bluntly refused to modify its previous position.

In the light of this rebuff the Defence Committee announced its resolve to fight to the bitter end, and declared its intention to invite all unions, including the A.W.U., to refuse to handle anything that had been touched by “black” labour. In response to this appeal the gas-workers struck at all the retort houses in Sydney and suburbs on September 3rd, and next day the glass-bottle workers, timber-workers, and all the employees of the Clyde Engineering Co. ceased work, but the A.W.U. did not reconsider its previous decision.

In fact, the back of the strike was broken. Twelve mines were producing coal with non-union labour. The two mines of John Brown, Pelaw and Richmond Main, had been definitely taken over by the N.S.W. Government. The latter arranged with the Victorian Government to provide labour for one of these mines and police protection. Non-union crews had been scraped together for several colliers and coastal steamers. Higgins, J., had cancelled the clause in his award which granted preference to members of the Waterside Workers' Federation on August 30th, and the shipping companies, thus given a free hand, had enrolled a tolerably efficient force of "blacklegs," for whom the Government provided accommodation in the premises granted to the waterside workers by the See Ministry fifteen years previously. At the same time steps were taken to prevent the families of strikers from receiving State relief when in distress.

Hence, on September 6th, the Defence Committee was forced to accept the offers of mediation made by J. B. Holme, Special Commissioner for Conciliation in the Department of Labour and Industry. On September 8th they agreed upon terms of surrender. The card-system was to be retained, subject to certain safeguards to prevent a falsification of the record, and an inquiry by a Royal Commission at the end of three months' trial. Other grievances were to be submitted to Mr. Holme, and by him to the Arbitration Court, where possible. The Railway Commissioners were to have discretion in re-employing strikers to fill vacancies, but employment was to be "offered without vindictiveness." The Committee recommended the acceptance of these terms to the men on September 10th. Serious hitches still occurred. The men objected to having to fill in humiliating forms in applying for reinstatement. These were generally considered to be a contravention of the terms of settlement and many refused to fill them in, but many others gave way under pressure of hunger. By the 17th the Timber-workers', Engine-drivers', Gas-workers', and other unions had resolved to return to work, but in all too many cases found their places filled. The engineering trades did the same, but even here by no means all the unionists got back.

On the waterfront and the coal-fields, however, the official strike dragged on for nearly a month. On the 20th most of the transport workers returned to work where it was available. The wharf labourers, however, were completely locked out. The shipping companies and the Governments had set up National Service Bureaux to recruit scabs, and by now had organised a body of some 2,000 non-unionists for constant work. They would only engage men for casual jobs through the Bureaux, and the latter required from applicants a signed declaration that they were not members of the Waterside-workers Federation. That was to avoid the operation of the Federal Award which still stipulated a high hourly wage for members of that organisation. The wharf labourers have never quite recovered. The companies kept up the bureaux after the war was over, and organised their loyalists into a tame union, which was awarded preference in place of the Federation. After many months some of the old hands were allowed to get stray jobs, but till the return of the Storey Government they were out of employment.

The seamen in turn refused to work with non-unionists, and it was not till October 17th that both parties modified their positions and so re-opened navigation.

Finally, the coal-miners remained on strike for another month after the other unions had abandoned the struggle. Negotiations were indeed opened up on September 12th through J. B. Holme, but there was the trouble of the loyalists employed on the northern field and the “scabs” imported from Victoria. Willis had done his best to keep the men out of the strike, and when released did his best to get them back to work, but the first terms offered by the Government were intolerable. By the 25th, however, adjustments had been made and the Delegate Board were prepared to recommend a resumption on the following terms:

“The unionists were to agree to work with non unionists and to admit them to membership of the Federation. In future, no permits to work at the coal face were to be issued to unqualified persons save in the event of a strike. But in re-employing miners preference was to be given to 'loyalists,' and the colliery managers were to have the right to select labour without, however, showing unfair discrimination against unionists, and guided in general by the principle, 'last to come, first to go.' The cases of men who considered themselves victimised were to be examined by an industrial court judge, Local and regional conciliation committees were to be set up to supervise the re-establishment of local customs and to try and prevent minor stoppages.

On September 28th the Western District Branch of the Federation accepted these terms and resumed work, and a few days later the miners on the southern field followed suit, but in neither of these districts had there been any large influx of non-union labour. In the north there was much dissension. The Delegation Board recommended a resumption on October 2nd, but many lodges recorded an adverse vote. It was not until the 15th that the strike was officially declared off on the Maitland seam. And even then Richmond Main was manned wholly by the Victorian strike-breakers, while many members of the Federation who had been prominent in the strike, or who had belonged to the I.W.W. or the Socialists, were locked out. These men were long supported by levies on their fellows. But in the end the free labourers from Victoria found themselves quite incapable of earning a decent wage on piece-work and, despite their revolvers and their police bodyguard, grew weary of living in constant terror from the unionists. So they elected to be repatriated, and most of the unionists gradually drifted back to the pits.

This account must suffice to give some idea of the progress of the great strike at its centre. Its eddies affected more or less all the States. The net result, in N.S.W. at any rate, was that unionism was virtually crippled in almost every industry. The railway, engineering, and many other unions were de-registered and so excluded from the Arbitration Courts, and that was a serious matter in a country where the preparation and argument of claims for the Court had become the chief function of unionism. In the railways and tramways “yellow” unions were organised by the Commissioners to take over these functions, and men were given special leave and free passes to organise these bogus bodies; for, as the Chief Commissioner explained to the Royal

Commission in 1921, it was necessary to have some body to “represent” the men before the Court! These bodies were deliberately organised so as to break up the railwaymen into as many small sections as possible. Similarly the “loyalists” on the waterfront were registered as an industrial union and supplanted the old Federation before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. Bogus unions were also set up in several other industries.

The aftermath lasted long. The working-class of Sydney experienced a period of distress and actual starvation which had not been paralleled in their generation. Thousands of families were driven to subsist on public charity which was given with no generous hand. On the railways and tramways despite promises of no vindictiveness, those strikers who were lucky enough to get back at all were shown no mercy. All their accumulated privileges and seniority were forfeited, and they were treated worse than fresh recruits to the service. For instance, on the railways first-class drivers on returning to duty were put to fire for men who had not even been first-class firemen before the strike. The whole seniority lists were revised so as to degrade the strikers. In fact eyesight and hearing tests were altered in the interests of the loyalists and strike breakers, and this had the effect, according to Mr. justice Edmonds, “of securing permanent employment to a number of persons (loyalists) who would not otherwise have been retained in the Commissioners' service, and therefore keeping out of employment an equal number of strikers who were eligible in all respects.” The same judge draws attention to a number of other points in which the settlement terms were disregarded by the Commissioners in some cases under political pressure.

It is worth while pausing here to consider the two most generally accepted views of the origin of the strike as beautiful illustrations of the myth-making instinct in politics. The official view, as set forth in the daily Press, and enunciated by the N.S.W. Government of the day, is that the strike was a deliberate bid by the extremists within the Labour Movement to obtain by direct action the power which the people refused them at the ballot box in May, 1917. Fuller claimed to believe that it was a carefully-planned conspiracy to overthrow or supersede the constitutional Government of the country by paralysing its industrial life. So in the statement, already quoted, of August 3rd he says:

“The Government is convinced that a section of the men were determined to have a strike under any circumstances. There can be no compromise on the part of the Government when an issue of this kind is raised. The time is now come for the people of this State to take a stand against those extremist's who have for a long time been deliberately conspiring against the public interest, and who have been responsible for the industrial ferment which has disgraced this State since the beginning of the war.”

By the 8th the Acting-Premier was able to say:

“It is absolutely more important that the Government should run the country than those irresponsible people who are behind the trade unions at the present time should get a withdrawal of the card-system... . The main question was whether the

irresponsible gentlemen who are trying to run the country shall run it or whether the Government shall run it.”

On the following day the myth had grown, and Fuller now told a deputation of women, introduced by James Dooley, M.L.A.:

“This is not a revolt against the card-system, but against the National Government. We will not allow the Government to be taken out of the hands of those who have been elected in the proper way to run the country, and to be handed over, not to the unions, but to the irresponsible men who are endeavouring to force the Government out of the hands of those responsible to the people and get possession of it themselves.”

And eventually all idea of proportion was lost, and the official advertisements Fuller inserted, calling for strike, breakers, end:

“Who is for Australia and the Allies?”

Finally we get the theory perfected, and are assured that the Government held ample evidence to prove that the strike had long been premeditated and was political or even revolutionary in character.

This evidence has never been published. Even a carefully chosen capitalist jury was unable to convict Kavanagh, Willis, Thompson, and Buckley of conspiring to bring about a strike in the railway service (November 9th). Some colour was certainly given to the Government's pretensions by some stray utterances of strike leaders-especially Buckley-at Domain meetings; but no historical critic would take seriously the utterances of leaders endeavouring to hearten a body of strikers in a losing battle. More plausible were Beeby's references to the abortive O.B.U. Congress in Sydney the previous year, and to the proposals before the Melbourne T.U.C., summoned to consider conscription in September, 1916. But in view of the manifest disorganisation of the strikers, it was necessary to modify the official view and assume that the deeper plans of the “conspirators” had been wrecked by their inability to hold back the wilder elements within the unions until the “plot” was perfected.

Now, a belief that a general strike would prove invincible no doubt existed very widely, and the general idea of direct action had been popularised by the I.W.W. But that these sentiments had crystallised into a conspiracy to use those weapons on a large scale is incredible in the light of the facts, and there is not a tittle of evidence that a single responsible Labour leader wanted a big strike at that time. If he did, he would have been a lunatic in view of the vast quantity of coal stored at grass since 1916. On the other hand, it is likely that the leaders did want to be in a position to carry out a big industrial stoppage if occasion should require it. Hence the conferences and plans.

Beyond this the official theory is sufficiently refuted by the patent lack of any defined plan in the conduct of the struggle. For example, in the official statement issued on

behalf of the Defence Committee on August 4th, when the fuel-men struck, Kavanagh says:

“It had been originally intended to confine the strike to those directly affected by the card-system, but this was found to be impossible owing to the general dissatisfaction which existed throughout the railway service due to the failure to remedy long-standing grievances and to the limited scope of the Arbitration Act.”

All the evidence goes to show that many unions simply rushed into the fray from a mistaken spirit of solidarity without any encouragement from the Labour leaders – in fact, against their advice. It was not till September, when too many unions were already embroiled, that the Defence Committee deliberately invited an extension of the area of the conflict.

In reply to the official version the unions evolved an amazing myth of their own. In its final elaboration, the Labour thesis was that the whole dispute was deliberately engineered by the Government, in conjunction with the Employers' Federation, with a view to dealing a knock-out blow to unionism. It was contended that the Government waited till ample reserves of coal had been accumulated and the cessation of public works had thrown large numbers of men upon the Labour market. Then a step was taken which the Ministry knew meant an upheaval-the card-system was revived, and to make sure of the desired breach occurring the Acting-Premier refused point-blank to meet the men.

“Every subsequent step,” says the Annual Report of the P.L.L. Executive, December, 1917, “proved that the plausible Acting-Premier, Mr. Fuller, was simply a willing tool in the hands of the Employers' Federation which met daily to advise the Government. That the Government and the employers' organisations were all parties to a conspiracy to break the power of unionism and force conscription upon the working-class has been proved up to the hilt by the discovery of the Secret Memorandum prepared by Premier Holman, and circulated among his colleagues prior to his departure for Great Britain.” (p. 17).

Now this pretty theory might fit in very well with post-strike events, but is otherwise self-contradictory. In the first place, the Secret Memorandum proves nothing of the sort. It was a series of suggestions for aids to recruiting, drawn up under Holman's instructions and circulated among his colleagues for consideration by Cabinet in the ordinary way. A copy was stolen, and published in the Press by the Anti-Conscription Committee on the morning of the polling for the second referendum on that subject (December, 1917). For the purposes of discrediting conscriptionists, it was highly effective; for it contained a whole series of most Prussian suggestions – racing and amusements were to be rigorously curtailed; picture shows were to be flooded with recruiting films; the Press-censorship was to be yet further tightened, and all papers were to be obliged to publish columns of official war “news” and propaganda articles; pacifist papers were to be watched with a view to complete suppression; eligible single men were to be discharged from the public service, and employers were to be

encouraged to adopt a similar policy of economic compulsion. All this is reactionary in the extreme, but where is there a hint of any plan for crushing unionism?

Of course the Labour theory is untenable. It proves, or seeks to prove, too much. How could the Government or the Employers' Federation foresee the ramifications which the strike would assume? On their own confession, those who were responsible for the conduct of the strike had no intention of letting it spread beyond the workshops. If the union leaders could not foretell the expansion of the strike and did their best to limit it, how was any one outside the unions to foresee the implication of the coal-miners or waterside workers? Really the acceptance of the Labour thesis would involve adherence also to the version of Fuller and Co.

On the other hand it is probable that the new anti-Labour Ministry were resolved to challenge the authority of the unions within their own employ. The card-system did constitute such a challenge, but there is no evidence to show that that challenge was deliberately timed to suit the other employers. It was more likely that it was just a coincidence that it came at such a convenient juncture. Nevertheless, when they saw men coming out on all sides at a disadvantage, the shipping and coal interests resolved to seize the opportunity to draw the fangs of the militant unions. They had long writhed under the repeated stoppages and interruptions inflicted upon industry by the waterside workers and the coalminers. Now, these unions struck when there was plenty of coal at grass and trade was slack. The employers were assured of the fullest support from the Ministry, and pushed home their advantage ruthlessly. A happy combination of circumstances- superfluity of labour, ample reserves of coal, a war emergency (which was not an emergency in this sense in Australia except in the capitalist dailies), a pannicky fear of Germans and I.W.W. incendiaries among the cocky farmers and middle classes, and a spirit of undisciplined and misguided solidarity among the proletariat-had delivered the unions into their hands. Government and employers were united in driving home their advantage, but that was all.

The lesson of the strike, so pitilessly driven home on the starving unionists of Australia, was the complement of that of the Bank-to-Bank Strike the preceding year, the futility of mere solidarity without direction, of strikes alone deprived of plan and executive guidance. Unions had rushed out into the fray without consulting anybody, and so complicated the task confronting the hastily formed Defence Committee. Yet the latter lacked the authority to order back to work over-zealous organisations or to call out others. Still less could it conduct the strike on the scientific lines that persons wise after the event subsequently recommended. The urgent need of reorganising the forces of unionism was, therefore, made clear to all.

The Secretary of the Labour Council, in his report for December, 1917, draws attention to this. In future, he argues such matters must be controlled by a responsible body, not a scratch organisation without permanent existence like the Defence Committee. He therefore outlines a sort of federal scheme to this end. All unions should be grouped on lines of trade affinity into Industrial Federations governed by Industrial Councils, on which each union would be represented by from one to three

delegates according to membership. These Councils should in turn be linked up to a State Council, and over all would be an Australian Labour Council. The State Council would consist of one delegate for each union and would send two delegates to the Australian Council. Voting was to be on the card-system, and no union might strike without the approval of the Industrial Council to which it belonged.

Kavanagh's scheme did not meet with the approval of the industrial unionists on the Labour Council. It was referred to a sub-committee, on which the industrialists secured a majority dominated by men like E. E. Judd, S.L.P., A. Macpherson, an ex-member of the I.W.W., and J. S. Garden.

The latter rejected the Secretary's scheme on account of its craft basis, and outlined a plan for One Big Union in accordance with American theories. They did not, however, propose to scrap political action altogether, or even to abandon arbitration. The new plan, known as the O.B.U., was approved by the Council after a protracted debate. and a committee was appointed to explain the proposal to the unions. Meanwhile the Secretary of the Council, E. J. Kavanagh, was appointed to the Board of Trade, and the industrialist, Garden, elected in his place. Had the scheme been ripened and ratified a little earlier while the lessons of the Big Strike were still fresh in the minds of unionists, it would have had a far better chance of acceptance. This psychological moment was lost in talk.

However, a Trade Union Congress was called and met in Sydney on August 5th, 1918. A. C. Willis was in the chair, and nearly 150 organisations sent delegates. The scheme of industrial unionism laid before Congress was, of course, opposed by the craft interests and also by the Central Branch of the A.W.U. On the other hand, A. Rae and Cullinan, of the Western (N.S.W.) Branch of that union, supported it enthusiastically. The scheme was preceded by a preamble inspired by the I.W.W. economics. It did not, however, follow slavishly either the 1905 or 1908 preamble. In particular it precisely defined the meaning of the class struggle ("the greater the share which the capitalist class appropriates, the less remains for the workers; therefore the interests of these two classes are in constant conflict"); revolutionary ("a complete change, namely, the abolition of the capitalist ownership of the means of production, whether privately or through the State, and the establishment, instead, of social ownership"); and retains political beside industrial action with the qualification that it must be "revolutionary."

The actual organisation, too, was a much modified version of Trautmann's plan. The union was to be divided into six departments – (1) Building and Construction, (2) Manufacture, (3) Transportation and Communication, (4) Agriculture and Fisheries, (5) Civil Service and Public Utilities, (6) Mining. The departments were sub-divided into divisions three in No. 1, four in Nos. 3, 4 and 6, six in No. 5, and eight in No. 2. For instance, in the Building and Construction Department there were the Ship-and-Boat Building Division, the Railway, Road, Canal, and Sewerage Construction Division, and the Building Division proper. (The construction of locomotives was assigned to Department 2.) The divisions were industrial. For example, the Metalliferous Division of the Mining Department included, beside the miners, clerks and all labour employed about the mines as well as those engaged in treating the ore

at the smelters and refiners. But little attempt had been made to adjust the American scheme to actual conditions in Australia. So in Department 4 the three most important industries of Australia pastoral, wheat and cane-growing-were lumped together in one division, while the industrially far less important orchard and vineyard workers had a department to themselves like the cotton-plantation employees, who were non-existent. Again, in the Mining Department a whole division was reserved for oil mining. This had to be glossed in the explanatory pamphlet issued by the Committee: "that is, when we strike oil"!

Within the divisions of the Manufacturing Department there were to be also subdivisions – five in the Foodstuffs Division-animal foods, cereal and vegetable foods (millers, bakers, sugar refiners, etc.), beverages, tobacco-workers (wholesale and retail), and also hairdressers, and hotel and restaurant employees, including their special butchers and bakers as well as lift-men and chauffeurs.

The government of the union would have been highly complicated. At the top was a Grand Council consisting of a President and Secretary elected by plebiscite of the whole membership, together with two delegates from each department also elected. This body had almost untrammelled power over the finances and policy of the union and could call a general strike. No Department, Division or Section would be permitted to take any action involving the members of the unions without the permission of the Grand Council. All its members were to be fully paid. Departmental and Divisional Councils were similarly constituted. There was also provision for District Councils made up from delegates from each Division in industrial centres like Sydney, Newcastle, Broken Hill, and so on. Sectional Committees to safeguard the interests of allied trades, and Shop Committees on the lines of those operating under the A.M.I.E.U. in the meat works. The whole was designed to constitute a graded hierarchy of controls. But all the officers and councillors were to be subject to the recall, and it was laid down that the highest authority in the union should be a plebiscite vote of all the members. The ballot was to be used to determine all matters of interest to the unions. The extremist section denounced these latter provisions as reactionary, but they were inserted as a sop to democratic prejudices.

While these events were taking place in N.S.W. a similar movement was on foot in the other States. After the Sydney Congress in N.S.W., congresses were held in Victoria and Queensland which adopted the N.S.W. scheme practically unaltered. Finally, an all-Australian Congress in Melbourne ratified these plans. But this grandiose edifice came to nothing. It had officials provisionally appointed at Melbourne, but no members. Craft and sectional prejudices were still too strong. Moreover, the politicians, as we have seen above, opposed the scheme. But above all it had to face the hostility of the A.W.U.

Chapter XII. The O.B.U. and the A.W.U.

THE opposition of the Australian Workers' Union was the rock on which the One Big Union went to shipwreck. This great organisation was made the shield from behind which the alarmed politicians launched their attacks and the rallying point for the jealousies of craft union officials. There seem to be two main reasons for the A.W.U. hostility. In the first place they aimed themselves at being the One Big Union, and were, therefore, jealous of the new organisation. But more serious, their officers objected to its revolutionary policy. The A.W.U. was traditionally political, and its vast membership had been used as a machine for raising its officials to political honours. The revolutionary preamble of the O.B.U. seemed likely seriously to reduce the number of seats available for parliamentary aspirants in the Labour ranks. Finally, the A.W.U. officials looked with distrust upon the coal-miners' organisation, which had already robbed them of the Broken Hill section of the metalliferous miners and seemed likely to wield the preponderating influence in the new union.

Accordingly, though the Central Branch of the A.W.U. had been represented on the O.B.U. Congress in Sydney by J. H. Catts, M.H.R., and others, it quietly withdrew its support from the scheme there outlined after it had failed to secure the acceptance of an alternative and very mild preamble drawn up by Catts or its own scheme of organisation in contradistinction to the American model actually endorsed. So in Queensland, though an A.W.U. representative was actually appointed to the local O.B.U. Committee, by refusing to attend its meetings he succeeded in keeping propaganda work in that State hamstrung. Finally, the Annual Convention of 1919 ignored the appeals of the O.B.U. Committee and refused to take a ballot of their members on the question.

The indiscretions of the O.B.U. Committee eventually gave the A.W.U. officers an excuse for launching an open campaign against it. When the A.W.U. ignored the latter's request for a ballot of their membership on the question of dissolving in order to enter the proposed new organisation, the Propaganda Committee of the O.B.U. decided to go behind the backs of the A.W.U. officials and take a plebiscite of the rank and file on their own account. Such a threat was, of course, futile, since only the responsible officers of the union in possession of the roll of members and enjoying the proper authority could take a ballot that would reflect in any way the real sentiments of the members. Moreover the proposal to go behind the backs of the elected spokesmen of a great union exposed its authors to the charge of body snatching and treachery to union principles. It savoured of I.W.W. methods, and was compared to the attempt of the Nationalist Government to undermine the Miners' Federation by employing agents to canvass individual miners in favour of the Conciliation Committees after the Delegate Board of the Federation had definitely decided to have nothing to do with that machinery.

This resentment was fanned into fury by the language used by J. S. Garden, Secretary of the Sydney O.B.U. Committee, before the Social Democratic League in March,

1919, when he spoke of “white-anting the unions beginning with the A.W.U.” in the interests of the O.B.U. Garden's unhappy phrase was never forgotten. The A.W.U. bosses put the screw on the editorial staff of the Workers, and ordered them under pain of dismissal to reverse the policy of the papers and cease supporting the One Big Union. They readily yielded to economic pressure, and began to attack the skeleton organisation with as much vehemence as they had hitherto displayed in its favour.

But if the reasons animating the A.W.U. can be thus simply summarised it is by no means so easy to explain why the industrial unionists thought it necessary to construct an entirely new organisation instead of joining forces with the A.W.U. in their amalgamation movement. The answer is that they objected to the structure, policy, and personnel of the existing organisation. Instead of Divisions and Departments for the several branches of industry, the A.W.U. went in, as we have seen, for mass unionism, in which the balance of power was retained in the hands of one section – the pastoral shearer. Again the governing convention, instead of representing the several economic interests of employees in different industries, only reflected the more or less accidental grouping of workers by the locality in which they might happen to reside. So the criticism levelled by the I.W.W. against middle-class democracy (Chapter X) would apply equally to the government of the A.W.U. Moreover, with this structure, the detailed action by sections of the working-class, essential in the eyes of these theorists for success in the struggle against the master class, could not be ensured. That required, above all, that a paralysing strike could be called of the whole of the workers in one specific industry-building, mining, railways, etc. A union departmentalised on the American plan could carry out just those tactics. The A.W.U. branches, on the other hand, lumped together all workers in all sorts of disconnected industries just because they resided or worked in the same geographical area.

This difficulty might have been overcome by an extension of the system of industrial branches already applied in the case of the navvies in N.S.W. But the opposition of policies was more serious. The advocates of the One Big Union, though prepared to make some concessions both to the arbitrationists and the advocates of political action, were resolved on having a lengthy preamble prefixed to their constitution. It is open to doubt whether the Registrar of any Arbitration Court would admit a body under such a banner to the benefits of the Court. Certainly the nascent politicians in the A.W.U. thought it would be a serious obstacle to success at the polls.

The industrialists on the other hand regarded the policy of the A.W.U. as devoted solely to getting its officials into Parliament and then into Cabinet, regardless of the industrial interests of the workers it was intended to serve. And here we come to the real crux. The O.B.U. leaders looked upon the A.W.U. officials as a clique of reactionary intriguers and boodlers who were out for power. Hence their pursuit of a conservative revisionist programme, their devotion to political action. and their horror of revolutionary propaganda. They only wanted to absorb other unions, said the apostles of the O.B.U., in order to augment their own prestige, and were careful in the process to keep the balance of power in their own hands. To this end they dominated

the policy of the union, manipulated plebiscites, and packed conventions. That is why they opposed a scientific form of organisation and clung to their antiquated geographical structure.

These contentions are so grave that they merit examination in some detail. For a strong case has been presented in support of them. It is in fact undeniable that the government of the A.W.U. is, and long has been, in the hands of the paid officials, who are in turn under the thumb of a smaller group at the top of the hierarchy. Such a state of affairs is the natural outcome of the A.W.U. structure.

As we have explained, the supreme government of the A.W.U. is in the hands of the annual convention. The members are represented on this Assembly by delegates of the branches chosen by plebiscite of the members therein. Owing to the vast area of these branches, only those candidates whose names are very widely known have a real chance of election. This circumstance gives the branch officers and organisers who travel about the branch area, publish reports in the Worker, and appear before Arbitration Courts, an incalculable advantage over the ordinary working members who can only be known as a rule to their actual workmates in a limited area. Thus it comes about that the majority - generally a large majority - of the delegates to Convention are branch officials or paid organisers.

Even the more progressive officials of the union have recognised the impropriety of this arrangement. At the Queensland Delegate Meeting-constituted like Convention of delegates from the Districts in that State-of 1914, Con Ryan proposed:

“That not more than one fully paid official should be elected from any district as a delegate to the branch meeting.”

He argued that it was wrong that officials should dominate Conference and regulate the policy they themselves would have to administer. Riordan pointed out that paid officers got elected because they were well known, and even Theodore declared:

“We are drifting into a policy of bureaucracy—of Government by officials for officials.”

At the Annual Convention a similar motion was also brought forward, and a delegate remarked that a plebiscite sometimes meant a monopoly for the best-known men.

As a remedy for what one delegate described as “star chamber control by officials” it was proposed at the 1916 convention to establish a system of initiative, referendum, and recall, whereby “10 per cent. of the members as a whole or in any one industry might petition new rules, censure officials and regulate their salaries.” This motion was vigorously opposed by the dominant clique, and only found five supporters. W. McCormack warned delegates against “catchy resolutions,” arguing that the resolutions discussed at Convention were all formulated by members of the union, and that the officials were annually elected.

Now, it is true that the vast majority of the resolutions on the Convention agenda emanate from meetings of the rank and file, at shearing-sheds or construction camps. But the number of such resolutions is stupendous – passing resolutions is a favourite pastime in off hours in the back country – so that Convention cannot possibly consider them all. Some selection must, therefore, be made, and it is reasonably easy to have really inconvenient motions shelved in this way. Moreover, Rule 62 allows the General Secretary to omit from the agenda published in the Worker, “resolutions containing irrelevant or improper matter,” provided he retains the original. Finally, no delegate from the meeting which originated a proposition is sent specially to advocate it, and it may, therefore, find no genuine exponent.

As to re-election in the A.W.U., as in most unions, this is a mere formality as far as the President and Secretary are concerned. W. G. Spence retained the Presidency from 1898 to 1916, when he was suspended and forced to resign, owing to his support of conscription. Donald Macdonnell was Secretary continuously from 1900 till his death in 1912, and his successor Grayndler is still in office. Dunstan has been Secretary for Queensland since the amalgamation with the A.W.A., while Bailey and Lambert have retained their positions as President and Secretary respectively of the Central (N.S.W.) Branch nearly as long.

The government of branches was even more oligarchic. Save in Queensland the Branch Executive is the supreme authority, and it is composed of delegates elected at a local committee meeting (Rule 75, 1919, since revised). No such committees were in existence at a number of centres of the pastoral industry within the Central Branch territory, and the local meeting would be likely to consist of the local office staff, and their personal friend, Jack Cullinan (Western Branch), in fact, told the 1918 Convention that under this system a few persons could elect an executive officer, and Arthur Blakeley asserted that the system of local committees had failed in N.S.W. because of the nomadic habits of the members who were on the move following their occupations.

The general branch meeting is held at the head office of the branch in June or July – early in the shearing season. That was a convenient time when the branch offices were in the middle of the pastoral districts, but since the Central Branch was transferred to Sydney in 1916 the working unionists have been de facto excluded, and the attendance restricted to members of Parliament, the branch officials and the office staff. Yet these “general meetings” have still power to exercise general control over the policy of the branch (Rule 53) and the organisers.

The latter, apart from appeals to the unrepresentative general meeting, are almost entirely under the thumb of the Branch Executive which may, on its own initiative, appoint additional organisers (Rule 58a), and suspend or dismiss any organiser for faults, or if his services are no longer required (Rule 58d). Now, as apart from the permanent officers the majority of the delegates to the Annual Convention are organisers or other employees even more directly under the control of the Executive, the official junta can control a large bloc vote at that gathering, since they can dictate to organisers and similar employees how to vote. (They are allowed to make

guardedly militant speeches if they like, for that is good business.) It pays to keep on good terms with the junta, as an organiser's billet is in itself quite a pleasant one nowadays, and the junta can reward faithful service by making generous allowances for travelling expenses. On the other hand, an inconvenient critic can easily be punished. For example, in 1915 E. Lane came ninth in the ballot for the eight Convention delegates. When a substitute was needed for one of the eight, Lane was deliberately passed over because of his recent scathing exposure of the Queensland junta.

So the deliberations of Convention are, it is said, secretly fettered by a Tammany system of cliquism and favouritism. Similarly all serious criticism of the officials in the Labour Press can be suppressed because of their share in the management of the Workers. The Australian Worker, published in Sydney, and circulating in N.S.W., South Australia, and Victoria, like the Westralian Worker and the Maoriland Worker (New Zealand), is entirely owned and controlled by the A.W.U., and the same union has a major voice in the management of the Queensland Worker. Control by the A.W.U., of course, means control by the official clique. And so it comes about that the columns of these papers are not really open to publish correspondence from members who have complaints to make displeasing to the official clique. For instance, in January, 1915, E. Lane, as Secretary to the Literature Committee of the Queensland Branch, wrote to complain that the committee had not been allowed the use of the funds voted by the branch the previous year for the purchase of propaganda literature. (The reason apparently was that the pamphlets imported by the committee from America encouraged a too-militant outlook to suit the tastes of the politicians.) His letter never appeared in the Worker, though the Standard, to which he sent a copy, published it! During 1918 Sydney Truth published a number of letters purporting to come from members of the union, which the writers said had been suppressed by the Workers. There is grave reason to doubt the authenticity of this correspondence, but, assuming that the letters were forgeries, their contents are intended to be convincing so that it is probable that these "complaints" were founded on facts.

An unmistakable instance of interference by the union officials is provided by the sudden reversal of the policy of the Sydney Worker in 1919. From the most unstinted eulogies of the Trades Hall O.B.U. in one issue we pass to equally unsparing condemnation in the next. Henceforth it begins to boost the A.W.U. as the one genuine O.B.U. for Australia, and to describe its rival as an engine of destruction. Yet every one in Sydney knew that Boote, the editor, was heart and soul behind the O.B.U.

But not content with stifling criticism and manipulating the decisions of Convention, the bosses have on occasions gone so far as to ignore the directions of that supreme body. We have already mentioned one such case in Queensland, but it was followed by a still more glaring breach. The 1915 Convention resolved to divide Queensland into two branches. The existing branch officers, however, issued through the Worker an appeal against the division, and by March persuaded the General Executive to suspend the decision of Convention, and to submit the question to a plebiscite of the members. During the ballot the whole machinery of the branch office was used to get

a negative vote. The ballot was declared ineffective, and despite strong protests at the 1916 Convention the proposal was never put into force.

In accordance with the democratic theory on which the A.W.U. was originally founded, much is made of the referendum. But in practice the officials seem loath to use it for any serious question. Thus they stoutly refused to submit the question of joining the O.B.U. to the rank and file. It was only with the utmost difficulty after three years' struggling by the Left that the issue "Direct negotiation with the employers (strike) versus Arbitration" was submitted to a plebiscite vote. On the other hand, questions of the most vital importance have been settled by a couple of officers on their own responsibility. Thus the decision to hold the union aloof from the 1917 strike was made by the President and Secretary alone without consulting the Executive.

The "unscientific structure" of the A.W.U. has already been noted. As the I.W.W. put it, "The A.W.U. thinks it is on its way to become an industrial union, if it swallows up another union." The reasons have now been revealed in the grasping lust for autocratic power of the officials. They desire to extend the membership of their union in order to swell their own importance, but they aim at keeping the unions that they devour in the most complete subjection possible. Where a union has come in with the status of an industrial branch like the R.W. & G.L.U., its relative independence has more than once been threatened by proposals that all N.S.W. should be under one branch. Moreover, the methods adopted to bring about some of the amalgamations were reputedly not over-scrupulous. It is authoritatively alleged that the A.W.U. bosses bribed every one of the officials of the Federated Mining Employees, in order to get the metalliferous miners to agree to terms of amalgamation suitable to the A.W.U. Claude Thompson, Secretary of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Service Association, was to have a seat in Parliament secured by a faked selection ballot as the price of his support of the amalgamation between the A.R. & T.S.A. and the A.W.U. On the other hand, when the Barrier miners, distrusting the reactionary policy of the A.W.U., decided to throw in their lot with the coal-miners, the A.W.U. opposed before the Registrar of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court the application of the latter union for permission to amend its rules so as to include the metalliferous men of the Barrier. So Grayndler, Secretary of the A.W.U., ranged himself beside the Broken Hill Mining Companies against the A.M.A., and drew forth an indignant protest from the Broken Hill Branch of his own union.

Attention has already been drawn to the extremely conservative policy of the A.W.U. in its attachment to the Arbitration Court, and we have seen how that policy reacted on the amalgamation move in 1912, the success of the new amalgamation in Queensland, and the wages of shearers in the 1915-16 season, and have quoted the comments of the I.W.W. thereon. On the tactics of the union officials, after the expiration of the Shearers' Award in 1915, the comments of Mr. Justice Higgins in granting a new award of 30s. per 100 are worth quoting:

"The union got its members to wait patiently till the award should have expired and, as I know from certain conferences in my chambers, used all its influence to prevent

men from claiming higher rates in the meantime than the award permits. This attitude is all the more to be admired in view of the steady increase in the cost of living even before the war and the violent increase during it.”

From the standpoint of the class-conscious industrialist these eulogies hardly redound to the credit of the A.W.U. bureaucracy, since they do not denote any sacrifice by those officials, but simply mean that they prevented their underpaid followers from extorting by direct action the increases that even the President of the Arbitration Court admitted were due, and which the successes of the outlaw strikes in northern N.S.W. showed might have been secured. The same applies to certain remarks made by Falkiner, M.H.R., a wealthy pastoralist:

“I rose chiefly to contradict a statement made by the Hon. Member from Darling, in which he tried to connect the Pastoralist Union with the I.W.W. He knows well that for many years, and especially during the last twelve months, the Pastoralist Union has been doing its best to retain in office the present officials of the A.W.U. because the I.W.W. section of it has been getting quite out of hand.”

At the time of the Big Strike the A.W.U. non-intervention policy looked to many as sheer treachery. It was argued that if the A.W.U. had obeyed the call of the Defence Committee and withdrawn the shearers and rural workers, the farmers' sons and other bushmen, who had come to Sydney as strike-breakers, would have had to go home again to look after the crops. Similarly, the agreement between the proprietors of the Port Pirie smelters and Secretary Grayndler, providing against strikes at the smelters during the war, made on September 17th at a time when the Barrier miners were on strike in sympathy with their comrades in the east, was looked upon as a further betrayal of labour.

The composition of the union is also remarkably middle class. In delivering judgment upon the application of Killeen for the deregistration of the A.W.U., Powers, J., states (April 14th, 1915)

“The evidence showed that barristers, members of Parliament, hotel-keepers, store-keepers, dentists, hairdressers, and many other employees not engaged in any work connected with the pastoral industry, had been admitted to membership of the union, while employers, not employees, had been elected as members and allowed to continue as members of the registered organisation of employees. They had been allowed to vote for the appointment of the Executive and the Executive generally determined whether claims were to be enforced against employers, to what extent, and how.”

The insinuation in the learned judge's remarks is obvious, yet he contented himself with ordering the union to enforce its rules more strictly in the future. The Court's direction was, however, got over by appointing members of Parliament and other unqualified persons “honorary organisers,” thus making them technically officials of the union and so eligible for membership. There is, further, no doubt that, as stated by the I.W.W. in their booklet already quoted, members of the pastoral section of the

union were cocky farmers. Small farmers and their sons often leave their selections for a while to go shearing. Again, J. Bailey, the N.S.W. Vice-President, when running for the Monaro seat in the Labour interests, solicited the farmer votes as a fellow landholder.

The inference generally based upon these facts is that the A.W.U bosses have been out for political power and the perquisites of office for themselves and their cronies. It is indeed admitted that those bosses-Lambert, Blakeley, and Bailey, etc.- had been the keenest critics of the politicians and political control from 1912 to 1916. But this is explicable on the assumption that they did not object to politicians in the abstract but only to any politicians but themselves or their tools. As Black and other parliamentarians had argued at the time, the A.W.U. officials were even then looking for seats for themselves, and used their criticisms of sitting members as a lever to supersede the latter on the coveted benches.

Certainly when the conscription split had created a number of vacancies in the Labour ranks, Bailey, Blakeley, Last, and other quondam critics hastened to offer themselves to fill the breach. During the 1917 elections, Bailey, Holloway, Last, and Lundie were so busy looking for seats that it was impossible to secure a quorum for a meeting of the General Executive of which they were all members, although there was most urgent business to discuss, namely, the framing of the union's claim for a new award from the Arbitration Court. General Secretary Grayndler admitted that he had been handicapped in the presentation of the union's claim by the absence of many officers.

Everywhere the A.W.U. has provided a ladder whereby the ambitious unionists have sought and often attained parliamentary honours. Some have gone so far as to argue that the whole campaign against Holman and his colleagues in N.S.W. and even the amalgamated movement itself which President Spence declared would be a considerable force in the political world, were merely stages in a gigantic conspiracy on the part of the A.W.U. bosses to turn the political movement into an instrument for their own advancement.

The last thesis is certainly far-fetched, and much of the other criticism here summarised must be discounted in view of the personal prejudices of the critics. The union's adherence to arbitration, for example, may only be due to the superiority of that method for settling industrial disputes and improving conditions. Certainly the union's experience of the alternative in the 'nineties had not been encouraging, and the plebiscite taken in 1919 showed that a large majority of the members were in favour of the Court. More recently the union has been prepared to revise that policy when it was obvious that the membership was ripe for a more vigorous move such as the strike for forty-four hours in 1920.

The same may hold good of political action which has been the policy of the union consistently from its earliest years. Its efforts were justified if not actuated by the proved necessity of controlling the politicians in order to extort effective labour legislation from them.

But making the fullest allowance for these considerations, the policy and administration of the union could not be regarded as satisfactory. The charge of bureaucracy is proved up to the hilt. It cannot be gainsaid that Labour papers controlled by the A.W.U. have shown an inclination to suppress legitimate criticism. The freest discussion of all aspects of the working-class movement in the Labour Press – and the Workers are more than mere union journals – is essential to preserve that movement from stagnation. Yet the attitude of the Workers on the O.B.U. and on the N.S.W. A.L.P. split that followed, shows the danger of permitting a single union or section to control the sole organ of proletarian opinion.

As to structure, the question of mass unionism cannot be decided here. It must, however, be said that despite McNaught, for Arbitration Court purposes, at least the A.W.U. – for instance, in Queensland – seems fully capable of looking after the interests of the multifarious classes included in the union. Admirable awards have been secured for miners, sewerage-workers, sugar-workers as well as shearers. Martyn's argument in the last sugar-workers' case was a brilliant example of lucidity, profound erudition, and clear comprehension and exposition of every detail of the cane-cutters' and mill-hands' tasks.

So, then, in 1919 the O.B.U. leaders found themselves standing in diametrical opposition to the officials of the A.W.U. as to aims, methods, and persons. The opposition of the largest union in Australia added to craft jealousy and parliamentary intrigue was fatal to their scheme. A few unions - the Waterside Workers and Trolley and Draymen - did, indeed, take a ballot of their members on the question of merging in the O.B.U., or Workers' Industrial Union of Australia, as it proposed to call itself; but as that body existed solely on paper all rejected the proposition except the C. & S.E.F. The coal miners and the Barrier A.M.A. did come in en masse, and called themselves the Mining Department of the W.I.U. of A. But the change of name by one union did not, of course, make a new union. In fact, the tactics of the O.B.U. leaders were at that juncture doomed to failure. It was vain to hope that the mass of existing unions would abandon utterly their existing identity and organisation to merge into a larger whole that was left hanging in mid-air.

On the other hand, their distrust of the A.W.U. excluded a process whereby some existing bodies might have amalgamated under the W.I.U. of A. scheme, and formed a nucleus organisation to which other bodies might later have gravitated. That might have been feasible. Instead the O.B.U. made an indiscriminate onslaught on all unions, and by its policy of “all or nothing” courted annihilation. It finally received its quietus when its leaders were expelled from the Labour Party in N.S.W., and allowed themselves to be manoeuvred into forming a new party in 1919. By that step they earned for themselves the title of “rats”; for the majority of unionists, to whom the Labour platform had become a sort of religion, saw no distinction between men like Garden and Willis who left that body to go further Left and those who, like Hughes and Holman, went over to the Right. At the same time their own minority broke up, suspecting Willis and some of their colleagues of seeking political honours by pandering to moderates. These preferred Sovietism or pure I.W.W.-ism.

Still the O.B.U. idea still lived, and at the All-Australian Trade Union Congress in Melbourne in July, 1921, the One Big Union scheme, preamble and all, was once more endorsed on paper. In the meanwhile the position of the A.W.U. had altered considerably. Despite all the intriguing of their bosses they had failed to dominate the new Labour Government in N.S.W., and Bailey had not even secured a seat in the Storey Cabinet. In the shearing industry, too, they had been forced to support a direct action policy to secure the forty-four hours week, and the comparative failure of the Labour Government to redeem its innumerable promises to the industrialists had induced a recurrence of militancy in the rank and file. So the A.W.U. bosses, having thrown over their former allies Storey and Catts (they had displaced the latter from the position of secretary to the Federal Caucus to make room for their president, Blakeley), were forced to find new supporters. So they reversed their attitude.

As an outcome of the Melbourne Congress an amalgamation between the A.W.U., the Miners, and the Waterside Workers was agreed upon in February, 1922. The miners now form the Mining Department of the A.W.U., and the Watersiders the nucleus of the Transportation Department, to which it is hoped that the Australian Railways Union and the Seamen will adhere later (the latter, indeed, only hung back because the A.W.U. will not abandon its rule excluding coloured aliens, of whom the Seamen actually include a few). As the price of their adherence the Miners have secured the adoption by the new A.W.U. of the preamble of the W.I.U. of A. and something like its structure on paper. But owing to difficulties anent the disposal of Trust Funds the scheme has not yet come into operation. It remains to be seen whether the change in the A.W.U. goes any deeper. For the moment it looks as if this apparent victory for the industrialists will cost them their ideals, and that while the One Big Union may be realised it will have to sacrifice its revolutionary idealism, and will degenerate into that state of soulless mechanism which seems to come over all Labour activities in the hour of their apparent triumph. As the Labour Party, starting with a band of inspired Socialists, degenerated into a vast machine for capturing political power, but did not know how to use that power when attained except for the profit of individuals; so the O.B.U. will, in all likelihood, become just a gigantic apparatus for the glorification of a few bosses. Such is the history of all Labour organisations in Australia, and that not because they are Australian, but because they are Labour. ADDENDUM – In the period of industrial depression which is now beginning the A.W.U. has suffered heavily. Called upon to prove its vaunted value as an industrial organisation, it has failed to protect even its most favoured section-the shearers. The Powers Award of May, 1922, reduced rates by 5s. per 100, and other items proportionately. So that pastoral wages were reduced to the 1917 level, though the cost of living is still far higher. At the same time the forty-four-hour week, which had been granted by the State award in Queensland and won by direct action in N.S.W., was refused. The A.W.U. thereupon advised its members to refuse to work under this award. But when an injunction was served upon the union forbidding it to uphold an illegal strike, its officers climbed down. The strike did indeed take place, but no reports thereof appear in the union journals – the Workers – and none of the union's well-paid organisers visited the danger zone. It was left to men like Arthur Rae, who had been expelled

from the union for criticising its bosses, to organise the resistance to the employers' attack and go to prison for so doing.