

# The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

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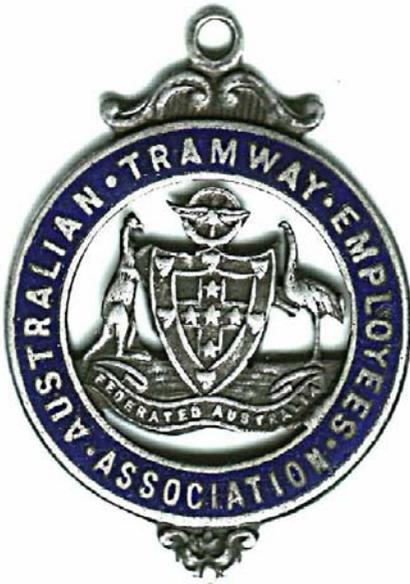
## Contents

<b>EDITORIAL</b>	Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell	1
<b>BLHA President's Column</b>	Greg Mallory	3
<b>IN MEMORIAM</b>		
Jack Sherrington	Ross Gwyther and Stephanie Sherrington	4
Fred Thompson	Peter Whalley-Thompson	6
Contemporary Extracts from 1912 Strike Literature		8
<b>ARTICLES</b>		
A Hundred Years Since the Brisbane General Strike of 1912	Errol O'Neill	22
Queensland Journal of Labour History: <i>Emma Miller and the Brisbane General Strike of 1912</i>	Claire Moore	37
Manufacturing Margarine	Carol Dian Corless	40
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>		
<i>A Manual for Unionists</i>	Howard Guille	48
Dale Jacobsen Life Membership	Bob Reed	50
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>		51
<b>NOTICEBOARD</b>		56

# Editorial

Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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