

PAPERS IN LABOUR HISTORY

NO.8

EDITORS: MICHAEL HESS and CHARLIE FOX

Perth Branch

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

SPONSORS

This edition of Papers in Labour History has been sponsored by the following organisations:-

- Australian Electrical, Electronic, Foundry and Engineering Union, W.A. Branch
- Australian Labor Party, Western Australian Branch
- Australian Public Sector and Broadcasting Union, W.A. Branch
- Civil Service Association of Western Australia
- Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union of Australia, W.A. Branch
- Metal and Engineering Workers' Union, Western Australian Branch
- Operative Painters and Decorators Union of Australia, West Australian Branch

Sponsorship takes the form of a donation to subsidise the costs of producing the edition. Organisations interested in sponsoring future editions ought to make contact with the Editor. The views expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the Sponsors, the Perth Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History or the Editors.

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF LABOUR HISTORY

The Perth Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History aims to promote the study and dissemination of information about the history of labour, particularly in Western Australia. It organises regular seminars and workshops for this purpose. These are open to members of the public. For further information contact: The Secretary, Perth Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Trades and Labour Council Arts Officer, P.O. Box 8351, Stirling Street, Perth, 6000. Branch membership fees are \$25 Corporate (Institutions, Groups, Married Couples), \$20 Ordinary and \$15 Concessional (Student, Unemployed, Pensioner). Membership includes subscription to *Papers in Labour History*.

Proposed contributions to future editions of Papers in Labour History should be typed, double spaced and forwarded to:

The Editors
Papers in Labour History
 Department of Industrial Relations
 University of Western Australia
 Nedlands WA 6009

Contents

	Page
ARTICLES	
"Tons were the go": some recollections of work in the early days of the Pilbara iron ore industry	.....Ray Fells and Stuart Reid 1
Getting organised in the 1970s - the experience of the Australian Social Welfare Union	.....Peter McDonald 17
The Wannaroo Market Gardener: Some Personal Reflections	.....Rosina Cristafulli 31
Records of WA Goldfields Unions in the WA State Archives	.....Andrew Gill 37
"I'm a poet..."	.....Geoff Goodfellow 46
NOTES	
Goldfileds Centenary History Project	.....John Gandini 59
Dorothy Tangney Commemoration	.....Carmen Lawrence 60
Museums and Communities: an interview with Elspeth King	.....Liz Lukin 63
BOOK REVIEWS	
Ben Hills, <u>Blue Murder</u>	.....Jeremy Henderson 69
Steve Hawke, <u>Noonkambah</u>	.....Paul Roberts 72

Acknowledgements

As well as those listed above who contributed to this edition acknowledgement is due to fellow workers who made suggestions, typed, proofread and supported the publication especially Lorna Duffy, Penny Fayle, Helen Riseborough. *Papers in Labour History No.8*, is available from the Office of the Department of Industrial Relations, University of Western Australia for \$10.00. It is anticipated that *Papers in Labour History No.9* will be available for a similar cost in May 1992. Correspondence and proposed contributions should be addressed to The Editors, *Papers in Labour History*, Department of Industrial Relations, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6009.

Papers in Labour History seeks to publish material of a serious nature about the historical development of the Labour Movement, with particular emphasis on Western Australia. It is intended to carry a balance of contributions from students and veterans of the Labour Movement. Naturally this raises controversial issues and no apology is made for the fact that few readers will be able to agree with all the views expressed here. While the editors have made suggestions regarding each of the contributions these have been of a stylistic nature and have not been intended in any way to interfere with the expression of the views of the authors.

This is the last issue of *Papers in Labour History* that Michael Hess will edit. He is moving to Sydney in the new year to take up a job at the University of New South Wales.

It is well known that both the Perth Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and *Papers in Labour History* came into existence through Michael's commitment to the study of Western Australia's labour history, and both the Society and this journal have been built on his enthusiasm, expertise and talent for organisation.

On behalf of the members of the Perth Branch of the Australia Society for the Study of Labour History, our readers and sponsors I would like to express our thanks to Michael for all his work and to wish him, Liz and Freddy all the best for the future.

Charlie Fox

“Tons were the go”: some recollections of work in the early days of the Pilbara iron ore industry*

Ray Fells and Stuart Reid†

The growth of the iron ore industry in the Pilbara in the late 1960's and early 1970's made a significant impact on Western Australia. The development of the mineral resources required massive capital expenditure and the development of new communities; the mineral resources were turned into wealth for the State and profit for the communities.

It was also a major source of employment opportunity for thousands of workers from all over Australia and from overseas. The development of the industry would not have taken place but for the effort and ingenuity of those who worked for the mining companies. “I was just going to stay for 6 months to earn a quid and then move on. That was 20 years ago and I'm still here.” This comment is typical of many workers in the industry and as part of a wider programme of research into the industrial relations in the mining industry we have been hearing the recollection of some of those who were around in the early days. What follows are some thoughts and stories obtained from a few long-time Hamersley Iron employees.

First Impressions and Living in a Mining Community

Barry Stothers arrived in Dampier in 1965.

There was nothing here, we were just building the town. Opening the road to the mine - there was no housing or anything. Only the construction camp. I got there in June and they'd nearly finished the causeway. It was virtually an island at high tide. They put the causeway in and the first job was to build a service jetty to get the State boats in. They off-loaded all the gear straight onto the wharf there. It was just shipped straight into King Bay in those days. Then we started on the empty car line which is for the dumper at Break Point now. The rock out of that was used to build the main wharf.

Bob Dickson worked for BHP in Newcastle and came across to Hamersley Iron in 1967. Why did he come?

Money. I saw the ad in the newspaper for a foreman. They wanted five and I sort of applied - and it was for \$6450 a year which was almost twice what I'd earned in the previous year with BHP. So purely nothing but money. It was more than twice a tradesman's rate of pay. So it was an excellent rate of pay, and in fact, in the first twelve months here, I saved enough to be able to fly back east with my wife and two kids, pay the air fares myself, have a new Falcon station wagon waiting for me in Newcastle, and have a two week holiday over east, and take

* The interviews used here are from a research project on the mining industry in WA, funded by U W A and the Australian Research Committee. We would like to thank those whose interviews we have drawn upon but we would also like to express our thanks to the other people who were interviewed but whose recollections we have not called upon in this selection. We acknowledge the assistance given by Hamersley Iron in providing accommodation and assisting the organisation of the interviews.

† Ray Fells is Senior Lecturer in Industrial Relations at UWA. Stuart Reid is a professional oral historian and researcher.

two weeks to drive back, staying at motels all the way. And no man can come in here as a foreman here now and no man coming in as a manager can do that! So it was excellent. But the wish to stay just.... we became part of the community and I think grew with it and it was excellent. Bloody hard work but terrific sense of being together with a work team.

Graeme Stevens arrived in Paraburdoo in 1970.

A friend wrote me a letter saying, "Gee this is a bloody good place up here mate you want to come up here." So I did. I came up from Kambalda only with the intention of staying a couple of years. I guess that's everyone's intention but I rather like the place. It grows on you. My first impression was the heat - that was incredible. Standing outside at 4 o'clock in the morning and you were picked up by the flies. It was terrible - it really was. I thought, "What the hell am I doing here?" Even the drive in was terrible. It was absolutely shocking. The road finished at Barradale. There was no bitumen from then on. The road was creek beds all the way in. Buckled one wheel - I remember that quite vividly. Took us 7 hours to do that 250 kms. I had a broken shock absorber too which didn't help at all. Every time you hit a bump the car kept bouncing at the back and I had the car loaded - all our possessions were in the car.

John Purdue came to Paraburdoo in 1971 and, like so many others, did not quite know what he had let himself in for.

I came to Paraburdoo in '71 but gee, I didn't know what I'd struck when I first got here. In those days the air strip out here wasn't built - it was just an old gravel strip at the back here which I still use myself. I came up here in the F27 turbo prop jet. Land out there in the heat of the day and so on and we were brought into the old construct camp over here. It was all cobblestones and rough and dirt and dust and Landrovers and 4WD's going past. Back and forwards - dust everywhere. I thought "God, what have I landed in here?"

They built the new units in town at the time so it was quite good really but there were no gardens, no lawns, just dirt. Everything was dirt and I think they built the first 50 houses at that stage and most of those were occupied I think - they were all starting to build a lot more. At night time it was like a ghost town - all the empty houses being built and so on. Eventually after a while the lawns took over and so on. But those days it was really hot and dusty. I came here in May. We had a pretty bad storm come through here - about 9,1/2 inches of rain over night. The creeks here were 16' deep. Raging torrent. I haven't seen the creeks that high since - that was phenomenal. We're trying to transport the power house drivers and the supervisors over on the HP4 and I got them over here and I couldn't get back to get them - I had to leave them there. So they lived on cups of tea and biscuits for the next day or two before we could come and get them. The creek was 16' deep in the end.

They had construction on - they were building all the plant. I think about 1972 they probably had it all finished, I think. We had all the railway line done by that time. A lot of contractors were living in town those days from the construction work.

We had an assortment of people - they were good, they were good social people. Those days we used to have progressive dinners - we weren't working much shift work you see. Shift

work we were working we were only 5 days a week from - you had your weekends off anyway. You were able to socialise a lot in those days and we used to have progressive dinners at different times and you used to go to one house and then on to another house for soup and the main meal and sweets somewhere else then drinks somewhere else and so on. It was really good like that. But of course the 4 shift roster came along and the 4 shift roster killed all the - a lot of the social life in Paraburdoo - sort of ruined it to a certain degree. It must have been about '76 or '78, I think.

Although everyone was working long hours, the social life was important .

Bob Dickson: It was very much make your own fun. There wasn't much else to do around here. The roads were pretty terrible. It was a major exercise to drive to Roebourne about 40 miles away. You got off when you saw the trucks coming, but there was terrific team spirit, or community spirit, and if you had a backyard barbecue which was the main thing - backyard barbecue or back beach barbecue - everybody would be at that barbecue from the top manager of the day down to the garbage man; and everybody knew each other.

Barry Stothers: In those days there were some pretty wild characters. Because there was no hotel or anything or wet mess. You queued up - a queue of about 1000 or 1500 chaps when you knock off and in the queue you'd get 2 cans per day. They were hot anyhow so they weren't much good to you. It was 4 men to a room. Double bunks in a small room and no women allowed on the site. You sort of went to work from 10 - 12 - 14 hours sometimes and home again - but the money was good. That's what everyone was up there for I think - the money. A lot of people didn't stay long. They did 3 or 4 months.

John Mossington arrived some years later but he found himself living in the single men's quarters at Dampier.

Everyone was the same age. So we all had a fair bit in common and I suppose that didn't help, because if there's fifteen blokes to one sheila in the town, and we've all got one thing in common, it was I suppose, that one girl! So that caused a lot of conflict in the towns in those times.

It was segregated - the single men's quarters and the single women's quarters in different areas, and then you had some staff who were single, and those staff seemed to be in the better blocks than the workers. That didn't help. We had one mess for the single men and we had another mess for the single women and the staff positions. So the staff could mingle with the women, but unfortunately the rank and file, the wages people, we had to sit in our own particular area.

That was one of the things a group of people actually set out to resolve, and it was over a period of time that we pulled down those barriers. That was one of the moves, I suppose, to normalisation, if you could ever normalise a place like the Pilbara.

The large number of single young men working in the industry was in part due to the lack of accommodation and the company's early recruiting practices.

Bob Dickson: One of the problems that the blokes had, we had a very stupid rule initially,

and that was somebody couldn't come to site, a wages man couldn't come to site with his family. He'd be hired in Perth, Sydney, or wherever it was and bring his family up here.... He had to work here three months as a single man, and prove himself, before he could bring somebody up, and if a bloke was on the edge.... if a bloke had a foreman who didn't like him, he'd quite often wait up to six months for a house. I think it was one of the most stupid rules ever invented and we certainly changed to, "We'll hire you as you are, with your family. Bring them up and if you're no good, we'll still sack you." That's a turn for the better, because it was hopeless asking a bloke to come up here for three months, single. That was a problem. When the blokes came up here they found riches that hadn't existed in their previous job - Hamersley paid reasonably well, and there was lots of overtime in those days. You'd work sixteen hour shifts every day of the week if you wanted them - so by the time their wives got here, after they'd been up here three months on single status, if he wasn't an alcoholic, he certainly liked to go in the pub every day and have a few beers, and that created quite a few problems in the community. The amount of alcohol consumed by those blokes having to lead a single life until their family came up. Well, it was very hard to stop them once they've spent three months drinking booze every day, it's pretty hard to stop that. I'm not saying everybody did it, but quite a lot did. New-found wealth - you still send mum a fair bit of money home, and still have lots of money in their pocket.

*In the early days, particularly while the construction was going on there was a strong sense of community but this seemed to disappear as time went on. At Dampier, according to **John Mosseingon**:*

I think I also noticed for the first time, and I hadn't really come in to it, that marriages were very strained. I mean there were no jobs for the women. They used to sit around at home all day, and as it became quite apparent to myself and others there was a lot of extra-marital situations going on around the place. So that was quite, you know, quite eye-opening.

We used to have mess committees, that were set up by the unions and the company, mainly by the unions, and the company had to fall in line otherwise they'd get a ticket. So there were a few things that we pushed as far as the single men's quarters were concerned. One was about the messing facilities, about the segregation. The other thing that we were jumping up and down about all the time, was that they wouldn't allow us to have anything in the rooms apart from what they would supply us. So if you wanted to put a television or a fridge or something in your room in those days, it was not on. And I can remember the cleaner saying, "Well, if you have anything in your room other than what you've got, then we're not about to clean those rooms." So we ended up having meetings on the oval and ultimatums were put, say "Well the single men are just not going back to work until such times as these things have been rectified." And they were rectified. That was in '74.

Work, Work, Work! Blasting and Driving

*In those early days just one thing was important - getting the ore out and down into the waiting bulk carriers. **John Buttery** arrived in 1968 and worked as a member of a drill and blast crew.*

I think in those days it was rush, rip, tear and get the ore out so that they can get the cash flow. They spent a lot of money getting the place going and even though they started off on a very

small scale but after a couple of years when it went up 5-10 million ton then 10-15 and it was all get it out, get it out. But there was lots of blunders made. One was - we were only talking about it yesterday. The rush, rip, tear, get the ore out, and the ore then was the high grade because they didn't have the concentrator. And a low grade was just dumped in a stock pile and they nearly mined themselves into a corner. They were down to 4 months presentation of their high grade ore body because they hadn't been stripping waste and overburden.

Syd Elgar started in Tom Price in 1969.

The planning must have been pretty abysmal because I don't think we've had a low grade stockpile that hasn't got ore under it. It was tipped over in those days, low grade was tipped over the side in 1968; now you've got to shift it to get to high grade..... I don't think we had any thought about it being a mine so it was just as John said, straight down the gully, and take it out and ship it.

The most spectacular stage in the mine process is blasting.

John Buttery: In 1968 the mine was huge. You had wide open spaces. Not much equipment - it was very difficult to hit anything. These days you can't - it's very difficult to get the equipment more than 300 metres away. We had some good blasts. The QM5's - I'm getting a bit deaf now - I'm pretty deaf now, but in the early days, those drills made me deaf. I could be sitting at home putting me boots on to come to work, on the back steps and if the drill string was stuck, you could hear the rotary head and the engines revving up in town. Bloody horrendous. 2 huge great engines and the cab - it's only a couple of feet away. No mufflers, exhaust pipes are about that long. All the equipment was like that back then.

Barry Peters was a driver.

There was no such thing as air conditioning. If you had a cab that supposedly sealed, most of the windows were missing. When I was driving the water truck, I can remember coming in on night shift and it was an old Euclid and no side windows or anything else and you'd have long trousers, overalls, you'd have rags wrapped around your head trying to keep yourself warm. The conditions in the dozers, they were just open. Blokes used to stand between the blade and the radiator to try and keep warm. Conditions then, compared to what you've got now were incredible.

John Buttery: See, these days we try to get as precise as we can but then, you had to work it out yourself. You'd have to work out on a bit of cardboard off one of the explosive boxes - you'd work out how many bags - as the guys were bringing the bags, instead of 5 they might put in about 11 you know because they just pour, pour, pour and they next thing you know the stuff's up the surface. So you just kick the dust over it! In theory you wouldn't want to bring your charge up any closer than 8 metres to the surface. And that used to happen plenty of times. Some parts of the mines, pit offices - say 3/4 mile away and you'd land rocks down there. Blokes running for cover. We don't do that much these days. Can't afford to.

Barry Peters: As Syd said, we'd go up, off-load all these bags of anfo or of nitrate, take them out and they used to have a big tanker full of diesel and of course with blasting it's supposedly 94% nitrate, 6% diesel. So you'd tip down so many bags of nitrate down the hole

and then somebody would get on the pump and they'd put the hose down and so many pumps per litre and if you didn't think you had enough you either give her a few more for luck or whatever - it was a real hit and miss. Or if you've got a cavity down there and you felt like it you just kept pouring anfo down there and try and fill the cavity up, you know, just for a joke. So, some of the blasts - oh!

John Buttery: I remember once a long time ago a long time ago I was exploration foreman - they fired one shot and a bloke was on a - measuring a shot - 2 or 3 benches up, only 150 yards away - it scared the living daylights out of him and he couldn't hear nothing for a couple of weeks. I nearly got blown up once but that was the blast engineer's fault. We were firing one shot right up the hill - in those days the in-pit radio system was terrible - so the leading hand came down to see what the engineer was doing and he'd lit the fuse and we pull up along side the fuse and it was about 20 seconds to go it was an old beat up Landrover and the shot went off and the bloody Landrover was going on the road on the front wheels. You can't take no chances with blasting. These days, we've got a pretty good idea of what it's going to do but then it was all mainly guess work, I suppose.

But then, like when I went drilling, they said, "Can you operate an air track?" "Yeah, no worries. I'd never seen one. And it took me half a day to figure out how to get the compressor started and how to get the bloody thing going. Same when I went on QM5. "Can you operate this?" "Yea, no worries." First hole I drilled, I lost the rods and lost the hole.

Syd Elgar: What about Carlisle - he had to go to Dampier to blow something around the big storage plants at the pellet plant. He was shitting himself - didn't want to go there and do it and anyway they said, "You gotta go over there, you're the blast engineer - you go and blow." It blew this thing out whatever it was and there wasn't anything touched the storage tank - it went straight over and lobbed on the contractor's backhoe.

Barry Peters: The contractor, he reckoned Carlisle was the greatest friend he'd ever had because this backhoe he had - it was clapped out - should never have been on the road and he lobbed this rock clear on top of it - demolished it - he finished up he got a brand new backhoe out of it. So he reckoned Carlisle was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

John Buttery: In the early days, that end block they used to live in - a bloke who ended up being my leading hand had a few too many and went off his brain. He busted every door in the building - 24 doors. They were putting a sump over here where they used to service the trucks in the lube bay. The building opposite used to be the carpentry shop and they'd just - we were doing a bit of blasting there to make - so they could make a pit - and we had blast nets and all that over it. Let it off and one rock about that round come out. Up in the air - through the roof of the carpenters workshop and they had all the 24 doors stacked on top of each other and it went straight through them. If you go there now, the hole is still in the roof. They've got another sheet of iron over it.

Once the ore has been blasted, the next task is to shovel it up into the big ore trucks and move it down to the crusher. John Purdue started at Paraburdoo as a 'dozer driver and later

trained up and got his ticket as a shovel operator

I was only here a few days actually and they needed a dozer driver who could drive. The chap who was driving the dozer apparently couldn't handle it or didn't want to handle it, so he got off and I took it over.

In those days we had no cabins on the dozers and the grit and the dust and silicon dust used to cut your eyes to pieces and really bad like that - I've worked in dust - very bad. All you could do with the dust was try and work with it. If you could, work with the dust blowing away from you. There was nothing you could do in those days. Then, of course, when the unions started pushing for airconditioners for the shovels and airconditioners for the dozers and things like that I thought they were having a lend of themselves. I thought that they would never get that. I could never see them getting that. Anyway, they did, and now, of course, they wouldn't be without them. It increases productivity for start off, because the operator is comfortable out in the machine. He'll get more dirt out or more tons or do more work if he is comfortable. If you were uncomfortable like we were in those days, you got wet rags around your neck and all sorts of things to try and cool off. It certainly wasn't very pleasant.

Used to worry me a fair bit. The dust used to worry me. Especially the silicon dust used to worry me a fair bit. I used to be pretty concerned about it because you would come off the machine - you were absolutely covered in dirt and dust - your eyes would be like burnt holes in a blanket - they'd be all bloodshot and red and sore. Your nose and your mouth and your ears, be full of dust and dirt. It must have done something to you, surely. It certainly wasn't healthy. I think - just going back over the years - it takes so long to improve things - make things better.

Everyone remembers the harshness of the working conditions in those early days compared to the present. Roger Wells worked as a driver at Tom Price.

In the days when I first came here, I remember the truck they gave me to drive. In the summertime you got covered in dust and in the winter time, got no window in it and the big vents - about a foot long by about six inches, on the springs in the front - you push 'em open for a bit more air but often they weren't there at all! So in the wintertime I used to wrap my legs up with rags to keep warm. Gets cold up here. Of course now everything's air conditioned - in wintertime you turn a switch on and you've got a heater. Entirely different for blokes today - they don't know they're alive. That's one good thing the unions have done.

Graeme Stevens: We had some funny characters here early in the piece. Fellows like - one name springs to mind - he was an ex-merchant seaman - fellow named 'True Blue' - we used to call him anyway. Very much a patriot. He was a bit of a bloody wag driving the trucks. On the Dart Haul trucks - there was a cut-off switch. It cut off the power to the wheels - and they were free wheel on haul trucks and you know, you got a 100 ton truck with a 100 ton load on it - you've got a runaway monster. So he cut the power off because you've got no electric brakes once you cut the power off. He'd be up the top of the hill and he'd cut the power off to the truck and let it free wheel down the hill and it was 8% grade for - it must be over 1 km - and he's belting down the bloody road - and of course, when you put your power back on - you've got your electric brakes again. They'd line up 3 abreast at the crusher - tip their loads

and then they'd race up the haul road. That's what the safety was like in those days.

Working in the Crusher

The drivers tip the ore down into a primary crusher. Graeme Stevens came to Paraburdoo in 1971 and worked as a crusher operator.

Basically there was two of us in the crusher. There was an operator and an offsider. One did the operating and one did the cleaning. The trucks - at that stage running to the crusher there was 22-23 Dart Haul trucks - they were 100 ton trucks and you had to operate the lights - the crusher works automatically. Once it gets so much dirt into the hopper a light comes on - a red light which saying 'Don't tip yet' and when the level goes down on the open feeder and all that, the light turns to green and the trucks tip. Sometimes that didn't work all the time and to get the trucks through quicker you had to actually do it manually - operate the lights manually. Look at your watch and give it 10 seconds and - it was quite fun at the time. Any truck that came into the crusher, the operator had to write down the number because he was keeping tabs on how many truck loads went down. You could not miss that. You had to know.

Then, of course, you have rocks. Some of the drivers had a propensity to pick up large rocks and block the crusher - whether they did it intentionally or not I don't know - I never will know. If your offsider was down there doing a clean-up - you were up there by yourself and you got a rock in the crusher - you had to get out and clean it - you had to fix it. So you took your biro - a very good biro, and you're out on the hook and you're trying to manipulate these things - there's dust billowing around everywhere. You had to still take the truck numbers so you get your biro and you're writing on your arm - up here. It was no joke at the time - it was terrible. After the dust you just couldn't see your arm anyway. But you had to keep them.

You had to get out on this hook hanging over the crusher. The hook is on the overhead crane at the crusher. It's got an 80 ton crane and a 15 ton crane - you use the 15 ton hook. Hopefully, the rocks that they throw in don't weigh anymore than 15 tons. Then you had to manoeuvre them - sometimes they bridge across the crusher where another truck tipping would just pack on top of that and you wouldn't be able to get below the dirt into the mantle. So you had to manoeuvre the hook - it just hangs straight down with a bit of a foot on the bottom and you had to hook it onto there and try to get the rock to shake or jiggle so it would fall into the crusher and crush itself up and go. If you had a really bad day some of it would bridge right out and you obviously and to get right down into the crusher and drill holes and blast it out. That was another bad one - all the dust and the smoke and the grime.

To blast the rock once it's inside the crusher - first you have to isolate the primary crusher. You can't go down there while there's still power generated down there, they've got to physically get an electrician - go to the sub-station, he's got to throw the switch and say, "Right there's no power to that now." Only then can you go down to the crusher and you've got to do it with a safety belt on and a bloke up top holding the rope and he lowers down the air drill. you've got to drill - depending on the blockage itself whether it's a bad one - determines how many holes you drill in it. You go and drill your 4-5 holes - I've drilled on and the bloody thing drilled right through - and you put the stick down and it just went boink. And then you did your own wiring at that stage - you set your gelnite up - did the wiring up - make sure the area's clear -

give a warning to everybody - send a vehicle up to the end of the haul road - make sure no vehicles come past, and just fire it. Hopefully it cleared.

Barry Peters also remembers what went on sometimes in the crusher

Some of the blokes get that carried away with the explosives, didn't they? This particular bloke - they had a big rock in there and he decided that he was going to really shift it - he wasn't going back. Because sometimes you put a stick of whatever in it, fire it and you'd crack it. So you had to go back and when you go back the second time, trying to drill through fractured rock and whatever, it was really awkward. So he thought he was going to shift it once and for all. So I don't know how many sticks of geli he put in this thing

John Buttery:he used the 3 inch by 2 foot sticks of geli - mollunite - he had about 10 of the bloody things.

Barry Peters:down below the crushers you had your secondary and there was a workshop down there where the electricians used to - on night shift where they used to go and sleep. This was on - it was the start of night shift. Anyway, he let this thing go and it hurled this rock out of the crusher - because you could hear it all over the place when it went off - and it put this rock down over the secondary crushers and this bloke just walked in the door of the electrical workshops and this bloody rock about - about 6-8 inches across comes hurling through the roof. So that was it. They were gone.

John Buttery: They just turned around out the door - in the bus and went home. Lot's of things happened here over the years. Lot's of things. Lot of stupid things.

Syd Elgar: Like Fuji - he was in the crusher - they were blasting and Fuji popped down there and drilled the hole in, put the plug in and lit the fuse and he was coming up the safety rope and they're feeding the safety rope back to him. Climbing like hell and getting nowhere.

The Pellet Plant

The pellet plant was started up in 1968. Bob Dickson was there from the start as a shift foreman:

Well, one it was the sort of plant that was technology with which I was unfamiliar. So first of all learning the technology I guess, and secondly the speed with which you had to make decisions. The sort of place where you had a couple of minutes to make a decision. If you didn't, you'd burn the place down, because of the injurating furnace. You'd burn conveyor belts and what have you, so decisions had to be made rather rapidly: operating decisions about how to operate the plant. There were lots of things that could go wrong and invariably did, so what do we do now to keep this place running? And the pressure was on production. I think it's pretty fair to say that Hamersley at the start, had no rules to follow. The rules evolved and that goes for handling men as well as everything else. Safety procedures, the whole lot, Hamersley had nothing, except very basic outlines. So the systems evolved if you like.

Getting started could be a bit intimidating for a newcomer, as John Mossington recalls. He started in Dampier in 1974 as a fitter working in the pellet plant.

I was pretty green. I hadn't seen too much about anything. We went to the Hamersley Iron administration building, and we were looking down at the ore wharf, and I could see this great monstrosity of a building down there, puffing out billows of red dust, and I said, "What the hell's that place?" And he said, "Well, that's the pellet plant and that's where you're working," and I nearly had a fit. But as it turned out it was probably one of the most friendly and best places I've worked in all of my time.

Well, I mean I was petrified first of all going down there because, as I said, I was pretty green coming into this sort of area. I hadn't had any experience in the workplace apart from being an apprentice, and I didn't really know how to take anyone in open industry, and especially in the mining type industry. But when we got down there and people automatically introduced themselves, and started having a talk.... and people just going out of their way to assist you, to show you around.

I mean that was virtually the second day. The first day of my getting in to Dampier, I can remember sitting in my room petrified that I'd been told I had to go down to the mess in the morning, have my breakfast, and then there will be a bus waiting for you to take you to the pellet plant. And I purposely slept-in that day. I just didn't really want to go down to that mess and I didn't want to get on that bus in the morning. I *really* was petrified about what I was doing in a place like this, and what I was going to be put up to. Anyway I stayed in my room and I can remember the accommodation officer coming around and knocking on your door, and I was saying, "Oh yes, yes. I'm sorry, I must have slept in." Well, I don't think I'd slept in at all, I was just so bloody scared about going out into this new bloody work situation.

But anyway, I was taken down there in the car with this bloke, and it was from then that they introduced me to all these people, and I realised it wasn't such a fearful place that I thought it was going to be. It was actually quite a friendly place and I got on quite well there. It was very close, and I think the dirt around the place, the conditions, were pretty bad. I think all those sort of things brought everyone together. I mean unlike today, even the foreman seemed to get on well with the workers too. It was very much of a family situation in there.

Bob Dickson agreed:

I think the foreman was pretty close to the men in those days - very close to them. He really was part of the work crew. You worked alongside the men, you didn't just direct, you worked with them; and I guess it's fair to say, you led, and you were part of a team, and they considered you part of the team. It was only as time went on, I guess, and part of the reason was because Hamersley had no rules, and Hamersley had all the power. You talk about balance of power. Hamersley had it all. You could sack a bloke (sorry the foreman couldn't sack, but the superintendent could) really at whim, and it was that sort of thing.... The bloke in charge of the shift was the boss and if he said, "I want this bloke sacked," you were sacked.

Also on the the other side of the coin, if you had a new bloke come in to your team that wasn't any good, the foreman didn't have to sack him. The wages bloke would go to the foreman and say, "Look, this next bloke's not pulling his weight. We don't want him as part of our team." So they'd initiate the get rid of procedures, they really would. That changed later, much later,

with the union involvement; different things became the lowest common denominator, I guess. But because Hamersley had no rules, it largely depended on the type of bloke that was in charge of the shift, or department or whatever, to what answers wages blokes would have with their problem. So you'd have two or three answers to exactly the same problem, and that led to confusion and I think that was the start of the militancy of the union movement. The blokes wanted some treatment different than what was being handed out - or at least some consistency.

Maintenance Work - or Demarcs!

It was the task of the maintenance workers to keep the plant and equipment working. John Mercer was a fitter at Paraburdoo, starting there in 1973.

Because overtime was running out of our very ears, we'd show up for work on a Saturday, we were on a two-shift system, Monday to Friday, we'd show up to work on a Saturday morning after working afternoon shift. We'd knock off at midnight, we'd show up at eight o'clock Saturday morning and the foreman would say, "Oh, you're here today are you? Oh, we'd better find you a job." No one had asked you to come in, you'd just front up and that's what you expected. People expected to stay back and work overtime, it was fairly free and easy.

Doug Alchin was another fitter but at Tom Price.

There was a lot of demarcation, an enormous amount of demarcation, but those were the days when they got all their disabilities and the unions were after employment and we had so many people and it was really demarcation. I, as a fitter, when I started there I was amazed at the things I couldn't do. They'd say, "You can't do this", you couldn't light an oxy torch and, "You can't do that - it's somebody else's job, you're doing one of your brothers out of a job." You were very, very hidebound, I suppose, in what you were allowed to do and it was very closely controlled and people would dob you in left, right and centre. The only time that you had any flexibility at all was on shift work - on night shift, when there was nobody around and the guys used to do things. I think a lot of it was all over conditions, and I'd say employment in real terms and unions wanting power and they certainly had it, people worked a lot of hours.

They were the days of development when the industry was growing up, the company was growing up, the industry was a baby. It's still very young. Money was no option and that was the big thing. Tons were the go - everything was tons driven. The company wanted tons. They were very hungry for tons and they bought tons and they tried to buy industrial peace and everything was just given away to fulfil contracts and expansion. The company just kept growing and nobody had time to sit down and think about where we were going or stability or anything else and who cares - we were making a big quid, let's keep going.

The maintenance work itself was often very basic. John Mossington:

The pellet plant must have been at that stage over ten years old, and it was burning a lot of oil. There was a lot of sulphur around. There was a lot of corrosion from the salt. You soon learnt that - as a boilermaker, the last thing you take to the ore drying section to fix up a patch on a piece of their plant, was a welder. You took along a piece of steel and a tube of plastic mastic, and you go and stick it on. I mean because if you tried to put an arc welder to it, you'd just

burn another hole in it.

It was always breaking down. I mean as day workers we were continually working overtime, and we'd be called in at all hours of the night. We had a good system where it came to overtime, that everyone had their fair share of overtime. There was no one person getting too much.

But it was not always hard work. He recalls,

And this one particular day - Christmas '74 - all the boilermakers had their own personalised fire extinguishers which they pressurised with air, and there was just this gigantic water fight. It went on for the whole of the morning and just no work was done on this particular day. One bloke there spent the whole morning filling up the bucket of the 992 front end loader and drove up to the front door and just let the bucket go open and there was tons of water just come through the workshop. Well, in the end the superintendent of the place, he'd just had enough of it and he just turned round and he said, "Well, that's enough," he says, "everyone home." So we all went home and amazingly we all got paid for it but I imagine if those sort of things happened today, we probably would all have been given our marching orders. But that was the sort of relationship we had around that time. It was quite good.

Being a Manager

It was not easy as a manager in those days. Nat Hilton went to Tom Price in 1969 and worked as a fitter in the maintenance work shop. He moved to Paraburdoo in 1971 to take up a foreman's position:

Well I think a lot of it was hands-on then too, because you could get in then and help them and the thing was I would give them a job to do and if they didn't know, I could tell them. The blokes knew you could do the job. They weren't going to try and pull the wool over your eyes - I think that was a lot of it. But the chaps, they were keen to do the job. A lot of chaps would come and had never worked on the sort of equipment, on the heavy equipment. They'd come from motor mechanics or from the other side of the fitting trade, away from the diesel stuff and they were keen to learn too.

You didn't have to do over much then because usually the crew of blokes would do that. That was a little bit of attitude you had with the blokes. They enjoyed the job and if someone wasn't pulling their weight on a crew it reflected on the lot of them and most of them used to - half a dozen would get around and have a little talk to him, put him in the middle, give him the finger. Some people couldn't take it and they left but they'd have never fitted in. No, as far as disciplinary action, you didn't have to do much. There was only a just a few odd ones that couldn't make work because of the alcohol problem as a rule and that was usually because of isolation. If you could get those blokes away - break for a week or fortnight or so - they'd come back and they were usually pretty right.

Managers at different levels had different priorities, as Bob Dickson found out when he later became a manager himself:

There's two levels of management. There's management per se and there's management as the shop floor supervisor, foreman, call him what you like, who was usually quite happy to get the

job done in the four hours even though it's only a three hour job, let's say. With his boss saying, "Hey, it's only a three hour job, why's it taking four?" So there's a bit of a split there, I think, in the way management approach things. It's pretty normal for a shift foreman (including myself) if you've got a shift fitter and a shift electrician on your shift, and they're the only tradesmen you've got in the middle of the night, to let them sit on their arse until you really need them. When there's a breakdown, they've got to run for you. As long as they do that, you turn a blind eye. You don't want them to work eight hours a night. You want them for the two hours that you really need them, to really work for those two hours and get you out of trouble in a hurry, rather than take their time.

I guess, human nature, that's a common approach for the shift foreman. "Take it easy, fellows, but when I need you, you'd better run for me!" I don't think that I as a manager, even though I've been the shift foreman, I know where they're coming from, I can't afford to take that approach. I would schedule work for the other six hours. So you've got different view points in the management structure I guess - which is a bit destructive but human nature.

The Organisation of Work

Demarcations were beginning to emerge as issues on site. Bob Dickson again,

Not so much in the early years, but they did become as time went on, where mainly between the trades groups: 'Thou shalt not use a fitter to do boilermaking work,' and boilermaking work really came to mean anything that had to do with gas or electric welding. And that again was largely evolved out of the wish for overtime. So if you had a breakdown at two o'clock in the morning a fitter didn't cut a bit of steel off. You sent out for a boilermaker who you paid four hours' pay at double time, to come in and cut the steel. So it was protection of overtime, I think, that brought a lot of demarcation issues up and out, which is still.... well, with us in reduced form now, but still rears its head every now and again. It was really that overtime and a wish for overtime that.... and minimum manning came about solely because of the overtime issue: 'Thou shalt keep a certain number of people', and if the certain number of people were not there, someone else works overtime to cover it.

So overtime became a very big issue, especially as the wages up here came down in relationship, if you like, to the rest of Australia. So the push for overtime caused a lot of problems in demarcation. I think almost solely initially.

Doug Alchin: It affected you every day. If you had an assistant, and in those days there was probably an assistant for every tradesman, they tried to have that many, you, as a tradesman, wouldn't drive anything, the assistant had to drive particularly trucks because they got disabilities for everything, so if they had a ten ton truck allowance or an eight ton truck allowance, so the assistant drove the truck for so many hours he'd get paid for the week at the higher rate. I could put a fan belt on an engine, but I couldn't take the alternator belt off. I could pull an engine out of a vehicle or a shovel but I couldn't take the wires off it, you know the twelve volt electrical system. You could unbolt the roof section of a shovel, but the electrician would have to take the wires off. Your crane would come up and you couldn't put the hook on, or put the sling through a lifting lug or put a hook on a lifting lug or anything like that. Talk about tools, this guy said to me in the first week you better take all your tools home,

you'll only want a couple of big hammers and a few big shifters and a screwdriver or two and a coal chisel, and he was right you know, you could carry all the tools you would need around in your hand. But those were the sorts of things that happened. You know you think about the situation where when we got into air conditioning in later years you could have a fan belt and an air conditioning belt and a battery charging alternator belt, one after another, you'd have a fitter take off the fan belt and a fridge take off the air conditioning belt and an auto electrician take off the fan belt. You know, a fitter couldn't undo a battery lead, couldn't change a battery and then the auto electricians, because the batteries are up high, generally would come and undo the battery and then they'd get an assistant to lift the battery out, and an assistant to put the battery in, and then they'd go and hook the leads up. Do you want a bit more? It was ludicrous, unbelievable, it was something I never could understand and never come to grips with, but that was the nature of the beast, you couldn't put oil in an engine, that was a serviceman's job, crazy! You wouldn't fill it up, that was a serviceman's job, it just went on and on and on.

Overtime and the way it was allocated was always important, The payment of allowances could also give rise to disputes (as could non-payment).

Bob Dickson: I don't think it was perceived to be done fairly. I think it was done reasonably fairly, but you'd have one foreman - his shift was always getting overtime. You'd have another foreman and his shift wasn't, and quite often used as a punitive measure. "I've had you bastards, therefore you will not get overtime."

In those days there were a whole lot of disability allowances paid as well, which have disappeared by the board now, and become more generalised in to areas, to which disability payments are made. But there were disability payments made for working in dust collectors. That was a 'dust allowance'. There was 'water allowance', all that sort of thing, so a foreman to reward one of the blokes on his shift who had done a good day's work, could turn around and say, "Look, mate, put eight hours dust money on your time sheet." It would be worth three and sixpence or something, but, you know, "Here's a little bit extra for you." So a bit of discretion, I guess, or it came to be discretion on the part of the foreman, to reward his good blokes, and that caused a bit of ill-feeling as well, because he'd rewarded one bloke with an extra three and six to which he really wasn't entitled; he hadn't been in a dust area or anything like that, but he paid if you'd done a good day's work. So the bloke that hadn't done a good day's work in the foreman's eyes, would say, "Why's that bastard getting the money and I'm not?"

Although there was a lot of working together, particularly in the early stages of the operation, and a general view that those who could not "hack it" just moved on, not all managers approached their task in a conciliatory manner. As Graeme Stevens recalls:

Out of the primary another dirty job we had was cleaning out the dust collection system - that was a dirty filthy job that. It was very, very fine dust - you had to wear the mask. It's a big metal cabinet type of thing and it's a huge metal cabinet actually. You're perspiring like buggery when you're in there because of the temperature and, of course, the dust is around and you're very black when you get out of it. It's just a dirty job. That was one of the ones I didn't

like about it. Other than that it wasn't too bad. You had to keep the place clean - you did that to the best of your knowledge. I remember one night - it was actually on night shift - it was about three in the morning - we heard this - there was 196 odd steps from the top of the crusher to the bottom - inside the crusher and most of them are metal and we heard about 3 o'clock in the morning - the offsider was there with me - we heard this clonk, clonk, clonk, clonk coming up the stairs. Obviously someone walking up the stairs. And low and behold when they opened the door - it was the bloody mine manager, a fellow named Ian Brown, walking up there and he's rubbing the hand rails as he's coming up. It's a primary crusher and there's just dust everywhere. "Look at that - filthy. Go and hose them down." He was a hard man - a very hard man.

Barry Peters remembers one of the foremen:

We had a classic bloke here a few years ago and he must have caused more strikes in Hamersley than any half a dozen foremen put together and to me it was just his attitude. I think he just come to work spoiling for a fight and nine times out of ten he got accommodated. That style of management's gone. That shift was an utter disaster. It was just one blue after another.

Difficulties in reaching decisions, either because of procrastination or because Industrial Relations Department got involved, also could cause problems for management. The foremen felt like the meat in the sandwich. Barry Peters recalls,

I had a problem, and it was management problem that caused this one, where the blokes finished up going out on strike where this Baldwin-Smith went up to a shovel - it was on night shift - went into a shovel and in those days we used to take the in-pit transport up, park them up near the shovel and it was in a confined area. He saw the vehicle parked on the side of the bench as he went in but he did a right hand turn and straight over - ploughed into the vehicle. He was adamant that it wasn't his fault because the vehicle shouldn't have been there and all this sort of thing. Now the blokes at this stage had had enough of him and they were quite prepared to - not so much have him sacked but taken off trucks and relocated somewhere else. This was on the last night shift which was on a Thursday morning. We weren't due back then until the following Tuesday afternoon. I had him and the convener in for the rest of the night and the convener at that stage was on my side because he knew this bloke was a danger. We saw the manager the next morning and he said, "I'll give you a decision as soon as I can." This bloke - it finished up they let him stew all weekend. By the time they come back to work on Tuesday - we still hadn't got an answer and all the blokes that were against him on the Thursday morning, because he'd been left to stew all weekend - and his wife had been sick and all that sort of thing - they'd completely changed and everybody was in his favour. We called in at the start of afternoon shift and the manager said, "I've finally made my decision and I'm going to take you off trucks." The blokes were all going to go out on strike over it because the thing had been left sit for so long. Instead of turning around that morning and saying - "Yep, that's it - bang - you're off trucks.", which would have been accepted. No, they just let the whole thing fester and it just blew completely out of proportion and it just made things that bad. And that wasn't the only one - that happened on numerous occasions where people higher up the tree wouldn't make decisions and you're the one that's left holding the can.

Graeme Stevens: If you made a decision (it's my interpretation) that affected the running of the place in so far as unions were concerned then boy, the cringe, you felt like you were marked because industrial relations became such that you could not - if there was a ship in the harbour it had to be loaded no matter what so you couldn't make a decision that would affect anything.

Syd Edgar: A lot of the stuff that was given away to the unions in the old days was when there was a big push. It was a standard joke - 3 ships off the coast, you know - it was worth big money so it was a case of giving into the unions to get their three boats or otherwise we just weren't in business.

Barry Peters: Keep producing at all costs!

Conclusion

There are many many stories about what it was really like to work in the iron ore industry in the late 1960's and the early 1970's. We have been able to present only a few. And in many ways, things are different now. Our main focus has been to show what the work itself was like - the conditions, the pressures, the things people used to get up to. It has not been our purpose to describe or explain the industrial relations but such is the nature of the industry that industrial relations is very much a part of all that we have presented. We have tried to present a balanced picture but we have had to be selective. Our material is drawn from only one company; further, although it was a 'man's world', none of the contributions we have drawn upon have been from a women's perspective. Nevertheless, we hope that through the comments of some of those who were involved at the time we have presented a picture of working life in the early days in the Pilbara iron ore industry.

Getting organised in the 1970's - The experience of the Australian Social Welfare Union*

Peter McDonald†

The Australian Social Welfare Union (ASWU) formally came into existence on June 1 1976. It began as a small union, and remains one today. In this paper I have set myself two tasks; to give a Western Australian perspective on the first years of a difficult life, and to provide some suggestions as to the lessons which the experiences of the ASWU can provide to students of the labour movement.

The Industry

The activists who fought to establish the ASWU could be excused for their predictions of a rosy future. From the mid 1960s until the mid '80s what has become known as the 'community services' industry experienced a burst of growth, matching the rapid expansion of the welfare state occurring in all advanced capitalist democracies (Mishra, 1981). Between 1966 and 1986 the ABS classification 'community services' grew by 147.7%, from 486,000 to 1,204,000 workers, the most rapid rate of growth of any of the ABS classifications (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989 p.160). This classification included one of the largest groups of award free workers in the Australian labour force, a group known within the industry as the 'non-government welfare sector'. The only exhaustive statistical survey of non-government welfare organisations carried out in Australia estimated that, in 1982, between 150,000 and 600,000 people were employed full-time, and between 122,000 and 398,000 part-time, by between 15,000 and 29,000 organisations. (Milligan et al, 1984 p.137; Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989 p.139).

In industrial terms, the non-government sector could be distinguished from that proportion of the industry employed directly by government, where wages and conditions were governed by a range of public sector awards. Although disparate, the non-government sector also had a clear sense of identity. Charities with histories going back to the last century, religious organisations, self-help groups, housing and welfare rights activist groups, ethnic groups, youth groups and movements fighting for the rights of disadvantaged minorities could all see themselves as having sufficient bonds to form an identifiable industry. Many of these organisations were totally government funded, most received some state funding, and a few could rely on their own resources (Scott, 1981 p.11). They employed workers with an enormous range of job titles, employment histories, and educational qualifications, often to be found working alongside volunteers performing almost identical tasks. The identification with

* The case study upon which this article is based was part of Peter McDonald's thesis for which he was awarded the Master in Industrial Relations degree at UWA in 1989.

† Peter McDonald formerly taught social work at Curtin University of Technology and is now a free-lance social activist. His latest work has been with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Hobart.

the industry tended to extend beyond the direct service deliverers to the administrators, policy-makers and researchers employed by those organisations. The sense of identity of the sector was strengthened by membership of peak bodies such as the Australian Council of Social Service, the Australian Council on the Ageing, the Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and the Youth Affairs Council of Australia (ibid p.61). This identity was recognised by government, which funded these peak bodies and, in the late 1970's, established an interim Community Services Industry Training Council. Despite their differences, most workers in the sector shared the position of being uncovered by any industrial awards or registered agreements. Salaries and conditions of work were a matter of negotiation, and enormous disparities existed between workers performing similar tasks. These workers made up the bulk of the potential membership of the ASWU.

The Establishment of the Union

The sheer size of the award free workforce bode well for the future of the union. So also did what appeared at the time to be a remarkable piece of good fortune, the inheritance of an already existing federal registration. The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) had been registered as a union with the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission since 1956, but had until 1975 made little use of that registration, except in Victoria where it helped gain a determination for social workers in the late 1960s (Hayes, 1986 p.180).

The AASW saw itself as a professional association, and had lobbied hard for the conditions which brought about a steady increase in numbers within the occupational category of qualified social worker; from 59 in 1941 to perhaps 9,000 by 1981 (Lawrence, 1965 p.89 : Scott, 1981 p.118). When the AASW registered with the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, its coverage extended to people 'usually employed for hire or reward in or in connection with the industry of professional social work'. That industry was in no place further defined, and it was in practice left to the AASW to determine its own criteria of membership, including what were to be appropriate educational qualifications, and hence access to the industry.

The AASW had been successful in steadily increasing the educational requirements and employment opportunities for graduates. The push for the establishment of the ASWU came about both because of this success and because of what many members perceived the association to have been failing to do. The push came from two sources. Firstly, there were many members of the AASW disturbed at the low priority given to social action within the association, with the bulk of formal activities being given over to enhancing the claims for professional status. Secondly, there were a growing number of workers without social work qualifications being employed in the industry. Although the number of social work graduates had been rapidly increasing (Learner, 1979), output had not kept up with the demand created by the social reforms of the federal Labor government. Of the 5000 students studying in welfare related courses in 1976, only half were enrolled in social work. The others, even when qualified, would not be eligible for membership of the AASW (ibid). The AASW was in danger of losing its claims to speak for, and control access to, the industry.

Colin Benjamin, a past federal secretary of the AASW and leading activist for the establishment of the ASWU, asked in 1974:

How long will we continue to maintain a position of social isolation from our fellow workers employed in the welfare industry in order to protect our 'professional social work' status against the demands of social welfare development?... The Association has consistently attempted to use its industrial registration to avoid allowing other members of the welfare industry such as youth workers, welfare officers or sociologists to take part in one industrial body (AASW 1974D).

If it was not for the industrial relations context in which the AASW was (however unwillingly) operating, this need not have been a matter of pressing concern to the association. As Benjamin pointed out, however, the fact that the AASW had federal industrial registration left those non-social workers in the industry seeking industrial coverage with little choice but to target their efforts on the association. Not only would the AASW most likely have opposed the claim of any other body for registration, but it was unlikely that, given the interpretation of the term 'industry' used within the federal industrial system, such a claim could have succeeded.

It was in Victoria that the issue came to a head. There were many reasons for Victoria taking the lead, some bound up in the history of Labor and trade-union politics within the State. Undoubtedly one of the most significant was the unique nature of the Victorian Wages Board system. The Victorian branch of the AASW had been the only one to successfully gain any form of industrial protection for social workers. In the late 1960's a wages board had been established which provided coverage for persons qualified from the Melbourne University social work course. The establishment of this board gave an indication both of what was possible in Victoria, and of the limitations of the existing eligibility requirements of the association. The motion at the Victorian Branch Conference of 1974 included resolutions for the branch to register as a member of the Victorian Trades Hall Council and to seek industrial coverage under the existing State wages board of other occupational groups engaged in the industry of professional social work by extending the terms of reference of the Board (AASW 1974F). The key proposal, however, was a recommendation to the federal body that the AASW widen itself as a union by making eligible for membership all other groups in the industry which had any form of educational standard as a criteria for membership. This proposal was accepted by the federal council, but after a request from the NSW and WA branches a plebiscite of all members was held on the issue.

The WA branch of the AASW actively campaigned to overturn the federal council decision. It had long been against relaxing the eligibility requirements for membership of the association, having devoted the bulk of its energy over the years to securing professional, university level training in the State. The general feeling within the WA branch appears to have been that it would be preferable for the AASW to seek de-registration as a union rather than in any way to open up membership. Only 25% of the branch voted for the motion which was successful in the plebiscite, one which effectively gave up the federal registration to a new body representing all workers in the industry. 60% of the Victorian votes, and 50% in SA and Queensland, supported the proposition.

The decision to create the ASWU was ratified at the AASW federal council meeting held on the 17th October 1975. This was a decision to clearly separate the 'social work professional association' function of the organisation from the 'social welfare industrial function'. The AASW was to remain a professional association open only to social workers with a professional education in social work from an accredited Australian programme or an equivalent overseas qualification. The ASWU was to be a union registered under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, open to all those working in or in connection with social work who had some relevant training or education (AASW 1975M).

The AASW had operated with a structure of State and Territory Branches and an elected federal executive. At least in the short term, the ASWU inherited this structure. It was left up to the State branches to determine the way in which they would handle the transition period. Not surprisingly, it was in Victoria and federally that separate union structures were rapidly established. Elections for the Federal Executive Committee (FEC) of the union were declared by the Australian Electoral Office in December 1975, with other office-bearers being shared until October 1976. The Victorian branch had effectively been operating separate structures for some time, and by the beginning of 1976 had formalised this arrangement, with separate AASW and ASWU branch councils and secretaries (ASWU 1976D).

The union had its first direct experience of inter-union conflict when the Commonwealth Public Service 4th Division Officers lodged an objection with the Conciliation and Arbitration Court with respect to the union's application for a formal name change (from the AASW to the ASWU). The dispute was settled by negotiation, it being agreed to co-operate in promoting the welfare of joint members, and on the 1st June 1976 the ASWU could declare its name as official (ASWU 1976H). The ASWU itself lodged an objection to the Public Service Associations' Federation application to the Court for registration as a trade union. This dispute was also settled by negotiation when the Public Service Associations agreed not to enrol any person eligible for membership of the ASWU who was not employed by a State government or instrumentality (*ibid.*).

By the end of 1976 the process of formal separation of the ASWU from the AASW was complete. Each organisation had its own members, office-bearers, and finances. Newsletters and channels of communication were separated, with only the arrangement of administrative staff sharing remaining at the federal offices of both organisations in Melbourne. The October federal council meeting had resolved to initiate the process of achieving a national award (ASWU 1976M), and State branches of the union were in varying stages of development. In Victoria the branch was well organised and actively recruiting, and in New South Wales a regional structure was being developed. In South Australia an active committee, separate from the AASW, had been operational since September. Only in WA, the Northern Territory and Tasmania had there been no real movement toward separation at the branch level (ASWU 1976N). National membership at the end of the year stood at approximately 800, although most of these were social workers, many with dual membership of the AASW and ASWU. Membership had fallen by more than half during the year, indicating that perhaps two-thirds of

the membership of the AASW (and hence both organisations at the time of separation) had not renewed their membership of the union.

The Western Australian Experience

The WA membership of the AASW had been opposed to a widening of membership and increased industrial focus for the association. There was a feeling amongst many members that the push for the formation of the union was being organised by Victorians on behalf of Victorians, and that conditions in WA were different. Few WA AASW members were willing to actively support the union (with some notable exceptions, including Grace Vaughan, president of the State branch and soon to be national president). The new membership that activated the branch was drawn largely from the staff and students of the WAIT (now Curtin) social work course and from members of a body known as the Social Action Lobby. Tony Cooke, later to be president and secretary of the union in WA, and at that time a WAIT social work student, recalls that:

There was already a network of activists on the ground in WA built around an organisation called the Social Action Lobby. This was an informal action oriented group which did a lot of campaign work. It was loosely based at the TLC, using their facilities and rooms. They were a loose coalition of social welfare workers in general terms. They were the core group of contacts for the ASWU (Interview, Cooke).

It was not until after an expanded interim committee was elected on the 18th January 1977 that the WA branch announced to other State branches that enough active members had been found to form the basis of an effective organisation. The interim committee, with WAIT social work lecturer Dave Buchanan as president, set itself the task of developing a programme for the union after consultation with members (ASWU 1977C).

WAIT appears to have been the focal point for organisation because of the legacy of a dispute within the AASW over the accreditation of its social work course. In 1976 there was still a degree of antagonism between UWA and WAIT trained workers, with the UWA graduates being perceived as entrenched in the labour market and in control of the AASW. There were accusations from some members of the AASW that WAIT was flooding the market with inadequately trained workers (interviews, Cooke; Wooller). When Colin Benjamin, the federal President of both the AASW and ASWU, visited Perth in January 1976 to attempt to mobilise enthusiasm for the union, it was WAIT which hosted the meeting. Those staff and students who became active at this time and took over the recruitment process tended to view the ASWU as a body with which they could identify as a counter to the perceived elitism of the AASW.

A small amount of seeding money was received from the federal ASWU, and when the members of the Social Action Lobby were signed up the WA branch had just over 30 members, a figure which was to remain static for some time. Tony Cooke believes that none of that original 30 joined the union with any thought that it would be a vehicle for representing their own industrial interests. Most were employed within the State or federal public service and were represented in the workplace by other unions. They saw the ASWU as a means of both

giving the social issues with which they were concerned a higher profile, and of agitating for improved conditions for welfare workers in areas without effective representation (Interview, Cooke).

The issues defined as priorities by the interim committee elected in January 1977 reflect that range of interests. Affiliation with the TLC was seen as a major priority, for social action rather than industrial reasons. Norm Williams, who prepared the March 1977 branch report for the national newsletter, argued that:

The branch has committed itself to the process of affiliation as a means of extending its power base. The key officials of the TLC are most anxious that we get on with the process as they see a real need for our participation especially since they are expanding their social welfare role (ASWU 1977C).

An examination of branch activities and items for formal discussion during 1977 indicates a predominant concern with social action issues, although these were generally dealt with within the context of the union movement. It appears that what the branch defined as an industrial focus was the use of labour movement forums to mobilise support for social action goals. Co-operation with other unions was the goal, rather than industrial activity per se. The branch gave active support to the Unemployed Workers Movement, and, through its delegate Tony Cooke, successfully lobbied for its endorsement by the TLC. Discussions were held with CAGEO concerning attacks on the government over the administration of benefits for the unemployed, and with the State School Teachers Union about cutbacks in teaching staff. The union also joined in discussions about the possible formation of a family, health and industrial clinic for workers on the Kwinana strip (ASWU 1977DE; ASWU/WA 1977ABCD). Early forays into direct workplace industrial issues were clouded by both a basic lack of industrial knowledge, and the fact that many workers were already covered by other unions. For example, when the branch attempted to intervene in a dispute concerning the working conditions of welfare officers in public hospitals little was achieved. The ASWU had no legal status in the dispute, and received a cool response from other unions and many of the workers involved. Members of the branch had not fully realised that the dual membership arrangements negotiated nationally gave the ASWU no right to represent workers in the public sector (interview, Richmond). The confusion over dual coverage led the branch to decide to work toward State registration as soon as possible (ASWU/WA 1977 ABCD).

Members of the WA branch were also actively involved in the formation of the Social Security Union, a welfare rights organisation with close links to the TLC. According to Tony Cooke, the Social Action Lobby effectively died out during 1977, with the Social Security Union taking over most of its activist functions and the ASWU providing an organisational focus (Interview, Cooke). The branch had by then developed a management structure in which the branch council, the meeting of office-bearers, was the decision-making body. To reflect the concern with social action issues two positions of vice-president were created, with responsibility for social action and industrial issues respectively (ibid). At this stage, however, the branch still appeared uneasy about its role as an industrial organisation. If a welfare rights group was established under the auspices of the TLC, was this industrial activity? Communication links and co-operative activities had been established with other unions, and it

appears that, to the inaugural Branch Council, these were sufficient justifications for existence. Any directly industrial initiatives involving the working conditions of members were still some way off. It was as if the branch wanted to be a 'proper' union, but lacked a strategy for becoming one. It could not become actively involved on behalf of the working conditions of its membership, and was having to come to terms with a dilemma which was to plague all State branches apart from in Victoria. A proper union represents its members, but workers are generally unwilling to join an organisation which is not yet a proper union; how then was the ASWU to recruit? This was the reverse side of the good fortune involved in having inherited federal registration. The union was created without members, rather than having been created by its members.

The National Award Campaign

Meanwhile, at the national level the industrial focus was sharpening. The first National Award Committee meeting was held in Melbourne in May 1977, with federal office funds being made available to enable delegates from each State to attend. The achievement of a national award had been a long term goal of the union since its inception. The decision to embark upon it so early in the piece was prompted by two factors, the fear that other unions seeking coverage of the ASWU's membership would push for its de-registration, and a concern that the Australian Assistance Plan was about to be wound up, leaving hundreds of workers around the country with no redundancy provisions. The intention was that the award campaign should initially seek to cover Australian Assistance Plan workers, workers in non-government welfare agencies and local government workers not covered at the time (ASWU 1977G).

The WA branch fully supported the move for a national award, being committed to the idea of being part of the trade union movement. Unlike in some other States, the professional/unionist split was not an issue in WA. There were few AASW members who had stayed with the union. Those active in the branch wanted to be part of a proper union, and saw a national award as the realisation of that goal. Despite the reservations expressed by some State delegates, there was no effective opposition to the campaign proceeding, particularly after it was agreed that State branches would have the final decision as to which employers were served with the log of claims.

Without the active support of all States, however, in mobilising support for the campaign, the National Award Committee found itself having difficulties in locating groups of workers anxious to have a log of claims served on their employers. The tradition of charitable organisations and their employees seeing themselves as partners in providing for the needy would not be easily broken. The nature of the employer/employee relationship in the non-government sector of the industry was related more to the structure of that relationship than to either the personal characteristics of workers and employers or the prevailing conditions of work. Employing organisations were 'not-for-profit' and tended to be run by committees of management, often made-up largely of other workers in the industry. Funding was generally provided by government grants, almost all of which were spent directly on salaries. It was apparent to many workers that, without an increase in levels of government funding, any improvement in wages and conditions would have to be at the expense of either fellow

workers or the standard of service delivery offered by their organisations. The 'selfish' nature of unionism deterred many workers who, no matter how desperately they sought improved wages and conditions, were not prepared to define their interests in opposition to those of their employers.

Positive responses to the request for workers willing to have their employers logged were received only from Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) workers in NSW and some private agency workers in NSW and Queensland (ASWU 1977I). The WA branch, while supporting the award, did not have enough of its members in the non-government sector. The Victorian branch, although the most industrially conscious, had an easily accessible State avenue for gaining coverage, and provided only passive support.

The logs of claims for both the Victorian and national awards were based on the concept of a common wage scale for all welfare workers, a radical departure from previous determinations in the area and bound to antagonise the AASW, with its commitment to tertiary qualifications. Years of training were to be recognised in exactly the same way as years of experience within the industry, with no special recognition being given to the category of 'social worker'. Furthermore, the Victorian employers had already expressed strong resistance to giving coverage to workers without formal qualifications, and it was likely that the national log would also encounter opposition on similar grounds. Both the logs were clear statements that the ASWU was not to be considered a union of social workers and was prepared to take on the social work 'profession' in the name of all workers within the industry (ASWU 1977J). This sentiment was clearly shared by the WA branch, despite almost all its members being themselves social workers.

Summing up the first two years: 1975-77

The first two years of existence of the union as a national organisation had seen considerable progress toward the achievements of its initial objectives, at least at the federal level and in Victoria. Although that progress had been slower than envisaged, there had been no major setbacks, and the air of optimism at the 1977 federal council meeting was understandable. The coverage of the anticipated national award and the nature of the proposed salary scale indicated, at least to those within the union, that it was clearly committed to the industrial protection of all members of the industry, and not just social workers. In that sense the legacy inherited from the AASW had been shed. Although there had been some tension in relation to the priorities which should be given to social action as compared with industrial concerns, this had been dealt with effectively, and there was a feeling that both could be accommodated. With the benefit of hindsight, the lack of progress in the smaller branches, particularly WA, was a signal that not all was well. At the time, however, the faith in the eventuation of the national award allowed this to be seen as purely a short-term problem, bound to be resolved once those branches had an award to administer.

The WA branch had a financial membership of only 30, out of a national total of 1,069. It's small size can be partly explained by the low proportion of membership shared with the AASW in WA. It could also be argued that, with the focus on a national award, the branch was

effectively 'a long way from the action', and it was only social action activities which provided any incentives for workers to join. John Richmond, later to become WA branch secretary, recalls that:

I didn't see the ASWU as an industrial union in those days, and I don't think the others did either. I think they saw themselves as a lobby group, a welfare rights group. I think they saw unions as an appropriate power source for them; they had practical resources and shared similar values. The issues were adequacy of social security payments, supporting parents, handicapped child's allowance. They were remote from industrial issues. We were all social workers or social work students, and I don't think it had any industrial relevance to us at all. I don't think that if any of them had an industrial problem that they would have seriously thought the ASWU could have done anything for them. None of us really knew anything about industrial procedures (Interview, Richmond).

The avenues which the WA branch saw as bringing them into the industrial mainstream were State registration and the national award. The agendas of branch meetings, however, indicate that these were more talked about than acted upon. In its report to federal council in 1977 the branch stated that the process of seeking State registration as a union was proceeding (ASWU 1977E). State registration was on the agenda of every branch meeting during 1978, although it was not until June that a motion was passed stating that "The ASWU (WA branch) make full investigation of the process required for registration as a State union under the Industrial Arbitration Act" (ASWU/WA 1978 B). It was not until April 1979 that the issue of registration was referred to Kevin Edwards, by then the union's solicitor, for opinion and advice (ASWU/WA 1979 C).

The Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) campaign

At the federal level, progress on the national award was much slower than anticipated. The hopes of having the log of claims served by early 1978 proved to be wildly optimistic. Fran Hayes, then national organiser for the ASWU, was to later analyse the reasons for that optimism:

I think its fair to say that, at the start, those making key decisions on the industrial directions of the ASWU had little or no previous industrial relations experience...a lot of our initial goals were not realistic because of our lack of experience in the industrial arena and our lack of understanding of what avenues our opponents could use against us if they really wanted to get nasty (Hayes, 1985 p.186).

The first major hurdle to be faced before employers could be logged was the eligibility clause of the union's constitution. The union had been interpreting the clause liberally, accepting membership applications from any one employed in welfare who could demonstrate that they had received some training, whether on the job or in tertiary institutions. When legal advice was sought on the award claim in January 1988, it was pointed out that many of the workers in organisations to be logged were not eligible for membership, particularly those who had received no training before starting work. It was felt that both employers and other unions would challenge the right of the union to cover those workers (ASWU 1978A).

The legal advice was that the ASWU change its constitution to delete the reference to education

programmes, a move that the union had wanted to make earlier but for the anticipated opposition from other unions. This time it decided to go ahead, and the logging of employers was put off until after the constitutional change. The application for the rule change, simply deleting all reference to educational qualifications, was lodged with the Industrial Registrar in March 1978 (ASWU 1979B). The first hearing for mention before the Industrial Registrar for the change of eligibility rule took place on June 18th. Six unions had lodged objections to the rule change. It was to take two and one half years for negotiations with these unions to be completed and the rule change accepted (Hayes, 1985 p.286), but almost before they had started the national award strategy was to be overtaken by events which were to fundamentally change the course of the union, both nationally and in the States, particularly WA.

In NSW Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) workers had been particularly active within the union. CYSS was a manpower programme established by the Federal Government in 1976, under which funds were provided to community based committees for the establishment of centres for unemployed youth. By 1978 approximately 200 were in operation throughout Australia, employing approximately 400 welfare workers, or CYSS project officers (ASWU 1978E). In June 1978 the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR), which funded the programme, introduced new guidelines for the programme. Several aspects of the new guidelines drew an immediate hostile response from CYSS project officers, and the NSW branch of the union sponsored an active campaign against the new guidelines. On the 13th July it organised a rally outside the Sydney office of the DEIR, and a delegation was seen by the State CYSS Committee for New South Wales. On the 21st July Shelley Jackson, a CYSS project officer and ASWU member who had attended the rally was called to a meeting of her employer, the Auburn Community Council for Social Development. She was informed that her employment was to be immediately terminated, and that no written reasons would be given. At a meeting with Shelley and the ASWU State Secretary on the 24th July, the acting chairperson of the employer committee gave as the reason for her dismissal the fact that she had incited participants in the scheme to political activity (*ibid.*).

The ASWU requested and was granted a conference before Commissioner Sweeney in the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. Two officers of DEIR appeared at this conference in support of the employer, an act which was seen by the union to fly in the face of the Department's often stated claim that they were not employers in the scheme and that their role was to provide support to both employees and employing bodies (ASWU 1978E). Commissioner Sweeney found that he had no real jurisdiction in the matter because, amongst other things, the ASWU had no award covering CYSS employees. He could only make suggestions to Shelley's employers which were in no way binding on them (ASWU 1978G).

The FEC met on the night of the Commission hearing. Furious at the treatment of Shelley Jackson and the behaviour of the DEIR, it authorised the National Award Committee to focus the campaign to gain award coverage on the CYSS project officers. The decision to concentrate the first award attempts on CYSS was reinforced later in 1978 when one of the unions objecting to the rule change questioned whether the union had a right to be registered at all. It felt dubious about whether the industry in connection with which the ASWU was registered

was in fact an 'industry' for the purpose of gaining an award in the Federal industrial system. The union's solicitors advised that if this point was raised during the award campaign then the CYSS workers provided the best example on which to fight, given that they were employed in a manpower programme aimed at preparing youth for the workforce (Hayes, 1985 p.187).

This dispute was a turning point for the union in that it signalled the channelling of its energies into an area of the industry in which there were very few social workers employed. Rather than being an organisation of social workers which had broadened its focus to include workers with other qualifications, the union had taken the first step to becoming an organisation of non-social workers.

Ironically this step, upon which the WA branch had exerted virtually no influence, was followed by a federal council decision to devolve much of the control of the union's resources to the branches. There was a recognition that the union had grown too top heavy too quickly, and had put its resources into building up a national organisation without paying sufficient attention to local level organisation (ASWU 1978H). This renewed emphasis on branch organisation and recruitment was accompanied by a commitment to give industrial issues priority over social action.

This decision left the WA members, nearly all of whom were still social workers with social reform as their motivation for belonging, effectively out in the cold. The next five years were to be painful ones for the branch, as the old guard struggled to keep the ship afloat as a new constituency amongst CYSS and other youth workers was slowly established. As Gail Green, the first CYSS worker to be active in the branch recalls:

The union started off doing lots of broader social action things, and we got gradually whittled down to spending all our time on the award. That was good for me, but it probably wasn't for the union. We had been an alternative AASW, doing more radical things like poverty marches, but... (Interview Green).

The CYSS award campaign was eventually to be successful, but by then the original activists, the old guard, were out of the picture. The 'handover' of the branch that John Richmond had been staying on as secretary to supervise finally occurred at the annual meeting held on 13th August 1984. Seven of the eight office-bearers elected CYSS project officers or youth workers. John remembers:

That was great for me, as I was tired and didn't want to have to stand again. The new people were very capable, very knowledgeable. I dropped out right then (interview Richmond).

The Lessons

In my study of the development of the ASWU I identified three themes, or tensions, which helped me to make sense of that development. They were industrial action versus social action, professionalism versus unionism, and the determining effect of industrial relations structures.

Industrial action versus social action (or social reform): The ASWU sprang from the twin desires for social action and the industrial protection of non-government sector welfare

workers. There appears to have been little questioning by union activists as to the validity of the link between those goals and that of becoming a trade union (although such a questioning may well have occurred amongst many who remained outside of the union). The importance of becoming a 'proper' union seems to have been taken for granted throughout the years of the study, with any opposition to that goal being seen as an example of either elitist 'professional' attitudes or a naive unwillingness to compromise in the interests of labour movement solidarity. The question must be asked, however, whether by the 1970's the popular historical linkage of unionism with collectivist social policies could be sustained?

Professionalism versus unionism: The theme of professionalism versus unionism dominated the debate in the period leading up to the establishment of the union. I would argue that the AASW, prior to the formation of the ASWU, was acting as an effective union for the bulk of its members. The strategy of professionalisation, which necessarily involved the enforcement of a clear distinction between social workers and other workers in the industry, had achieved real gains in terms of both salary and the degree of control over job content for the majority of social workers. Some of the opposition to the continuation of this strategy came from those who saw it as ultimately self-defeating and bound to lead to a diminution of the dominance of social work in an expanding industry. Most of the agitation for reform, however, was coming from those who argued that the AASW needed to identify itself with the union movement. In that sense, the goal of unionism was a social action goal rather than an industrial one.

If that argument is accepted, and given that those who initiated the WA branch were in the main social workers with secure jobs in the public sector, it is not surprising that other workers did not flock to join the union. Non-government employed welfare workers, including CYSS Project Officers, had far less of salary, status and job security than public sector social workers. Their concern was to improve their own conditions, and it is little wonder that they were attracted to the proven strategy of professionalisation which those who initiated the union had been reacting against.

The determining effect of industrial relations structures: This theme is perhaps the hardest to ignore. The fact that the AASW possessed (even if only by 'historical accident') federal registration as a trade union effectively dictated that it become the focal point for organisation. In most other respects the AASW was an inappropriate starting point. It was an organisation which represented the interests of those workers in the industry who, by and large, already had the industrial coverage being sought (through the public sector unions). It was an organisation of which the membership tended to be physically separate from the prospective membership of the union. The government and non-government sectors had different networks of communication, with the peak bodies discussed in the first section all being organisations which tended to unite the non-government sector, often in opposition to the government sector. Within the non-government sector of the community services industry social workers were as often as not perceived as being 'on the other side', in terms of both their conditions of work and the interests they represented.

When the battle within the AASW had been won, the ASWU was born as an organisation

without significant membership from its own constituency. Much of the struggle of the next few years was to convince that constituency that the ASWU was not an organisation established by social workers for social workers.

Another consequence of the inherited federal registration was that the union was forced, before it had built up its grassroots membership, to operate largely as a 'top-down' organisation. National decisions had to be made about national strategy, a strategy which required scarce resources to be concentrated at the national level of the union's operations. In effect the branches in the smaller and more isolated States were left with little but a recruiting and fund-raising mandate, one which left them with few resources and little incentive to build a State level industrial base. Even their participation in national decision-making was limited by the financial pressures which dictated that, for some years after establishment, the FEC of the union consist solely of members from Melbourne or Sydney. The experience in Victoria, where the history of involvement with the State wages board structure gave the State branch a tangible role to play, gives some indication of how differently the union could have developed in the absence of federal registration. The WA branch at no stage fought seriously to obtain State registration, with that difficult and time-consuming process being seen as a 'second-best' alternative to a national award.

The unions which objected to the ASWU's eligibility rule change must also be considered. While those unions were prepared to concede the existence of a large body of workers uncovered by industrial awards, they were generally unwilling to allow, and almost never prepared to actively encourage, the efforts of the ASWU. If their response had been to preempt the work of the union by themselves seeking coverage for those workers, then perhaps there would have been no need for the continued existence of the ASWU. The industrial relations framework, however, meant that instead of having to woo those workers away from the clutches of the union they could use the courts to challenge its jurisdiction. The ASWU was forced to use much of its scarce resources to fight protracted legal battles, the results of which, by themselves, did nothing to advance the working conditions of its members. At the State level the situation was similar, with the NSW branch in particular having to mount a long and expensive battle to obtain State registration, a battle which was fought against other unions. In WA it was the fear of union challenges which prevented the branch proceeding far with its efforts at registration. It was only in Victoria, and in Tasmania before the abolition of the Industrial Boards system, that the State industrial systems had the effect of encouraging a degree of co-operation, by other unions close to the industry, with the efforts of the ASWU to become established. It could be argued that the early hope of the union, to see the establishment of a national award covering all workers in the industry, was thwarted more by the legislative framework in which it was forced to operate than by the opposition of employers. Indeed, the majority of the early battles were fought and lost before an employer was sighted.

References: Published materials

- Graycar, A. and Jamrozik, A. *How Australians Live*, MacMillan, Melbourne.
 Lawrence, J. (1965) *Professional Social Work in Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra.
 Learner, E. (1978) *Education and Training for Social Welfare Personnel in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra.
 Milligan, V., Hardwick, J. and Graycar, A. (1984) "Non-Government Welfare Organisations

in Australia; A National Classification" *SWRC Reports and Proceedings No. 51*, SWRC Publications, New South Wales.

Mishra, R. (1981) *Society and Social Policy*, MacMillan, London.

Scott, D. (1981) *Don't mourn for me - organise...*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Union Documents

AASW 1974D Benjamin, C. "The AASW and Industrial Matters" , *AASW News*, August p.15.

AASW 1974F Notice of motion submitted to the Victorian Branch Annual Conference [undated].

ASWU 1976D *ASWU/AASW News*, January/February p.9.

ASWU 1976H "Victorian News" *ASWU/AASW News* August p.22.

ASWU 1976M *ASWU Federal Council Minutes*, October.

ASWU 1976N *Interface Views*, December.

ASWU 1977C "WA Branch Report", *ASWU News/Interface Views*, March, p.75.

ASWU 1977D "WA Branch Report", *Interface Views*, September/October p.243.

ASWU 1977E "Federal Council Branch Round-up", *Interface Views*, November pp.281-282.

ASWU 1977G "ASWU moves for a national award", *ASWU News/Interface Views*, April p.85.

ASWU 1977I "National award campaign news", *ASWU News/Interface Views*, August p.215.

ASWU 1977J "National award campaign", *ASWU News/Interface Views*, November p.277.

ASWU 1978A "The ASWU Constitution and the Award Campaign", *ASWU News* February p.6.

ASWU 1978E Letter to ACTU Federal Secretary from Bob Boughton, ASWU Federal President [undated].

ASWU 1978G "National Award Campaign" *ASWU News* August p.189.

ASWU 1978H "Federal Council", *ASWU News*, November p.231.

ASWU/WA 1977A WA Branch General Meeting Agenda, June.

ASWU/WA 1977B WA Branch General Meeting Agenda, July.

ASWU/WA 1977C WA Branch General Meeting Agenda, August.

ASWU/WA 1977D WA Branch General Meeting Agenda, September.

ASWU/WA 1979C WA Branch Minutes, 2nd April.

Interviews

Tony Cook, ASWU founding member and activist. Branch Secretary, President, and TLC delegate (Interviewed July 1988).

Gail Green., ASWU activist and CYSS project officer (Interviewed February 1989).

John Richmond. ASWU activist and Branch Secretary (Interviewed February 1989).

The Wanneroo Market Gardener: Some Personal Recollections

Rosina Cristafulli[†]

Much has been written about market gardening North of the river prior to World War Two, but very little has been said about the worker, the person who worked from dawn till dusk, and during the busy season late into the night by the light of a hurricane lamp subjected to untold hardships, seven days at a time. Many of these gardeners were southern European migrants. To add to their plight they were trying to adapt to a way of life which was new to them in a vast country whose people spoke a different tongue and whose customs were different to their own. My own involvement began in the early stages of 1937 when my father leased a portion of land at the 27 mile peg on Wanneroo Road, known at the time as "Karraburra Road". The land belonged to Mr. Harry Gibbs, a member of one of the well known pioneer families. Wanneroo to me was synonymous with market gardening, endless hours of hard work and untold hardships.

Tradition dictated that it was improper for an Italian girl to live away from home or go out to work, subsequently I was compelled to leave school in the August following my fourteenth birthday and work in the garden with my father until my marriage. Thus over the next thirty years I was personally involved with market gardening and the people who made it their living. Although there were other vegetable areas south of the river, my personal experience was in the Osborne Park - Wanneroo district. Most of the families who were of British descent were better off, having lived there most of their lives, but for the southern Europeans who ventured to this country far from their homeland with the hope of a better way of life, it was an uphill grind.

Wanneroo was one of the main vegetable growing areas, most of the land under cultivation was swamp. Any site suitable for cultivation was taken up for vegetable growing. There were garden plots dotted here and there from Gngangara through to Yanchep, some of the better known areas were East Wanneroo, Lake Joondalup, Flynn's Drive, Papas Swamp, Neerabub, Karraburra Road through to Bernard Road. More land was taken for vegetable growing as time went on. In fact most places near water or swamp were cultivated. During the rainy season the swamplands became waterlogged, it became difficult to cultivate and the swamp plots became overgrown with clumps of grass and weeds. Hock and paspalum would take over, yanchies would clog the drains and water cress would grow lush. Mint was also a prolific grower during the wet season; both the mint and water cress were marketable goods, during the lean times they would be a bonus as they didn't require any specific preparation. During this winter wet the farmers would cultivate the higher ground (or border land), they would plant crops which were ready for harvesting in the early spring; such as peas, french beans and potatoes. Sand potatoes were marketed washed and were in strong demand, as they were in short supply that time of the year. Growers in the Metropolitan area were not permitted to grow potatoes for market, except for a short period in the early spring. The main

[†] Rosina Cristafulli is a member of a Wanneroo market gardening family. She now lives in Scarborough.

potato growing area was in the South West of the state under the supervision of the Potato Board. When the water level receded preparation would begin to plant the tomato crop.

Very few growers possessed any farm machinery, so most of the work was done by manual labour, it was heavy going, wearing heavy rubber boots up to your knees. First the drains had to be cleared to improve the drainage, then the grass would be cut with a scythe, left to dry then burned. When this preparation was completed the soil would be turned over by spade to a depth of about twelve inches then left to dry out a bit longer. The whole process, until the plots were ready for planting, took about six weeks. Finally, the soil was broken down and levelled with a garden fork.

The growers who could afford to pay would contract this work to casual labour. It was hard and tedious work, digging with a spade from dawn to dusk for weeks on end. Sometimes a day wasn't long enough to finish one bed. The hired labourers would get thirty shillings to three pounds per bed depending on the size of the bed. Most of this work was done by Italians. Nobody liked doing this type of labour but work was scarce and necessity gave them no alternative.

One of the men who worked for my husband wasn't much taller than his spade. The other workmen would tease him about his size but he plodded on regardless. Mr. Ravi was barely five feet tall so tackling this task was quite a feat. The other workmen were a lot taller, bending over the spade was no problem. To counteract their jibes, he vowed that one day he would return to his native village and bring back the tallest woman as his bride. He was true to his word! His wife was nearly five foot ten inches tall and quite a beauty. He worked hard and eventually set himself up with a little shop repairing shoes in Charles Street, North Perth and never looked back. The name is now prominent in Perth in various professions.

Meanwhile seed beds had to be taken care of. It was essential to have an abundant supply of tomato seedlings for planting. Most of the growers made their own seed from the prime fruit of the first picking of the tomato crop from the previous season. Firm quality fruit was essential to command a good price at the markets. The seed beds were jealously guarded, a disease free strain was of primary concern and growers were reluctant to give away or sell surplus seedlings. It was also a risk to bring in seedlings from any other garden. Growers would normally destroy surplus plants (seedlings) to protect their interests; I have known seed beds to be sabotaged by another grower to prevent a neighbour from harvesting an earlier crop. The seed beds needed protection from extreme weather conditions, hail or frosts could destroy the lot. Stray dogs were also a threat, they would move in packs and could destroy the lot by trampling. People did not hesitate to shoot the culprits on sight if they were caught in the act. The loss of seed beds meant a serious delay in harvesting an early crop and it was vital to get tomatoes into market early to attract a better price. As the season progressed there would be a surplus and the price would drop. Even if you had top quality fruit you would be lucky to cover expenses.

During the peak of the tomato season there would be dozens of cases of tomatoes left unsold.

The surplus had to be removed off the market to make way for the next days sale. The surplus tomatoes were often collected by the nearby factories like Plaistow's and Rayeners and converted into pulp for tomato sauce. Some of the pulp was even sent to the Eastern States, then came back as "Rosella" tomato sauce. If the growers were lucky enough, sometimes they would get their empty cases back. In the late thirties and early forties new three-quarter bushel cases cost one shilling and sixpence each; on top of that there was commission and cost of cartage!

The two main varieties grown during the pre-war and post-war years were crinklies and smooth skins. The crinkle variety were the very early strain, they were a large flat fruit with innumerable convolutions as the name implies. To grow well they had to be staked, this involved endless hours of care to train and tie them as they grew. They usually bore a heavy crop in clusters of six or more fruit which had very few seeds. These were easy to pick but once the smooth skins came in there was neither price or demand for the crinklies. The growers still had to meet the cost of cartage and commission as well as fertilisers, cases, insecticides etc.

Some of the growers would flood the markets with inferior goods, it was very difficult to make them understand if they planted half the quantity they would have better quality goods and less work as well as commanding a better price. Others would only pack the top and bottom layer of the tomato cases with their best fruit and put inferior fruit in between. The buyers were familiar with the prime growers and would buy their goods without question and pay top price. Prior to the 1939-45 War when there was a regular shipping service, tomatoes, which my family grew in Wanneroo have gone to England and back to Fremantle and still been in prime condition after a period of six to eight weeks.

During the war years essential foodstuffs were commandeered by the Army and many growers were contracted to grow all their produce for the Forces. Due to the increased demand, prices rose sharply, then price control came into operation for the duration of hostilities. Tomato growing was the priority during the summer months, you could market quality fruit from the same crop for about six weeks, so the growers staggered the planting by intervals of three weeks apart, this enabled them to have a high percentage of prime tomatoes for marketing over a long period.

When the season was in full swing (about mid-January) prices would drop. Then even the top grade was lucky to get five shillings a case. At that point, tomatoes were marketed in three quarter bushel cases and they weighed approximately 40 pound. These cases were made of thin narrow boards set about one-and-a-half inches apart to allow the air to circulate. The cases measured approximately 18x30x6 inches and cost about fifteen pence each.

By the time the smooth skins were ready for picking the temperature would be near the forties. The tomatoes were picked and taken to the shed to be sorted and packed later. Normally there was other produce to harvest such as peas, as well as broad and runner beans. Picking peas and french beans was hard on your back, but the job had to be done! Although the runner

beans were staked it was very humid in the rows. On very hot days it could be stifling. Sometimes the red spider would infest the crop and this would add to the irritation.

Cabbages were marketed in full and half chaff bags. They were bagged in the beds then the men would carry them to the shed on their backs. The half chaff bags were called dumps!

The men (labourers) employed on market gardens were paid about two pounds ten shillings a week plus their accommodation and keep. During the busy season they worked seven days a week. We seldom had a Sunday off as you were preparing for Monday's market. The winter months were a little easier; the work was still heavy but the hours were shorter and the rainy days gave them some respite.

My husband was a market gardener, his father migrated to Australia in 1913 and he lived in Wanneroo until his death; I can only imagine the problems they faced prior to the First World War. My father-in-law earned the respect of the community, but he was a hard task master. My husband was twenty-five years old when we were married, he worked on the land with his father from the time he left school; until that stage he had never received a regular wage. He lived at home where all his needs were provided plus pocket money if he needed it. He got the usual promises, which were customary at the time, that he would inherit his share of the property when his father died! After our marriage the profit from the family business was split three ways but by the time the books were balanced there wasn't much left to share.

In the early thirties, Southern Europeans were not readily accepted by the Australian community; they were often ridiculed because they didn't speak English, because of the way they lived and the food they ate. I like to believe that the behaviour of Australians towards migrants at the time was due to lack of awareness about other countries, their people or customs. Nevertheless a little compassion towards other human beings would have made their transition a little easier. To leave your country and settle in another which is foreign to you demands considerable courage; it is a step into the unknown, it is difficult to predict the effect it will have on one's self and one's family. Feeling unwanted and rejected, Italian migrants were reluctant to mix with their Australian neighbours and keeping to themselves didn't improve their chances of learning the language. Furthermore, a large number of migrants had a very basic formal education, while some were completely illiterate.

I emphasise "Italian migrants" because I was one of them. I understood their problems and shared the hurts of being treated as a second rate citizen in those early years. Other migrants who came from other parts of Southern Europe suffered the same demoralising treatment. It was a common practice at the time for migrants to nominate friends or relatives to come to Australia on condition that they would accept full responsibility for that person for a period of two years. If within that two year period the person in question was not happy the nominee was bound to pay for the return fare to the country of origin. Very few returned home, but many were cruelly exploited by their own countrymen. The new arrivals were virtually in bondage to a person who nominated them until such time as they were able to repay the cost of their fare. This they did by sheer hard labour! These men were given food and

accommodation but very little money. The amount of money deducted from their debt each week was entirely in the hands of the employer/sponsor. They worked seven days a week from daylight till dark, if there were no vegetables to harvest they might get a couple of hours break on Sunday afternoon. The only thing that kept them going was the hope that as soon as their debt was paid they could leave and work for better conditions. My daily routine was similar to theirs, when my father left to start work in the morning I followed. We normally worked for an hour or so then went back to the house for breakfast.

I did all the usual garden work except digging with the spade. On market days we picked and prepared the vegetables for market, then a carrier would collect and transport our goods to market. We didn't have a truck so we had to rely on a carrier. Sometimes he wouldn't get to our place until after dark, and we would have to wait to load our stuff on the truck before we could clean up and have our evening meal. Our carrier was Bill Perry, the son of Alf and Ada Perry who lived about two miles away from our place. Some growers who had their own transport would leave home late in the evening and sleep in their trucks outside the metropolitan markets, others would leave home about 3 a.m. We had to rely on our carrier to purchase our supplies of goods and garden essentials.

My mother would stay home until after breakfast, then she would come and help for a few hours, prepare a light lunch as well as taking care of the usual household chores.

Our accommodation consisted of a large room made of corrugated iron which was where we slept. The living areas was made up of bush logs covered with corn sacks sewed together and white washed with Kalsomine, wooden benches to sit on and dirt floor. I do believe we had a stove to cook on under a bough shed; we drew our water from a nearby well. We did have one luxury - fresh bread delivered twice a week! Five of us shared the sleeping area, the conditions some people lived under in Flynn's Drive were even worse than the ones I have described.

Growing a healthy crop of tomatoes was a full time job, they needed to be dusted and sprayed and fed at regular intervals to maintain a disease free crop. Arsenate of Lead and powdered Sulphur were used liberally for dusting; Bluestone and Black leaf "40" were used as sprays in the appropriate strength. I used to watch my father using the corner of a sugar bag to apply the sulphur by shaking the bag over each plant manually; a small amount in each bag would be sufficient to cover a large patch of tomatoes. The Arsenate of Lead was applied by an implement called a Duster. This consisted of a main cylinder with a tube jutting out of the centre. The operator would secure this apparatus in front of him by sliding his arms through the straps on each side of the duster, easing it onto his shoulders and securing it at the waist behind. The outlet for the Arsenate was rounded at the end towards the ground, when you turned the handle the dust would fall directly on the plant. It always reminded me of a flour sifter. It was very important to do this work when there was no wind, and it was always advisable to wear a mask while applying this lethal dust. The same precaution was necessary when using the liquid sprays, the knapsack sprayer was used for this task. Growers often shared these special appliances as they couldn't afford to buy their own.

Applying a liquid fertiliser was a tedious and back breaking chore. The water was drawn from a well and carried in four gallon kerosene tins, then fed to each plant with a small tin or dipper. Usually there would be three to four thousand plants to feed; the crop could be tomatoes, cauliflower or cabbage. If the grower had the available land, that amount could double. This job had to be done when it was due regardless of the weather pattern. My back aches, even now, just thinking about it.

The main grading of tomatoes for market were No. 1 half ripe, No. 1 ripe. If they were in short supply the red ripe ones were sent to market. Growers who had inferior crops would send "smalls" as another grading but the return was not worth the work involved. The price range at the peak of the season was from three shillings to ten shillings per case. The very early ones would pay one pound. That was really good money, but then you didn't have the quantity. When the supply exceeded the demand, the inferior ones were left unsold, or the price was so low the grower didn't even get enough to cover the commission. By the time he paid the carrier and the cost of the cases, he would be out of pocket.

Even so, on the way home he needed to purchase more cases for the next market day and what about fertilisers, food and petrol? Yet they still had to carry on hoping the next market, or the next crop, would bring better returns!

Some of the tomatoes left in our packing shed after the best were packed for market were better than what I see for sale in the shops today.

Records of WA Goldfields Unions in the WA State Archives

Andrew Gill*

It is sad truism that Trade Unions as institutions and unionists as individuals remain very much on the neglected fringe of 'local history' in Western Australia. The so called 'histories' of the 'People of Perth', of Albany, of Northam, of Subiaco, of the Onslow/Ashburton area in the North-West pay little or no attention to the existence of 'Trade Unions'; indeed the terms 'trade union' or 'union' rarely appear in the index to such studies. These 'local histories' are 'peopled' by ratepayers, local councillors, professionals, local parliamentarians, self-made farmers and business people, but seldom by ordinary workers - a high percentage of whom were and are unionists. The situation in respect to the W.A. Goldfields - for which there is yet to appear a single 'local history' of any substance - is just as bad. The short histories of Yalgoo, Kanowna, Youanmi and Cue mention prospectors and 'pioneers', but not unionists.

In this short note, I wish to draw attention to one section of the W.A. State Archives which may help to fill this gap. All the records to which I shall refer were deposited by the W.A. Industrial Relations Commission. Their reference number is AN 195/3a, 3b or 3c acc. 1101. They are all available to the public without restriction.

In 1901, the W.A. Parliament passed the first of many acts relating to Industrial Arbitration and Conciliation. Under the 1901 Act, for each union which chose to register with the court, approximately four separate files were created :

1. A Registration file. This file included the Union's proposed rules, a list of the names and addresses - often the workplace - of its proposed members, forms giving notice of objection to the registration by other unions or employers. Sometimes there is a copy of the transcript of the application hearing, and the decision of the court. The file may also contain amendments to the union's rules, and references to the cancellation of the union's registration.
2. A file relating to any amendments to the union's rules. This file usually contains copies of the union rules and indications of the amendments. Such amendments might involve an extension to the categories of workers covered by the union and changes in the name or title of the union.
3. Annual returns of the union's Receipts and Expenditure. These figures were entered on a form supplied by the court, and give elementary details of the union's finances.
4. Returns of the names and addresses of the Officers (Secretary etc.), Trustees, and the members of the union. The 1901 Act required that such returns should be submitted biannually in July and December. The 1912 Act reduced this to a single annual return to be made out in December.

In the listing at the end of this note, I have endeavoured to extract from the AN 195/3a, 3b or 3c acc. 1101 listing, all the files falling into the four categories referred to above, which relate to Trade Unions registered with the Arbitration Court which drew a substantial portion of their membership from the area known as the 'Goldfields'. I have used a wide and loose definition

* Andrew Gill is a freelance historian and researcher with a particular interest in labour history.

of the term 'Goldfields': they stretch from Whim Creek in the north-west to Norseman in the south-east; from Kalgoorlie/Boulder in the east to Westonia in the marginal fringes of the eastern wheatbelt. I have also included files relating to the Baddera and Narra Tarra branches of the A.W.A. (Amalgamated Workers Association of Western Australia) which covered the lead mines around Northampton. I have excluded from the listing files dealing with the 'registration' of changes in the unions' officers, or a change in the union's address. The four columns of file numbers correspond to the divisions of the files previously mentioned : column 1: Registration; column 2: Amendment of rules; column 3: Receipts and Expenditure; column 4: Lists of the names and addresses of the Officers, Trustees and Members of the Union.

I have divided the listing into six rough groupings :

1. Unions affiliated with the A.W.A.
2. Unions affiliated with the Westralian Goldfields Federated Miners' Union (WGF MWU)
3. Unions covering occupations associated with the work of 'engine drivers' and 'engineers'
4. 'Other Unions' covering workers on the Goldfields
5. Unions whose application for registration was rejected by the Court.

I have sighted all the files listed in columns 3 and 4 and most of those listed in columns 1 and 2 I was unable to sight a small number of files either because they could be found in its correct sequence; or because the file had been 'Returned to the Department' (ie. the Industrial Commission). Few as these cases are, they relate to the membership lists of three highly significant unions :

Goldfields Amalgamated Surface Workers' Union (1914-1918)
 Kalgoorlie and Boulder Federated Miners' Union (1912-1918)
 Gwalia Branch of the Federated Mining Employees' Association

My efforts to locate these files at the Industrial Commission have been unsuccessful.

The scope of this listing is limited by the files which have survived. Most of the files refer to the years from 1910 through to the mid 1950's. Relatively few Unions registering after 1920 appear in the list. The important exceptions are the A.W.U. (Australian Workers' Union) and the Engineering unions covering workers employed at the Wiluna Gold Mines in the mid to late 1930's.

A word of explanation is necessary concerning the division of the listing and the titles assigned to the unions. Usually the name of the union in the listing is the name used on the file. Where I have judged there was a significant name change to the union with a file, I have endeavoured to indicate this by a cross reference; but I have not attempted to record every name change. This point applied particularly to the AWA and WGF MU. A Union might begin as a branch of the AWA, merge into the WGF MU, and then in early 1912 revert to its existence as a distinct union - as opposed to a branch. These name changes occur within files. If a researcher is interested in the growth of unionism on say the Murchison, then he/she should consult all the files on the Cue/Day Dawn/Meekatharra branches of the AWA and WGF MU - as well as local branches of the unions covering engine drivers.

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
Amalgamated Workers' (Murchison District) Industrial Union of Workers Association	1500/1915 (R)		292/1917 (1916,17,19)	
<u>Branches:</u> Cue		316/1902		79/1917 (OTM: 1917-1918)
Coodingow	378/1913C			
Day Dawn		1479/1915		243/1915 (OTM: 1910-1915) 78/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)
Maninga Marley			265/1915 (1910,11)	249/1912 (OTM: 1911)
Meekatharra	345/1903 (R)			1032/1915 (OTM: 1910-1918)
Mt Magnet			101/1912 (1910-12)	99/1912 (OTM: 1910-1918)
Sandstone	347/1913 (R)			219/1915 (OTM: 1910-1914)
Whim Creek			896/1912	188/1912 (OTM: 1910-1913)
Wiluna	1530/1912 (R)			920/1919 (OTM: 1915-1920)
Youanmi				222/1915 (OTM: 1911-1915) 1469/1917 (OTM: 1917-1918)
*Baddera	1556/1911 (R)			214/1915 (OTM: 1912-1916) 228/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)
*Narra Tarra	1503/1916 (R)		820/1918	821/1918
Westralian Goldfields Federated Miners' Industrial Union Association	2321/1915 (R)	2321/1915 1540/1915	1800/1916 (1913-1918)	104/1917 (Lists Unions in the Association)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
<u>Member Branches of the Association:</u>				
Boorara	(1916, 1918)	1578/1914 83/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)	294/1917	56/1915 (OTM: 1910-1916)
Bullfinch	456/1912 (R)	139/1914		847/1915 (OTM: 1912-1916)
Comet Vale	773/1912 (R)		866/1915 (1912-15) 84/1917 (1916-18)	236/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)
Coolgardie	167/1922 (C)	197/1913	1793/1916	43/1915 (OTM: 1915-1918)
Davyhurst	(1910-13, 1915)		371/1915	1162/1912 (OTM: 1910-1914)
Gwalia & District		168/1913 169/1914	115/1917 (1916-18)	
Higginsville	771/1912 (R)			
Kalgoorlie and Boulder		428/1913 393/1912	357/1917 (1912-1918)	568/1913 (T: 1915-1918) 358/1917 (M:)
Kanowna		442/1912		268/1915 (OTM: 1910-1915) 90/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)
Kookynie	647/1912 (R)		690/1914 (1913)	1013/1914 (OTM: 1913 only)
Laverton & District Marvel Loch		428/1912 441/1912	20/1917 (1910-18)	299/1917 (OTM: 1916-1918)
Menzies & District		179/1913		162/1917 (OTM: 1911-1921)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of: ● Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
<u>Member Branches Cont'd</u> Mt. Morgans			1775/1916 (1910-21)	258/1917 (OTM: 1911-1921)
Mulline		427/1912	2535/1914 (1910-1915)	151/1915 (OTM: 1910-1916) 185/1917 (OTM: 1916-1917)
Norseman		240/1913	32/1917 (1910-18)	31/1917 (OTM: 1910-1918)
Ora Banda				26/1917 (OTM: 1910-1918)
Southern Cross		401/1912	245/1915 (1910-14)	244/1915 (OTM: 1910-1915)
Westonia	764/1914 (R)	215/1916	770/1917 (1917,18)	65/1917 (OTM: 1915-1918)
Wiluna	1136/1914 (R)			119/1915 (OTM: 1911-1914)
Amalgamated Certificated Engine Drivers' Union (ACEDU) <u>Branch: Boulder</u>		1710/1911	267/1912 (1911-13)	
Coolgardie	2280/1914 (C)		255/1912 (1910-14)	
Laverton		1220/1912	200/1912 (1910-30)	196/1912 (OTM: 1910-1912)
Leonora		944/1912	518/1912 (1911-12)	517/1912 (OTM: 1911-1912)
Menzies		778/1912	172/1912 (1911-12)	149/1912 (OTM: 1910-1913)
Murchison		616/1914		
Norseman	2281/1914 (C)		412/1912 (1910-13)	399/1912 (OTM: 1910-1914)
Sandstone		614/1914		
Kalgoorlie Certificated Engine Drivers' Union	181/1922	106/1917 (1910-33)		107/1917 (OTM: 1911-1933)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of: Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australasia. <u>Branches:</u> Sandstone				286/1915
North Murchison		229/1922	311/1917 (1916-23)	194/1917 (OTM: 1916-1924)
Murchison			424/1917 (1916)	734/1916 (OTM: 1910-1916)
Eastern Goldfields	842/1913 (R)	842/1913	92/1915 (1915-55)	88/1917 (OTM: 1913-1955)
Amalgamated Society of Engineers (from 1924/1925 known as Amalgamated Engineering Union, Kalgoorlie Branch)	1803/1915 (R)		2046/1915 (1910-1951)	1776/1916 (OTM: 1910-1953)
Amalgamated Engineering Union, Murchison Branch			88/1949 (1948 only)	89/1948 (OTM: 1949, 1951)
AEU, Wiluna Branch	48/1935 (R)		24/1937 (1936-46)	18/1937 (OTM: 1936-1944)
Amalgamated Society of Carpenters' and Joiners', Boulder Branch	1626/1911			
ASCJ, Kalgoorlie Branch			1618/1916 (1910-35)	143/1917 (OTM: 1910-1936)
ASCJ, Kalgoorlie Branch	61/1935 (R)		78/1936 (1936-48)	6/1937 (OTM: 1936-1950)
Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union, Kalgoorlie Branch			- SEE: W.A. Amalgamated Butchers Union of Workers, Perth - Eastern Goldfields Branch.	
AWU Westralian Goldfields Mining Branch 1943)		880/1918 (R)	880/1918	929/1919 (1919-45) 204/1920 (OTM: 1919-1943)
AWU, Pastoral and Agricultural Union of Workers	14/1923 (R)		20/1924 (1924-40)	16/1925 (OTM: 1924-1940)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of: Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
AWU Westralian Branch - Road Construction Workers			68/1940 (1939-40)	67/1940 (OTM: 1938-1940)
AWU - Westralian Branch	81/1940 (R)	34/1941	29/1943 (1942-60)	21/1942 (OTM: 1940-1957)
Cleaners and Caretakers' Union - Eastern Goldfields Branch	28/1923 (R)	28/1923		
Coastal & Eastern Goldfields Government Water, Sewerage and Drainage Employees' Union				199/1917 (OTM: 1916-1963)
Coolgardie Federated Miners' Union	141/1920 (R)		69/1921 (1921-45)	22/1921 (OTM: 1920-1945)
Eastern Goldfields Amalgamated Tailors' and Tailoresses' Union		269/1922	1643/1916 (1910-1947)	193/1917 (OTM: 1916-1948)
Eastern Goldfields Barmaids' and Barmen's Union	915/1920 (R) 398/1914 (R)			1528/1915 (OTM: 1915 only)
Eastern Goldfields Breweries Employees' Union (AWA)	483/1903 (R)		1828/1916 (1910-1945)	
Eastern Goldfields Carter's Union	19/1914 (R)			1529/1915 (OTM: 1918 only)
Eastern Goldfields Dairy Employees' Union		867/1918		
Eastern Goldfields Municipal and Road Board Labourers' Union	182/1922 (R)		56/1917 (1910-1953)	1835/1916 (OTM: 1910-1954)
Eastern Goldfields Operative Bakers' Union		1236/1911	222/1917 (1917-1923)	221/1917 (OTM: 1917-1924)
Eastern Goldfields Painters' and Paperhangers' Union			427/1917	428/1917 (OTM: Dec.1916)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of: Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
Eastern Goldfields Shop Assistants' and Warehouse Employees' Union			1889/1915 (1912-1952)	1524/1915 (OTM: 1912-1954)
Eastern Goldfields Water Supply Workers' Industrial Union of Workers - SEE: Coastal and Eastern Goldfields Government Water, Sewerage and Drainage Employees' Union.				
Federated Clerks' Union of Australia Industrial Union of Workers, W.A.	1461/1916 (R)	1461A/1916		268/1918
Federated Moulders' (Metals) - Goldfields Branch	713/1920 (R)		116/1921 (1920-1928)	114/1921 (OTM: 1921-1928)
Federated Society of Boilermakers' and Iron Ship Builders - Kalgoorlie Branch	1273/1912 (R)			
Goldfields Amalgamated Surface Workers' Union			147/1917 (1916-1918)	172/1916 (T: 1914-1916) 1821/1916 (M:)
Goldfields Bread Carters' Union	216/1910	216/1910	59/1948 (1946-49)	184/1917 (OTM: 1918-1952)
Goldfields Clerical Workers' Union	1355/1911 (R)			
Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union	1449/1911 (R)		1069/1915	1068/1915 (OTM: 1911-1915)
Goldfields Household Workers' Union	379/1913 (C)			67/1912 (OTM: June 1912)
Goldfields Iron and Sheet Metal Workers' Labourers Union			448/1912 (OTM: 1911-1912)	
Goldfields Typographical Union	519/1921 (C) 715/1912 (R)	715/1912	1834/1916 (1910-1922)	18/1917 (OTM: 1910-1920)

Name of Union	Registration (R) Cancellation (C)	Amendment of Rules	Receipts and Expenditure	Lists of: Officers (O) Trustees (T), Members (M)
Goldfields Water Supply Industrial Union of Workers SEE ALSO: Coastal and Eastern Goldfields Government Water, Sewerage and Drainage Employees Union				122/1915 (OTM: 1914-1915)
Hospital and Asylum Employees'	823/1920 (R)		979/1921 (1921-46)	1003/1921 (OTM: 1921-1945)
Hotel, Club, Caterers' Tearooms and Restaurant Employees' Union - Goldfields Branch.	685/1920	685/1920		
Kalgoorlie and Boulders Plumbers' and Sheet Metal Workers' Union				35/1917 (OTM: 1910-1921)
Kalgoorlie Electric Tramway Workers' Union	779/1912 (R)		737/1918 (1912-1953)	96/1917 (OTM: 1912-1952)
Metropolitan Hospital and Kindred Institutions Industrial Union - Eastern Goldfields Branch	868/1916 (C)			713/1915 (OTM: Dec 1914 only)
W.A. Amalgamated Butchers Union of Workers, Perth - Eastern Goldfields Branch	1614/1912 (R)		558/1916	521/1916 (OTM: 1914-1953)
W.A. Carters' and Drivers' Industrial Union of Workers - Kalgoorlie Branch.	187/1920		77/1922	71/1922

“I’m a poet....”*

Geoff Goodfellow

I am a poet, I’ve made a living from poetry since 1984. I left school at 15. I’m not an academic by any stretch of the imagination and I started writing poetry basically as a way to express myself and express the political beliefs I’ve got and to talk about issues that I think are important to me and if the issues are important to me I think that they’re probably important to a whole lot of other people.

In 1986 I published my first book of poetry No collars no cuffs which is poetry about working class people in Australia. That’s now gone into its seventh edition. Bowtie and Tails came out in 1988 and No Ticket No Start came out last October and has sold nearly 5,000 copies. Its amazing sales for Australian poetry and I think its amazing because its poetry that can be understood by anyone whether they have a Bachelor of Arts or Master of Arts degree or whether they be a road worker, digging holes in the road. I try and write poetry that is simple yet can carry complex messages but is written in a way that makes it quite easy to understand. It’s carefully contrived simplicity I suppose. I write about things that I see, write about things that I know about, about the things that sort of send shivers up my spine or things that make me feel like I want to crash something or change something. I guess that most working-class people have very little power and very little opportunity to exercise power. I think that most working class people see power more in terms of a physical thing that than the power of language.

As we go into the ‘90’s I think its more and more apparent that working-class people need to develop skills to be able to verbalise their needs, not only organisers of Trade Union movements but rank and file, shop floor people. The rank and file need to be able to articulate their needs and concerns to their shop stewards and to union organisers to be able to effectively bring about change. Whilst the average rank and filer mightn’t have much opportunity to create that change, they can set the climate for that change by articulating what their needs and concerns are and they’re the sorts of things that interest me.

In 1990 I was awarded a Community Writers Fellowship to work with the Construction, Mining and Energy Union in South Australia and it caused a furore in South Australia. The General Manager of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry came out and gave me a big slagging in the Press saying that the workers had their change to learn poetry at school, it’s a bit late now. In my own case, I had my chance to learn poetry at school and I never took the chance to learn as it didn’t interest me, because it wasn’t relevant to me. It didn’t speak to me in a language that I understood and it wasn’t contemporary poetry - it was poetry from the Dead Poets Society, poets that had been dead for 150 years. Talking about life in another country

* Geoff Goodfellow is a former building worker whose poetry reflects both his experience as a worker and his commitment to unionism. In 1991 he visited Perth as a guest of the WA Branch of the CMEU, with whom he previously spent a year as poet-in-residence. This article is an edited version of a speech given at the Trade Union Training Authority in Perth in June 1991.

and life in another planet, it might as well have been. I think that most of those building workers, construction workers and factory workers that I would speak to now, when they hear that they are going to have a poet come and address them in the workplace, they feel uncomfortable. It's very confrontational for them because their perceptions of poetry are of the poetry that was taught to them at school. So I think the education system has got a lot to answer for. That is starting to change now and there are probably about 200 schools in Australia that would teach my work quite regularly on a weekly basis and there would be 100 schools in Adelaide that would have me in through the year and other schools interstate would have me in. So gradually people like myself, contemporary writers, are infiltrating the hallowed halls of the educational institutions and showing people that their needs and their concerns and their every day lives are important, that they can be written about and that personal experience can be valued.

In working on construction sites, I've listened, I've watched and seen what the workers do and I've tried to record this as accurately as possible. Some of the poems mightn't particularly answer what the problems are but they lay the problems out and I think that is the job of writers and poets, not necessarily to try and find the answers but to look at what the problems are and to set those problems on the page so that other people who are perhaps more influential, more able to affect change, can use the poems as a guide to doing things.

One of the things that has been important to me is to try and politicise the workforce and make a lot of these young workers who are in their 20's and 30's much more aware that they need to be political and that they have got the opportunity to bring about some change. There are a lot of people out there who don't think of themselves as having any power at all and are just prepared to sit back and not worry about attending union meetings. If you go to a Union meeting after hours, there is generally only a handful of people there. Only the old staunch diehards are there and may be if there was new blood there, new things might happen and I guess that with courses like Labour Studies courses, that are operating around Australia, with courses like Australian Studies that are operating in schools and work education courses that are operating in schools, perhaps young people will become more politicised. I think that they need to be more politicised and the type of poetry that I write can make them think about what the union movement has done or is doing. Quite often I think that when someone goes in and gets a union card, pays the union dues and walks out the office \$100 lighter, with a slip of paper in their hand, they don't think that they've got very much and because of that they're really dark on their union because they don't think that they're getting anything. I went to give a reading on a construction site in Adelaide and just prior to arriving there, a brick had fallen 40 feet from a ledge and hit a bloke on the head. The bloke was knocked out. He was lucky. He had a blood bucket on his head, he was taken to hospital and he was going to be in hospital for a week then back on the job. When I walked into the room and saw the sea of faces that were in that room, they were all young blokes 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and not many heads older than that, I started to think "Why are all these blokes so young?" and I thought the reason they are so young is because people that are my age, most of them have got severe back injuries that preclude them from working in this heavy industrial market. They've got rods in their hips and knees and their shoulders and they've had to get out of that industry and go and

do something else. I thought these young blokes often when they pay their union dues, probably don't think that only a few years ago you didn't have to have a blood bucket on your head and a pair of steel capped boots on your feet. I thought if I can write a poem about that scenario then it might make a lot of these young workers think a little bit more about how the whole deal works.

So I wrote this poem called "The Shop Steward Said"

The Shop Steward said - do y' run away from a fight in the pub

I don't

and won't

And I won't run

from a blue with the boss

Now there were chippies

on the slip this morning

Cutting timber

Off cuts with nails sticking out

falling to the slab

And oxy torches sending down

showers of slag

But no red flags put up

No sign to say "Workmen Above"

Are you blokes walking around

with blinkers on?

Or what?

The young bloke that copped

a brick on the scone

from forty feet up yesterday

Got himself knocked out

If the Union hadn't had

safety helmets enforced in '72

he wouldn't have a head

Now you mate, yes you,
your head wouldn't a popped out
till after '72

But your not blind

or deaf or dumb

You come running to me
like a school boy when the Liftman
was gunna throw y' down the shaft

You'se young blokes

have gotta understand it

as it is

If you think anyone is in

a dangerous position

Just stop, pull up

You won't be canned

You see the Leading Hand,

the Foreman or me

and from there,

we'll direct the flow".

So, in 1972, and they start to immediately think "Oh, 1972. Blood buckets came in. Shit". And

if they can start to think about those sorts of things, they can think what their father's struggle has been and what their grandfather's struggle has been and what their uncle's struggle has been and I think that its a good way of getting the message through. I think its necessary propaganda because industries like the building industry can't operate without a "No ticket, no start" policy. It's important that workers realise what Unions have done for them over a long period of time and that they recognise that they've got to stand up and start to fight again especially with Liberal governments and enterprise bargaining threatening.

Another thing that I've noticed is the fact that gatemen on building sites have all got one thing in common - usually L4, L5 discs are ruptured and they are working as gatemen because they're being looked after by their union. They have been put into that position, which is a fairly passive sort of a job waving a flag and allowing trucks to come in and got out and hand out hardhats to people who come on site. I think that some of those young workers need to realise that the Unions have looked after those men who have suffered industrial accidents and kept them in a job where they are amongst the same people where they're talking the same language as they've talked all their working lives, where they're seeing the same faces that they've seen for the last 20 or 30 years. Young workers need to see that unions do good for people and don't just discard people like employers discard people, throwing them on the scrap heap and replacing them with another younger, fitter model.

After speaking to a number of gatemen around Australia who are all suffering with those L4, L5 disc injuries, which are the major discs that go in heavy lifting, I wrote this poem called "The Gateman" -

He wanted to tell me
 about the one that got away
 And it wasn't a fish or a woman
 But a barrow full of mud
 bound for a brickies board
 'I was going down the slope y' see
 Too much and the bastard's got away
 She's fishtailed like -
 But shit, I'm nearly 60 mate -
 I couldn't pull it up
 But there were no medals
 for trying either
 Just a lump in my groin
 as big as Fenech's fist
 And when I hit the hospital
 The Doctors found I'd blown
 two discs to boot
 "Too old mate"
 But who's to blame
 She's a young 'uns game
 An old bloke
 isn't an even money chance
 But this gateman's job,
 you can bet
 It's just my speed.

That poem started off with my having a yarn on a building site in Adelaide with a bloke by the

name of John. I said, "How long have you been a gateman mate" and he said, "A couple of years. I used to be a labourer". I said, "Where were you labouring?" He said, "I was labouring on the TAFE site in White Square". I said, "My brother Bluey used to be a labourer there". "I used to work with fuckin' Bluey - how's Bluey going? Is he still finding the fuckin' winner? Wah wah wah." We had this conversation about Bluey and he said, "Last time I saw Bluey he tipped me into a pub, I was blind fuckin' drunk. I never would have got home. I probably would have been pinched by the fuckin' coppers". This bloke is a typical type of building worker the same as what my brother is. Having the chat with this bloke, he never said, "I've got a lump in my groin as big as Fenech's fist" but he said, "I've got a lump in my groin like that mate" and when I started to think about him a few weeks later after a talk to a gateman in Sydney and a gateman in Melbourne, I thought, "he had a lump in his groin like that" and I thought what's that, what's something contemporary that workers can pick up on? Everyone knows who Fenech is, just as they knew who Lionel Rose was, just as they knew who Mohammed Ali was. Fenech's a little bloke with a little fist and a little lump which is a big lump and there's the connection point. What I'm trying to do is talk to them in their own language.

He wanted to tell me about the one that got away. It wasn't a fish, and that's worked out because there's always blokes telling you about the fish that got away, or the woman that got away. I thought OK it wasn't a fish or a woman but a barrow full of mud, not a barrows full of mortar, (a bloke on a building site would never say I was pushing a barfly of mortar). I was pushing it through the site when it suddenly started to escape my grip, a barfly of mud bound for a brickies' board. "I was going down the slope you see, too much, and the bastard's got away". Basically what I am is a thief, I am a thief of people's language. I can look at things and I can hear things and I tune in to help people use language. When I'm wandering through those sites, I'm listening to what's being said. I might not always use what's being said but it's stored up there in my mini-computer or whatever it is so that I can re-cycle it. I'm trying to re-cycle the experience and the language of the working class so that a bloke who has been labouring for all of his working life can understand it just the same as the PhD at Murdoch Uni or Western Australian Uni. Maybe they won't understand it as well as the labourer, because they might have difficulty with some of the terms like "mud". They might think "fuckin mud" but its "fuckin mortar" so they have to be educated too.

Poetry also gives the ideal opportunity to go into the work site and to talk to blokes about issues that are important to them apart from their working life. It's not just their working life that's important to them, what they do outside of work is important to them too. Look at this book Violence - directions for Australia published by the Institute of Criminology in Canberra. It was produced after a series of forums held right around Australia during 1990. They had keynote speakers in every state of Australia looking at why Australia is such a violent society and what we can do to address that violence. I'll read out some of the facts that are contained in the executive summary of this book because I think they are important:- "Violent offenders in Australia are overwhelmingly male, primarily between the ages of 18 and 30 and predominantly from blue collar backgrounds". Now if you're looking at 18-30 age group, blue collar workers, you're looking at building workers. On the other hand, "victims of

violence most commonly tend to fall into two broad categories - men who became engaged in altercations with other men” - a fancy way of saying “pub fights”, “and women and children who suffer at the hands of men with whom they have been living.”

So the wives, the de-factos and the kids are copping a slap around the head and the kids are hiding in the wardrobe when the old man gets home elephant’s trunk. So I fed these facts out to a journalist with the “Age” newspaper in Melbourne and he ran with it. He actually took the trouble to get out of bed during his holiday. He said to me he’d heard me at the Union office, the BWIU office in Melbourne and he said, “Next time you come to Melbourne I want to write about you but I don’t want to write about you reading to a group of trade unionists in the BWIU office because I think that’s a lot of bullshit, but I’m prepared to go onto a building site and observe you in front of a group of workers”. He said, “If I think that what you’re doing is valid and that there’s a response then I’ll give you some coverage”. I rang him up and I said, “I’m going to be there on Monday morning at 7am at Collins Street” and he said, “I’m on holidays” and I said, “Mate you said you would be there” and he said, “Ok you’ve got me - I’ll come off holidays”. So he came in on his own time and he observed me in front of a group of 250 people and he saw that what I did got a response from those men. They were all non-believers when they walked into the reading but by the time they walked out they were believers, they were believers in poetry and believes in the notion that poetry could make them think, could open them up to things and could talk about things that they know about life; getting pissed every night, having a blue in the front bar of the pub or seeing someone get barrellled in a hotel, about domestic violence. All those things are things that they know about.

Here’s a poem called “Trying to Forge a Union” - this is a poem that I don’t read a lot on building sites because I didn’t really write it for building workers. I started to think about how enterprise bargaining would effect building workers. I still can’t get a notion of how it is going to affect them and as hard as I try to think how it would work and as many questions as I ask within that Union, no-one could give me a simple answer. I started to think “Ok now I can see all these little factories out in Enfilade in South Australia. “What’s going to happen in these places? The boss is going to get these new Australian workers who are there and they’re going to fuckin pluck ‘em, pull em into the office, make ‘em feel important, slag on the other blokes that are out there, build up their egos, they’re going to suck these people in. It’s metal workers and factory workers who are the people that are going to be most affected by this and I started to try and gerry up this scenario in my head of how it would be and I wrote this poem called “Trying to Forge a Union”

The New Right now seek
the right
to make no left turns
compulsory

don’t turn to your union
turn to us -
was what they tried to sell to Sam

We’ll do a deal
get you stitched up
and pay you very liberally

and at least you'll still have work

in this period of economic
downturn
it's obvious
we'll have to chop some heads
and we've been watching yours -
but Sam
from where we sit
you look a real safe bet

and obviously
that's why we've chosen
to talk today

we'd love to do a deal
with you
get rid of Pete and Bob
and see you set up
to reap rewards
eh Sam

now we realise you're a union man
but this could be your
enterprise
you'd be the boss -
and with both those militants
thrown out as scrap
we'd all grow productive
together

those three kids of yours
the mortgage and that car
on the drip
they must be a worry
at times I know
I mean I've got three
kids myself

but when things get tough
you've got to think of numero uno
eh Sam

but of course we'll all keep
tightlipped about this meeting
eh Sam

and naturally you can expect
a set of keys for those nights
and weekends you'll be spending here
eh Sam

and as long as your price is right
the job and keys are yours
eh Sam

so sneak in early with your price
and I'll draw a contract tomorrow
eh Sam

SAM EH SAM?

So I guess there is more than one way to kill a cat. I don't read that poem on building sites because I don't think its relevant on building sites, but I think it would be relevant poem to read to a group of factory workers who are going to be manipulated in that way. The whole poem is designed around that sneaky notion because that's the sneaky way that the shylocks are going to operate.

When I started working for CMEU in Adelaide I didn't understand the politics of the BLF and the CMEU and the difference and that presented a big problem because I walked into a Union office asking questions of the CMEU officials about why the BLF reacted to them the way they did and no one wanted to tell me anything. They didn't know who I was, or what I thought, or how I ticked over so no-one was feeding me with any information, so I thought if these fuckin CMEU aren't going to tell me I'm going to go and ask the BLF why they won't fuckin talk. So I went down to Rundle Mall where there were a group of BLF blokes who had gone on strike and I said, "My name's Geoff Goodfellow and I'm from the CMEU, I'm the poet, I'm going to be writing a book of poetry about building workers. Wonder if you could tell me what's the story between you and CMEU?" "Fuck off". Now, I can't take a hint, I can tell you, and I said, "Listen mate, what I'm doing is writing a book of poetry about building workers and I don't care if the fuckin worker is a tradesmen or a fuckin labourer or what he is, I just want the fuckin truth". "Fuck off". He told me to "Fuck off" about twenty times I suppose and I just kept hanging in there and pumping him questions. There were a group of about 20 first up and only one stayed and the others went further up the mall and sat on other seats and this bloke continually told me "fuck off" because he had the crow's disease. I kept asking him questions and out of what he told me, besides the "fuck off", was the fact that they were working 12 hours a day, they were expected to work seven days a week and that everyone was getting fuckin divorced, everyone was bluing with their missus. I started to think about my own brother who works on building sites and who drinks too much, who slaves his guts out all day, then fuckin goes in for two quick ones and stays for 10 or 12 or 15. I was thinking about how the mortgage payments have gone from 10% to 17% and those people who are out there working their guts out, getting sucked in by smart arse car salesmen into buying the big GT HO with fat wheels and everything. A lot of those blokes who work on building sites, they'll get sucked into buying the cars that they really can't afford. They'll think that the job that they're going to be working on is going to go on and on and on and they'll sign up for finance for 4 years when the job is going to go for 12 months and then after 12 months, they've got Custom Credit knocking on their door. The tow truck's out the front and the big bullhead's out there that's going to hook their cars up onto the back of the tow truck. I mean, these dramas happen every day of the week. As much as we work for that overtime to get the extra whack in the pocket we finish up paying. I was a workaholic as a manual worker. I paid the price myself so I know something about the problem of working extremely long hours and seeing marriages fall to pieces. I've got connection points there and I thought as much as we work for extra pay that we put in the pocket, we pay a price and sometimes that price can't be measured in terms of actual dollars and cents but it has to be measured in terms of lifestyle. I thought there is a poem there - so the poem's called "Overtime".

It's a hard earn on the tools
but y' don't see any young blokes

give a Saturday away he told me
not now

these young blokes with mortgages
they're fighting to survive

they need that extra day
but even then they're beat

just look at 'em mate
they're tired
y' can see it in their eyes
and in the drag of steel-capped boots
fair dinkum
they're fighting to survive

they 're fighting with their bosses
and they're fighting with their wives
and what the banks don't get
solicitors do

they're pressured all the time

the bosses want completion dates
to come in undertime
and if they won't work overtime -
all the time
its an odds-on bet they won't
be working anytime

and all the time they're scheming
how to buy some time

but there is no time

they're paying for divorces now
in overtime.

I don't think you have to be too smart to apply that to being a doctor or being a factory worker or a garbo or a school teacher or a police officer or a trade unionist. I mean, I don't think I've met a Union official that has only been married once yet. If there are any present please step forward because I'd like to know the secret so I can write a poem about it and show other people. I don't know very many trade union organisers who go home from work at 5 o'clock and know their children. I mean, they spend their whole life trying to sell a quality of life for other people and yet they fuck their own up. Everywhere I go, I keep asking the same question and I get the same answer. So its a problem, its not a problem that's very easy to address because there are not many people who want to commit their lives to one cause I suppose. But its not a job, its a commitment. And who pays the price - the person giving their time pays the price, but its not only them, its their wife and their children and then the spin-off social problems from that too, it just runs right through the whole society but it seems to be more apparent with trade union officials. And perhaps with politicians too. I haven't talked to a lot of politicians, most of them are too scared of me because they think I'll write something about them.

The guts of what I'm trying to say is that we all know what the problems are, we all think about those sorts of things at the time. But I think a poem can compress situations like that and it can open up ways for people looking into it to think, "what can we do to rectify this?" I don't think that every Union organiser should have to have 3 wives and 7 children and maybe they should be allowed to have one wife and a couple of kids and a decent quality of life. And the workers, I don't think the workers ever think that they're paying any sort of price for the amount of work that they're doing, that seven days a week, or that six days a week. I know with my brother who has to jump into bed even if he comes home sober, he'll still jump into bed at 8.30 at night because he's got to get up at 5 o'clock if he wants to have breakfast to hit the site and start work at 6.

I've talked to building workers in Sydney who were actually sleeping in their fuckin cars in the middle of the city. That's outrageous.

Working on those sites, the number of migrant workers I saw was just incredible and I thought it would be great to have a poem that migrant workers could hook into and I've written this poem. I was asked to write this poem too, so I was helped along the way by the Arts Officer at the Trades and Labour Council in Adelaide to write a poem about terrazzo workers. But it was a bit like Dial a Poem. When I went to school we had a teacher in Grade 7, Mrs. Anderson. She used to write up on the blackboard, "A Day at the Beach with Nana" and tell you to write a composition or a poem about that. I was really poor - we never had a Nana - that's a good line isn't it? I did really have one but I didn't have two; I used to make out that I didn't have one and couldn't write about that. When the Arts Officer came in and asked me to write a poem about the Terrazzo workers I thought, (it's a bit like Mrs. Anderson at school), I didn't want to be told what to do by a Trade Union Arts Officer. I wanted to write poems that I wanted to write - I wanted to write poems that I had some feeling for and some passion for, but I said, "OK, well I need to go and talk to some terrazzo workers", and she said, "They don't speak very good English". And I said, "Fuckin neither do I - let me at 'em". And she said, "Well they're all old people and we don't want to bother them". Well I didn't want to drop my head down and let her see the bald patch - so I told her I couldn't write about them unless I know about them - I've got to feel for them, I've got to touch em, smell em, feel em, know em. She said "We've got their oral history, we did this Art and Working Life project which recorded the oral histories of 3 Italians". I thought I can read that and then I can go and spew to her that I didn't get enough from that and that I need to go and talk to these workers and I can go and present a case. But after starting to read the first page of one of the oral histories, I came across the line, "we work head down bum up". As soon as I read that line I pulled up. I've never worked "head down bum up" in my life. This brother here, he's never worked "head down bum up" either and the other brother, he's never worked "head down bum up". But we've all worked "head down arse up" and that's the Australian way of saying it - "head down, arse up and into it". I started to think about the cultural differences between Australian workers. And I thought, fair enough, there's a difference, so I started to think back to when I was 17 years of age.

When I was 17 I used to pump concrete into holes in the ground and I worked with these two

old Italian blokes, Vince and Sammy. Vince and Sammy used to trowel it out and by the middle of the afternoon we'd finish up with a swimming pool but at smoko time they'd pull their sandwiches out and I'd pull my sandwiches out and we'd sit down together, maybe on the back verandah of the house that we were putting the pool in. We'd eat our sandwiches and I'd try and talk to them and they'd try and talk to me. They'd probably only lobbed out here maybe 5 or 6 years before that so we found difficulty conversing because we were so different. My sandwiches were half inch thick with a bit of fritz and a bit of dead horse squirted on top and their sandwiches were thick as a Sydney telephone book and had stuff in the middle that I'd never seen before! This was the early 60's. There weren't any continental deli's then. It wasn't just the sandwiches that were different, it was also the way that we looked at our work. I mean they were very proud people. Concrete workers and the terrazzo workers and plasterers, they've got to have an eye for a job. They've got to know that its all squared up. You can see 'em falling in love with what they're doing.

I was there because it was a good whack in the sky rocket and I could put plenty of petrol in the BSA 650 and, you know, maybe even buy a pair of fur lined flying boots and be a real hoon. I could be an extra special bodgie. For me, work was a four letter word and it started with "F" but work for them as a three letter word and it started with "A". It was "art". The sorts of things that we talked about during those smokos was so different. I was much younger of course, they were married blokes with children and they were probably old enough to be my father. But we talked about different things and we seemed to be poles apart.

I continued to read the oral histories of these 3 Italian blokes and all the time I was hearing the voices of Vince and Sammy and I thought Vince and Sammy probably laid terrazzo just as well as they could screed concrete into a swimming pool. And I thought I don't really need to go and meet these Italian workers because I have met them. The fact that I'd met them 24 years ago didn't mean that it had been erased from my memory. I have a very strong recollections of sitting down with them and looking at those sandwiches and looking at the stuff in the middle and trying to work out what it was. I guess it's 'cause I've got a curious nature, I could remember their voices. I've always been a mimicker of peoples' voices. Ever since I was a young child I've been able to listen to someone, it doesn't matter if he was a Pom or a Scot or an Irishman or an Italian or a Greek, if I listen to him for 5 minutes I can take him off and I can probably do his facial expression and his hand expressions too. I mean they are much more expressivetalkers than what we are. Australians tend to put their hands in their pockets and talk and the Italian will wave their arms around and make hand signals all over the place. I thought, I don't need to go to the Union office now. I can get the fine points of the terrazzo business from these 12 pages that I've got, but I already know the people. So I wrote this poem called "Old Ways, old days" -

If you're talking terrazzo
you're talking Italian
don't you worry about that

terrazzo
as Italian as mortadella -
so beautiful you wish sometimes

you could eat it
 but no-one eats from it
 today
 not from the labour anyway -
 just from the table top
 yea Alfresco in Rundle Street
 they're got them
 & sometimes the feel & desire
 lures me there to sip short black
 but always I think of the old days -
 head down bum up
 hand polishing 'til my fingers bled
 no men won't do that now

I always loved my art
 but like so many other men -
 I kept my secrets

& now -
 terrazzo to terracotta
 Trieste to Tranmere
 that's the way things go

ah the old days
 jealous of my woman
 jealous of my job
 both of them holding the eye
 like a Mona Lisa

now I go to bed with my
 wife and aching back
 dream of terrazzo -
 knowing that everything must change
 everything has its price
 & only my work
 can survive.

That poem is published in one of my books as "Vecemodi, Vece Johnny" because I think its important that it's published in Italian as well.

I had a friend that was an English teacher in South Australia, her name is Marissa and she was an Italian woman and I asked her if she could translate it for me. She said, "Oh I think so" so she took it home. She had difficulty with it, so she went and got her mum. So her and her mum sat down and they translated it for me and they thought that they had it pretty right. Now I'm a bit of an extrovert at times, I'm also very shy at times. I can be shy and retiring or I can make myself as extroverted as I like and make myself quite manic. I shop at the central market in Adelaide every Saturday morning and I have 5 Italian butchers in the butcher shop and its a performance in there quite often. I'll read a poem in the butcher shop with 20 people in the butcher shop and flip the butchers' out. I have a lot of fun with them. I took the translated poem into the butchers and showed the butcher mid-week, when there were no customers there and he said, "No, no, no, this wrong, this wrong Geoff, this bloody woman she don't bloody know what she bloody talk about. This bloody word here is bloody wrong". And so he took

it away and mucked around with it with one of his mates and then they brought it back and then it went back to the school teacher and she took it back to her mum and eventually we got this translation which amongst a group of Italians is thought to be a pretty accurate representation. I felt quite confident then to publish it in the book and I felt quite confident because there are a lot of migrant workers out on those building sites, I want the book to be used by those migrant workers, I want the migrant workers to recognise that their contribution in the labour market in Australia is important. I don't want to intimidate them with this poem and that was one of my concerns when I wrote it; are they going to think that I'm having a go at them and taking them off because I read it in an Austro-Italian voice? Most of them can cop it sweet, some of them can't, if they know me they can, If they don't know me and I hit em straight off with it, sometimes they might think I'm having a go, but I think generally they realise that I'm fair dinkum. What I want those blokes to do is to buy the book, take it home and read this version to their kids because there is quite a good chance that they won't be able to read English. I think that this book could be an ideal way to show Italians who are learning English on the job. I think that this could be included in education programmes in the workplace and I think that they could see how translations can work. I think that they can take it home, they can read it in Italian to their kids, they can then get the kids to read the English version to them and I think that then it opens up some dialogue between the kids and the parents.

So I guess there are lots of reasons behind the types of things that I do. And the same with the meanings in the poem. I try to hit a site and present a reading to workers that will have some level of just pure entertainment, where I'll be able to actually perform for them and give them some enjoyment. But its layered, so that there are levels of meaning in these poems that will become evident to them if they start to understand them and maybe if they need to hear them two times or three times or maybe they need to see them on the page, to recognise that there are levels of meaning there. I'll just try to pick an example - "I always love my Art" - what do we mean by that? It's his work, his work is his art and that's the suggestive way of saying it.

I theorise about those sorts of things, I dream about those sorts of things, I don't know how to prove em but I can put em forward as ideas from what I do because what I do is think a bit I suppose. I was in the union office one day and I had my feet up on the table and one of the union bosses came in and he says 'Get your fuckin feet off the desk' and I said "Get fucked I'm flat out - I'm working". And I was staring out of the window. And I mean I was staring out the window into the trees in South Terrace. I was working my fucking guts out, my head was spinning at 100 mph and for me that was working flat out. I don't have to have a pick in my hand or a jackhammer, you know. That's working flat out for someone too but just thinking about things for me is working and I guess that the nature of how people work has got to be considered too and some of those trade union officials have got to think that not everyone needs to be physically moving and doing things to be working flat out. There the sorts of things that I think about when I'm working and when I'm trying to analyse what does go on in amongst workers and the way the world revolves.

NOTES

Goldfields Centenary History Project

The Kalgoorlie Trades Hall Centenary Restoration Appeal is a labour movement based project aiming to ensure that the contribution of workers to the development of the Eastern Goldfields is not forgotten. John Gandini, President of the WA Trades and Labor Council, is Chairperson of the Appeal. Here John provides his own view of what the project is about and the motives for it.

One of the amazing things about the centenary of the Eastern Goldfields is just how much labour history it reveals - or hides, depending upon who's telling the story. As soon as you think about the labour side of the story a whole number of incidents spring to mind and any of them would be significant enough to require being retold in their own right. Just consider the following:

- * The Separation for Federation League in the Eastern - Goldfields - Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie and surrounding towns - telling the conservative interests at the coast led by Premier John Forrest at the turn of the century: either we all join the Federation together as Western Australia, or the Goldfields will break away and join the rest of Australia without you;
- * Welsh nationalists seeking to raise finance for their fight for independence from England, investing funds in the Sons of Gwalia mine at Leonora. Subsequently the surrounding settlement became a "little Italy", with the forebears of many Western Australians of Italian extraction living and working there;
- * the first Trades Union and Labour Congress at Coolgardie in 1899 launching the ALP in WA;
- * British and Australians viciously rioting against their Italian and Yugoslav workmates in 1934 as the depression finally bit into the gold mining industry;
- * the never ending contest between police and miners over "gold stealing" as those who produced the unbelievable wealth sought alternate means to get their fair share;
- * the widespread participation in and support for cultural and sporting activities that impacted the rest of the state and at times the world;
- * the prominent Labor politicians and trade unions who had their origins in the rich political cauldron of this area in the first half century after Europeans found gold.
- * the treatment of the areas original inhabitants, the Aborigines - past and present evidence suggesting that this will be nothing of which we can be proud;
- * the clasped female and male hands in the symbol of labour unity on the banner of the Tailor and Tailoress Union;

These and other snippets of labour history on the Eastern Goldfields cry out to be investigated and recorded. To this end the ALP State Executive and Trades and Labour Council have jointly launched the Kalgoorlie Trades Hall and Labour History project, planned to span 1991 the Australian centenary of the ALP, 1992 the centenary of Europeans finding gold at Coolgardie and 1993 the Kalgoorlie - Boulder centenary.

The first part of the project - a practical and worthy commemoration of the ALP's centenary restoration of WA's last remaining Trades Hall, is already part completed. It is intended that this will be a living museum of labour history - available as a window into the past but also as an ongoing functioning meeting place for the ALP, trade unions and other parts of the labour movement. At a weekend function on August 11th, Goldfields and other visitors were able to visit the, as yet, empty Trades Hall and see the results of the fine paint and woodwork restoration carried out so well by the workers involved under the meticulous guidance of architects Ken and John Barrett.

Arrangements are now underway to have a labour movement history of the Eastern Goldfields written, supplemented by a number of specialist pamphlets, during 1992 and 1993. The possibility of a video history presentation is also being investigated.

One of the highlights of the project so far has been the initiative by CMEWU organiser Joe McDonald who has arranged to have two badges made. The first, depicting three intertwined "eights" from the original eight hour day campaigns has sold out the first minting of a thousand. The second shows a mine poppet head and the clasped hands of labour unity.

Much still remains to be done and a great deal more is required. \$40,000 has been spent on the hall so far including a \$10,000 grant from the State Government. An additional \$100,000 is needed for caretakers' quarters and ablutions before the hall can be utilised. The written and video histories will require another \$150,000.

While some trade unions have readily pledged a generous donation spread over the three years, others don't see the project as worthy of union financial support given all the other demands on their budgets. However such an approach ignores the benefits to contemporary union work that can be gained from a study of labour history. New generations of wage and salary earners often need to learn that most of the working conditions they enjoy today have only been won by the struggles of past generations of active unionists and that strong, independent unions are vital today to maintain and extend those conditions. As someone once said "those who ignore the lessons of history will be doomed to repeat its mistakes."

Dorothy Tangney Commemoration

On May 26 1991, the WA Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and the Tangney Electorate Council of the Australian Labor Party held a function at the Rostrata Family Centre to honour the memory of Dorothy Tangney. The formal proceedings were chaired by Cheryl Davenport, Member of the Legislative Council, and were addressed by Dr. Carmen Lawrence, Premier of WA, and Senator Ruth Giles. The Fremantle Feminist Choir also took part providing a fine performance of working class songs. We have reproduced the Premier's speech for the interest of those who were unable to attend.

We are gathered today not to praise the Choir, or the Labour Government in Western Australia,

or my own Premiership, but to pay honour to the memory of Dorothy Tangney and to pay tribute to her achievements and to remind ourselves of what one woman achieved. Collectively we can do a great deal more than we can individually. Nonetheless we need people like Dorothy Tangney to show us the way today as we will in the future.

If I can just briefly go through a remarkable string of successes and firsts as she progressed through her life. She always excelled as a student and won a State Secondary Scholarship which entitled her to 5 years free schooling at St Josephs Convent in Fremantle. She matriculated at 15 - an extraordinary young age and went into teaching and part time study at what was then known as "The University". While working and acquiring a Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Diploma of Education, Dorothy became President of the Debating Society and the first woman President of Societies Council at the University of Western Australia. Later in 1940, she became the first woman student to receive an Honorary Life Associateship of the Guild of Undergraduates. So she was active in Politics right from the outset. Success in Party politics didn't come quite so easily or so quickly. Dorothy twice failed to win the seat of Nedlands from Sir Norbert Keenan. She was obviously being asked to do what so many women have been asked to do and that is do the impossible. For a Labor candidate to win the seat of Nedlands would have required a miracle at that time as it does now. The only kind of miracle that would have enabled her win the seat was the entire electorate being struck down and enlightened on the road to the polling booth. Predictably that didn't happen. She did succeed however in her second attempt to enter the Senate, that was in 1943 when she was just 32 years of age.

Now we come to a string of political firsts for Dorothy Tangney. She was the first woman Senator in Australia and the first female member of the Labour Party elected to the Federal Parliament. She was the first woman to be appointed to a Parliamentary Committee and the first to represent Australia on a Parliamentary delegation overseas. She was also the first woman to preside over the Senate in Australia or indeed over any English speaking Parliament anywhere. When Dorothy retired from Parliament in 1968 she had faithfully served the interests of her constituents for 25 years and through 10 Prime Ministers. In recognition of her service to Parliament and to the community she was created a Dame Commander of the British Empire in the Queens Birthday list of that year. While we wouldn't want to do that any more, we would certainly want to recognise her achievements in a similar way were she retiring today.

In 1974 the 10th West Australian seat in the House of Representatives was named in her honour and won in that year by my Federal colleague John Dawkins who is now in Fremantle of course. Not many people know that it was Fred Daly who recommended the naming of the seat of Tangney and that both he and Dorothy were first elected on the same day in 1943.

One cannot help but be impressed by the record I've just outlined to you, in very sketchy terms might I say and yet the real Dorothy Tangney, the person behind all these pioneering feats was even more impressive.

She was born in 1911, third in a family of 9 children, her father was an engine driver and a

Unionist and her mother too was involved in the labour movement. So she was no silver spoon child. The reason Dorothy combined University study with work was so that she could help support her family. She was a monitor at Plympton School in the heart of Fremantle where the fathers of most of the children were wharfies. Back then a slack shipping week, meant the families did without and poverty and malnutrition were common. Many children were forced to leave school early and take dead end jobs. They later swelled the ranks of the unemployed during the Great Depression.

Dorothy responded to the conditions around her with all the idealism and fervour of her nature. Her mission in life as she came to see it was to do everything in her power to improve the lot of working class Australians and especially that of the most disadvantaged groups - the women, the children and people with disabilities. That's what led her into politics in her early 20s and it's what kept her there for so many years. It must have been extremely frustrating at times, since most of her 25 years in the Senate was spent in Opposition. But that didn't stop her, in fact that didn't even slow her down. Dorothy was always a tenacious fighter for the labour cause and a tireless supporter of the underdog. Issues of special interest to her, judging from her Parliamentary speeches particularly, were Social Services and Health, and the development of the outback. During the Pilbara pastoral workers strike of 1946 she spoke out fearlessly on behalf of the strikers declaring "Aborigines are being exploited in the North West by the big land owning companies and absentee land owners who employ them at a few shillings a week and don't even provide sanitation or shelter for them".

By dint of unceasing efforts she achieved a great deal. She helped pioneer major social service reforms including increased child endowment and hospital and medical benefits as well as pensions for widows and deserted wives and the infirm. Dorothy also exercised real moral courage and I don't use that word lightly. In 1954 during the Petrov affair, a Madam Rosemary Oliver, who worked in the French Embassy, was accused of being a Russian spy. Dorothy put her own career and reputation on the line in defence of Madam Oliver - it may seem difficult to reconstruct those times but they were very poisonous. With no support from her colleagues she acted on what she believed in as wholeheartedly in this as in everything else she did.

What really marked Dorothy out at the time of course, was the simple fact that she was a woman in what was very much a man's world. I think it's pointless to ask whether she was a feminist in the current sense of the word. They didn't really exist back in the '40s and '50s but there is no doubt that it was to give a voice to women and to what we now call women's issues that she first stood for Parliament and she battled right on through the years of the post-war reconstruction resisting the push to squeeze women out of the workforce and back into the kitchen. Dorothy challenged women to become more actively involved in politics pointing out that it wasn't easy but that after all she'd shown it could be done. As one newspaper article said in 1969 "she established a bridgehead for other women politicians to follow".

It took quite a while, but follow Dorothy Tangney we eventually did. There are now 56 Labor women Parliamentarians in Australia, after yesterday['s NSW election] there maybe at least one or two more. That's not as many as there should be but that's a big improvement and its an

important part of Dorothy's legacy to all of us and its certainly much better than the Liberals or Nationals have managed, or will ever manage in my view.

Throughout her life, Dorothy maintained an impeccable personal reputation. Perhaps I may read from a profile of her published in 1978:

Despite her arduous and time consuming job as a politician, never once did she forget she was a lady. Small in stature with a tremendous capacity to work, she's never been heard to speak an unkind or nasty word against friend or foe. She has never been crude or overbearing.

I was pleased to find so much in common between us. Both of us being born third into a large Catholic family, and neither of us being so tall as to make others feel diminished by our presence. I can only promise to keep working on the rest.

On a serious note we all know that the Labor Party is facing a crisis of confidence right now. Indeed this might be said of the whole labour movement. It is not the first time and most likely will not be the last. A progressive party probably has to expect a certain amount of upheaval and conflict if only from the ferment of ideas within it. A party that isn't content to stagnate, a party committed to reform is going to make mistakes from time to time. The sheer complexity of life makes that inevitable if we are honest with ourselves.

But what we have in the Labor Party, what pulls us together every time, what Dorothy Tangney stood for, is our shared committed to fundamental Labor principles. The principles which do not change, unlike the Party's platform, are the same for us now as they were for Dorothy Tangney - that is to create a better life for ordinary working people and a fair and just society. Just consider for a moment the alternative. The contemporary alternative. Consider for example what is happening in New Zealand under a conservative government. Cuts in social security payments and Industrial legislation which can only be described as draconian. It is most timely that the Labor Party is celebrating its Centenary year now. It gives us an opportunity to look back and see the continuity of purpose which has never failed us and which never failed Dorothy Tangney. She was not afraid to take on the hard issues under tough circumstances. She was motivated by her belief in what was right and not particularly concerned about whether it would make her popular or not. She worked quietly and tirelessly and she got things done. Loyal to the A.L.P. she survived the split of 1955 just as I believe our Government will survive our current troubles and surmount them. As we work towards that end, we should bear her example in mind and I hope that all of us will remember Dorothy Tangney in whatever we do.

MUSEUMS AND COMMUNITIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH ELSPETH KING

Elspeth King, the curator of the People's Palace in Glasgow for 16 years, recently visited Perth at the invitation of the WA Museum, and funded by the Department of the Arts. Liz Lukin, who is the TLC's trainee Arts Officer and a Women's Studies student at Murdoch

University was able to interview Elspeth about her experience of putting the working class into the forefront of museum exhibitions:

For those fortunate enough to hear Elspeth speak, during her recent visit to Perth, it was an opportunity to listen to a woman of courage and energy, who took over a run down and neglected building and turned it into a dynamic and popular museum, with a commitment to the working class history of Glasgow. Her exhibitions, collections and projects have attracted new audiences to the people's Palace, and she has made the museum relevant and responsible to the needs of her community. Community involvement, Elspeth says, is paramount for the growth, development and survival of a local museum.

Elspeth believes in the re-interpretation and reworking of history. She is committed firstly to a notion that no writing or representation of historical events is value free. and secondly that people must be actively involved with their histories to make them meaningful for the present and the future.

Her time at the People's Palace has been controversial. The collection policy of the museum reflects her commitment to both labour history and the history of popular culture and the every day, and this has brought her into conflict with the museum establishment and the Glasgow Council. Elspeth's position at the museum finally became untenable this year and she has left the People's Palace to take on a new job in her home town, Dunfermline, as director of a newly set up heritage trust.

While Elspeth was in Perth, I not only had the pleasure of attending her public lectures, but also to conduct the following interview.

Liz: You say that you have deliberately sought new audiences in your management of the People's Palace. Who do you think have been the traditional audiences of museums and why did you have a commitment to changing that?

Elspeth: I think it has always been the middle class and the wealthy, the well provided for, the upwardly mobile that visit our museums and I wanted to make museums available to absolutely everybody. I think what museums have to say should touch upon everybody and involve everybody.

I also did not want the history of Glasgow, which is a working class history, to have a purely middle class audience. Nevertheless there was not much of an audience for the Peoples Palace, even among the middle classes, because it was in the east end of the city. In the 1950's there was an attempt to change the name of the museum because it had acquired a kind of Bolshevik penumbra, it sounded a bit of the proletarian side, and it had been deserted by all audiences. I was determined to build up the audiences, especially amongst ordinary people and I wanted to devote it to ordinary peoples history.

Liz: How did you start making those changes?

Elsbeth: I wanted the displays to reflect the history and development of Glasgow. When I arrived at the museum a lot of the displays did not do that - they reflected a sort of 'signs they left behind' presentation, a bit of this and a bit of that - a clutch of military uniforms, and a lot of Liptons Yachting Trophies.

In the first instance I developed a collecting policy, whereby I was going to gather material which allowed an interpretation of the history of Glasgow. I started locally with the Bridgton Textile mills, most of which had closed down in the late fifties, but there were still plenty of folk in the community who had material and stories to tell. We tried to represent the working life and social life in the industry and in the town, to show what peoples lives were actually like.

It was in the getting of that collection that people were drawn in, and they felt had a part to play in the museum, and of course every person who was interested told 10 or 20 others, and they would get interested. People would see things on show that related to their lives, and to things they had at home, or they would think there were things we had missed out. That's how the dialogue started, it grew out of a collection policy.

Liz: You said in a paper that "We should not be taking the memorabilia of working class life and putting it into a middle class context - the context of a rarefied atmosphere of the art gallery". What did you do that was different from that at the Peoples Palace?

Elsbeth: I don't know that we succeeded entirely, but certainly people were more at ease with the building. This is because it was built for the ordinary person, and does not have the class connotations of the art gallery. It is a much more informal building and I tried to achieve an atmosphere of informality, of rest and relaxation.

Liz: You have a great commitment to the notion of collecting the people history as it happens, and of always linking the past to the present. Why has this been so important to your work?

Elsbeth: I do not think museums should be in the business of ancestor worship. The past is an indication of where we have all been, and by using it we can work out where we hope to go. We are not just collecting in museums for the sake of collecting, it is to give purpose, direction and significance to peoples lives. Museums should be giving people greater information on their backgrounds to help them decide what is important. If peoples history is hidden from them, if they do not know of the struggles and the battles, and the fight to get a decent living wage and living conditions, how can they hope to address what they are up against in this enterprise culture?

A lot of our displays are to give people inspiration and hope, to say to them that their ancestors had struggled, won some victories and lost some fights. Our collections are to give people enough historical information to give them direction for the future.

Liz: It seemed to me that this was the really politically significant area of your work and what made the museum so challenging: that you refused to put struggle and resistance safely away in a little glass case for people to look at and call history.

Elsbeth: I never wanted history to be safely in the past, I wanted people to sit up and take notice of what was going on now.

For example, during the miners strike, there was a lorry driver whose cathartic exercise was to paint scenes of the strike as a way of working out his anger at the response of his trade union to the strike. His union was strike breaking and he did not like that so he took to painting scenes of the picket lines, and of confrontation. They were very creditable paintings and we bought them and had them on display before the end of the strike. I wanted that part of the struggle to be part of the museums story. Some people took great exception to this and well, that tough. The great majority of Glasgow people supported that strike.

We have supported other issues of importance. There was a very long strike against a certain company, which led to a eighteen month lock out of the workers, and we had their stuff on show as it was happening. One of the managers from the company came to the museum and caused a scene. My response was that these events are part of our historical development, linked to events way back in the 1800's. I said to him, "This is a part of history, and usually its the side of the winners, the victors who write the history. You will probably win this fight, but this is not a museum for the memorabilia of the winners".

Liz: You have used the arts a lot in your work. What do you see as the connections between historical exhibits and the use of contemporary artistic or creative representations of events of times?

Elsbeth: I think people have got to have the chance to express what they feel about their past, to rework it if necessary. We have used a variety of ways to help people do this. For example, the Peoples Palace banner was a project using patchwork and silks. The banner is a 'banner of banners', showing the building itself, and has small patches showing all our historical banners in the collection. Also, community groups were involved in making their own patches which were sewn onto the main banner. Many church groups, women's groups and ethnic communities were involved and it made people think about the history of banners and what our historical collections mean for the people themselves.

Liz: It is clear to me why your strong commitment to labour history has got you into trouble - but it seems you have also had a great deal of opposition to exhibitions of popular culture. What is it about collecting, researching and exhibiting popular culture that you think is so threatening?

Elsbeth: It is not high art and it cannot be purchased and put into the art market. It resists having a price tag and becoming an investment for private interests. And of course the art

establishment doesn't like this.

For example, we collected a lot of stain glass, which is difficult to handle and difficult to sell. A lot of stained glass was done for the churches, and the church people did not like artists having a profile in the church, so consequently a lot of stained glass work is unsigned. We spent a lot of time identifying who did what, but the art market is not interested in anything without a name on it. It was a very successful exhibition, and an important collection of public art for the community.

Liz: How do you answer the charge that your work is too political or is biased, and that museums are supposed to be objective collectors of history?

Elsbeth: I have not seen an objective museum yet. Most museums are very political, very biased. They favour the history of the winners, the Great Men, and you can get no more political or biased than that. The history of Glasgow has been a celebration of the industrialists, the bridge builders, the capitalists and textile marketers. The simply is not good enough. We have to recognise the achievements of the working people, and I think that we have done in a very small way is redress the balance. Overwhelmingly, in British museums it is the history of the dominant classes, those that manage and rule, that is on display. There are very few museums that address the issues of ordinary folk.

Liz: How do you think museums should evaluate their success?

Elsbeth: Its very difficult. I can see the value of visitors surveys, but in the end its difficult to see what it all means. I don't believe in just counting numbers through the door, although that's one way of assessment. I think it is through maintaining a dialogue with the community. For example, it's a success if you have people ringing you up offering additions to the collections for the museum, and people asking you to go in different directions. It is something that is hard to quantify and analyse.

How to evaluate has always bothered me. I continually ask myself whether what we are doing is effective, do the people care, is it significant? In May, 1990, when I was not selected for the job of Keeper of Social History I thought I would just pack it in. The overwhelming response from the community was a real surprise, and I still haven't got over the amazement of the fuss that was caused. There were letters to the paper, newspaper articles, a petition of 10 000 names, and protests. The response was very warming and it let me know that the work I had done at the Peoples Palace was effective and did mean something for people.

Liz: Are there any exhibitions or events during your time at the Peoples Palace of which you are particularly proud, or which have special meaning for you?

Elsbeth: Every one has been different. I loved the Celtic Club Centenary Exhibition because there was a feeling that it attracted an entirely different audience. We had very little advertising, except through football programmes at Celtic Park, nevertheless the exhibition was queued out

for the duration. A lot of people rang up asking what the entrance fee was, and since we have never charged a fee in the history of the Peoples Palace, we knew we had attracted a new audience.

The football fans always knew we were there, near Celtic Park, but had never been remotely tempted to come to the museum. It was heartening to see so many people, from the young to the very old enjoying the museum.

Liz: Lastly, you have obviously committed a great deal of your life to your work, do you have any regrets about that, and what things have helped make the tremendous tasks you take on easier to manage?

Elsbeth: There have been times when I have felt bitter. If I had wanted to make money out of my job I could have made a lot in the antique business, but I was never in it for the money, or for the promotion either. By any standards I think I have paid a high price for what I have done, but I do not think there is any other way I could have operated given my commitment.

What has made it easier? I think the love of collecting. I think that love is an essential curatorial quality, that is being gradually eroded from the museum profession by those that would have 'collection managers' rather than curators. They would want to eviscerate the enthusiasm and commitment from collecting to make it into a business practice. These business managers would work from 9 - 5 and not cause the sort of trouble that I have caused. I regret this movement in the museum, the movement from curators to managers, because I think there is much, much more to curation than management. You need the ability to get under the skin of a community, and to communicate on many levels so that you instinctively know how to respond to the needs of the community and how to interpret so that history is meaningful for people.

Book Reviews

Ben Hills, Blue Murder, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1989.

Labour history is replete with stories of how workers acting in unity have changed the course of society. Perhaps something it lacks is sufficient examples of the disastrous impact of failing to organise. Blue Murder traces the history of one such example.

In his description of the events surrounding Australia's most horrifying industrial disaster, the Wittenoom asbestos mine, journalist Ben Hills has tried to emphasise the appalling human impact of asbestos related diseases on so many of those who worked and lived in that doomed little town. The tale itself is almost Dickensian in its description of the heartless exploitation of powerless individual by the ruthless owners of capital. One almost has to pinch oneself to remember that it's not a novel, and that it has all taken place in this century, with its fatal climax still being played out even now.

From the very start of the book, the author takes us with him to share an understanding of the breadth of pain and suffering which is Wittenoom's legacy. From the deathbed of the sixth member of the one family to die of mesothelioma, to the lonely flat of a widower whose wife's only sin was to work in the local gas mask factory during the war, he leaves us with no choice but to experience some of the emotional impact which a clinical documentary account might avoid. Some may see such a technique as a means of "sensationalising", in its most literal sense, the facts of the matter, but, by the end of the book, one cannot but accept the need for the full human facet to be exposed in order to put the whole issue in a proper context.

The book traces the history of the Wittenoom mine from its establishment in 1940 by Lang Hancock, its takeover in 1948 by CSR, its shabby operations through the fifties and early sixties, until its eventual closure in 1966. In all of that quarter of a century, the mine struggled to break even, recording a profit in only five years, and closing with an accumulated loss of \$2.5 million. At the same time, Hills paints the picture of the development of medical knowledge around the world of the hazards of occupational exposure to asbestos, and contrasts this with the lack of any attempt by the mine owners to protect their employees from these known hazards.

He paints a vivid picture of the appalling conditions faced by employees, many of whom had virtually no choice but to work there, and for whom no escape routes were open :

More than half of the 7000 men who were to work at the mill and the mine in Wittenoom were straight-off-the-boat immigrants, displaced by the war in Europe, or simply seeking a better future for their families
 "We all wanted to get out, but there was nothing we could do. We had all signed a two year contract".

Far from the well-paid work in good conditions and a fine climate which they had been promised in their homelands, we learn of the back-breaking work, in unbelievably bad

conditions, with poor pay and virtually no facilities, in an unbearable climate. We are told of how the workers in the mill spent hours on end in conditions where the asbestos dust was so thick that they could hardly see the hand in front of their faces. We hear of the vain attempts to escape from this Hell-on-Earth, of the lack of interest from almost anyone, including the Italian Consul in Melbourne, and even their own union, which was content to accept a dust allowance of threepence an hour, and ignore the hazards their members faced. All of this at a time when those who were trying to get away knew nothing of the fate which the microscopic asbestos fibres had in store for so many of them.

But those who did know, we soon learn, either did nothing or were frustrated in their efforts to change the situation. There were warnings, even pleas, from a very few who were convinced that the asbestos exposure would have drastic results, and yet there was spirited resistance from those who had any interest in the mine continuing to operate. Despite the warnings from the Mines Department inspectors, the Mines Department did nothing :

In spite of detecting the most outrageous breaches of mine safety laws over a period of more than 20 years, not a single prosecution was ever launched against CSR, no effective demands were ever made for safe ventilation in the mine or mill, the operation was never shut down for a single day, although this was within their legal power. Instead at the highest levels of the Department, there were attempts to cover up the true extent of the disaster, and to discredit the doctors who were doing their best to expose it The Mines Department saw its job as promoting mining, not regulating it.

The company effectively ignored the doctors who were trying to have the problem addressed, and all the while the fibres continued to plant their deadly seeds in the lungs of Wittenoom's inhabitants.

All of this, one would think, would be more than enough upon which to base a tale of the tyranny of unbridled capitalism. Not that anyone should really be shocked at the lengths to which the greedy are prepared to go to make their fortunes at the expense of others. Perhaps the crudity of it all is a little surprising, but the same story, albeit with a bit more subtlety, is told daily as the lure of wealth is used to corrupt society.

And yet, this is only the start of it all. The true horror of this book is the exposure of the deceit, cynicism and ruthlessness which characterised the subsequent cover-up of the extent of the problem. The author's description of the protracted legal battle by the victims of Wittenoom to salvage a modicum of compensation is an indictment of the system which purports to dispense justice. Were it not for the incontrovertible evidence which the court cases themselves brought to light, and which the author lays before us, it would be almost impossible to believe the extent to which those responsible were prepared to go to avoid their culpability, and to deny their victims any recompense. At every turn they were prepared to invest massive resources into creating delays, refuting what seemed blindingly obvious, and using every opportunity to avoid their responsibility for the disaster. Meanwhile, a growing death toll of unsatisfied litigants was witness to the success, at least in part, of such a strategy.

There is a fascinating description of the David-and Goliath struggle between the victims'

dedicated and enthusiastic, but desperately under-resourced, lawyers, Slater and Gordon, and the seemingly limitless resources of CSR and SGIO, with the rest of the asbestos industry in the background. The finding of Mr. Justice Kaye of CSR's (or its subsidiary's) "continuing, conscious and contumelious" disregard for its employees' safety, and the awards against CSR in favour of the victims are not, though, a happy ending. No amount of litigation can ever wipe out the slow and painful deaths already suffered by more than 500 of Wittenoom's victims, and yet to be suffered by an estimated 1500 more.

It is impossible to read this book without become angrier and angrier that the society we are part of has allowed this extraordinary course of events to have occurred. It is true that the narrative tends to change course frequently, sometimes alarmingly, and that at times one has the feeling that it is more of a dramatisation than a documentary, but it remains a gripping horror story whose message is unavoidable. At the end of the day, this book is an indictment of our failures - not merely the failures which have always been inherent in a capitalist system, but, most importantly, the failure of the Labour Movement. The fact that, even when the closure of the mine was finally announced in 1966, the Trades and Labor Council condemned the decision because of its impact on employment, is a chilling reminder of how short-sighted we can be. Organisation of the Wittenoom workers through an informed union movement was really the only change those workers ever had to avoid the fate which the mine held in store for them, and the union movement was found wanting.

This book should be compulsory reading for anyone who ever dares to suggest that occupational health and safety is not an industrial issue, or that it should not be a top priority for all unions.

Jeremy Henderson, Mount Hawthorne

Steve Hawke, Noonkanbah, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1989, \$16.95

The Aboriginal residents of Fitzroy Crossing come from four disparate language groups. They were dumped there, refugees of the pastoral industry, following the granting of award wages to Aboriginal workers in the late sixties. By then the industry was on the slide. commodity prices were no longer high enough to support a squatter elite and the land was dying under the short term profit motive. Noonkanbah Station, for instance, had annual shearing musters, in the fifties, of well over 100,000 sheep, not what you would call a sustainable yield.

In 1976, the Noonkanbah people walked away from the fourth world squalor of the Fitzroy ghetto and returned, as the "Yungngora Community", to the station. It had become, by then, a depleted environment, the top-soil shifting, floating and blowing away, the business of managing sheep having been replaced by the less labour intensive business of cattle hunting, the fences and windmills no longer maintained.

But it was home, to Friday Muller and his people, who had conducted such a tough campaign to regain their land. Steve Hawke describes the vision underpinning the move back.

At the heart lay the old people's love of and faith in the Law, the culture, the

Aboriginal way of life as they knew it. This was not the traditional life of the days before the white men, which had passed before their time, for all except a couple of the old desert folk like Mick Nicki. It was the life of their youth and middle-age in the station camps in the relatively secure period from the 1930s to the 1950s, when outside the labour demands of the station, the Law was supreme. Noonkanbah was a renowned centre of the Law, children were born and reared to the Aboriginal way, the young people bred by the Law, went through the ceremonial cycles, and respected the Elders.

The vision related to a picture of a community which lived by these principles, in which the oppressive power of the white boss was removed, and in which the people's labour was for their own benefit. The important elements in this vision were internal, social and cultural ones, not economic; bringing the younger people back to the Law, making sure they married the right way, making sure that they spoke Walmatjari before they spoke English, caring for the land, conducting the ceremonies.

Whether such a future was ever achievable to the extent that the Elders hoped is highly debatable, given the changes that had been wrought by the years in Fitzroy Crossing, the different perspective of the younger generation, and the compromises that were required with the new world.

It was a vision of conservatives, who yearned for an older and familiar order..... (p.85)

So the people who moved back to Noonkanbah at the end of 1976 were excited and highly motivated and hopeful. They faced massive tasks in reconstituting station plant and in establishing social and community structures and roles. All reports indicate that these tasks were undertaken with quiet confidence and with outstanding early results.

The details of what has been called the Noonkanbah dispute, or conflict - Hawke calls it the Noonkanbah drama - began to unfold less than two years after the move back. Hawke recounts the relentless escalation of activities and the polarisation of the conflicting parties. Its context, the mineral boom of the late seventies, was "a second invasion". In one year, 1977, almost the whole area of Noonkanbah was pegged by explorers. That this should have occurred at the delicate instance of cultural and social revival, is surely a tragedy.

Hawke's book reminds us of the key players, the parts they played and how they were portrayed on the nation's television screens. Many Australians, black and white, will remember, with particular associations, the mining company Amax, the postulations of Sir Charles Court and his Ministers. The classic photograph taken by Bobby Kogolo of Sir Charles, hands on hips, talking down to seated Aborigines in the old shearing shed, brings back the emotion of the period. On another page, we see Fred Chaney, in the same location, talking to the people with a more modest and culturally appropriate body language. In this context, Hawke notes the bitterness of the divisions which emerged within the West Australian Liberal Establishment, although I think much more could be made of this, particularly with the resurfacing of hatreds within the party in 1991.

The book reminds us, on the other side, of Ivan McPhee and Dicky Skinner, speaking and negotiating month after month, to the point of utter exhaustion, putting their community's views to the public. Michael Gallagher's low-angle photograph of Skinner on a car roof waving the Aboriginal flag, remains a magnificent image of resistance, to this day. We see also

Don McLeod, reading a proclamation, symbolically claiming back the land, and simultaneously getting right up Sir Charles' nose:

Before the coming of the white man, there was a law for all men and all time. This Law guaranteed the undisputed tenure of the Land from generation to generation. The collective rights, titles and interests of the people were protected by this Law. The people lived in a state of virtue and democracy under the Law, without recourse to kings, princes or police.

Let it be known that this Law of the Land continues to guide us up to the present time. Next to the food we eat, it is the thing which keeps us alive and which we cherish most.

Let it be known that in spite of our misery, the Land and its Law provides hope for us.

The white man has never understood our Law (pp.275-6)

Hawke writes about the predictability of the chain of events. The community enjoyed small victories, such as the time when the drilling contractors were forced to withdraw. They received unprecedented support from ordinary, white Australians living in cities, from some church groups and unions. Even the most conservative Australian journalists were almost all won over to their point of view. But power resided with the State Government. The final acts, the police-led truck convoy and the sudden drilling operation itself, came as a tremendous, paralysing shock to the Aboriginal community. There was outrage across the nation, but in retrospect, Hawke sees it as a largely predictable, almost scripted piece.

Ten years down the track, what has been the aftermath, what has been lost or gained? Hawke is ambivalent here. He highlights Jack Davis' optimistic assessment:

I firmly believe that what has happened at Noonkanbah has more political and racial implications for the betterment of Aborigines than most people believe. (p.316)

But most of the evidence is on the downside. The sinking of the bore was quickly followed by the illness and deaths of a number of senior Lawmen in the community, including Ginger Nganawilla whose strength and leadership was behind most of the statements made by the younger men, speaking for the community and the Law during the conflict. Many people saw the Government's success as a major defeat of the Law. The void was filled, in part, by new-style missionaries of the Jimmy Swaggart style, descending like locusts on the Kimberleys and preaching a hocus-pocus of fear and superstition ("land rights is the work of the devil").

On the political front, Brian Burke's personality cult pushed the Aboriginal struggle off the political agenda in Western Australia. Indices of racial conflict and alienation rocketed in the seventies and eighties. Western Australia achieved the distinction of being the most imprisoning State in the country with by far the highest rates of Aboriginal incarceration and Aboriginal deaths in custody. More important it emerged as the State which refused, against all evidence, to admit that a problem existed. We were, after all, fighting for the America's Cup at that time.

On the upside, there is the concept, which Hawke also seems to embrace, that the victors in the Noonkanbah battle will be the losers at the end of the war. In the same way, it has elsewhere

been argued that Frazer's victory over Whitlam in 1975 was a pyrrhic one. There is an ongoing perception in both cases, that the proponents used punches which the Marquis of Queensberry had never even envisaged. Certainly the editorials in a parochial press were unprecedented in their criticism of our local cultural icon.

Sir Charles Court has bulldozed himself into history through his Government's carefully orchestrated drilling operation at Noonkanbah. But he's more likely to achieve notoriety than fame for his actionSir Charles tries to justify his dictatorial actions by the very fact that he is in Government. He has no mandate for his current actions..... What has transpired during almost the whole shameful Noonkanbah exercise is, we suggest, contrary to the fundamentals of true liberal government(Sunday Independent, 31st August, 1980)

The WA Government yesterday used extreme tactics to turn a drilling rig into a symbol of white dominance Tactics such as the Government has employed might have been understandable in circumstances of crisis, but the only emergency that exists at Noonkanbah is of the Government's own making. (The West Australian, 30 August, 1980)

It seems to me that an increasing number of Aboriginal people are taking the same line; land-rights and other elements of the movement will return one day. In the long run, the authorities won't be able to keep the dirt under the carpet. I don't know if these crucial issues will ever really be faced in this country - and nor does Steve Hawke. The optimistic vision of Aboriginal future remains more an article of faith, than a concrete programme, for a growing number of Australians. Perhaps this faith is its strength.

In analysing the strength of the Noonkanbah people's resolve in the face overwhelming State power, I think Hawke should have made much more of the role of the school. The community had established its own bilingual independent school at the beginning of 1978, with Ginger Nganawilla as it's Chairman. This institution was almost the only constant in a sea of uncertainty during the hard times, providing the people with pride and stability.

Hawke also should have made more of the Strelley connection. Strelley leaders, who had experienced the fury of State reaction during the great pastoral strike of 1941-1949, were present at Noonkanbah throughout the main period of conflict in 1979-80. I think they provided much more than moral support. Their presence rebuilt long-broken lines of kinship, kinship being the other guiding principle (along with the Law) at the heart of Aboriginality.

Hawke has chosen a difficult assignment. The book fits no particular recognised genre: it is not sociology, not a personal account or diary, not quite history. His ideological perspective is not particularly clear or consistent. He is a young man and was a very young man indeed when he became a player in this particular drama. Point of view is an understandable difficulty with this book: the extent to which the writer expresses himself as part of the subject matter or as more independently observant of it, a participant or an outsider. Hawke falls, inevitably, betwixt and between. It is probably impossible for a white man, for instance, to express in English prose the essence of the Aboriginal relationship to Land. Hawke's attempt at this is commendable, but lacks a sure, authentic footing.

The book opens the door, however, to further works and analysis on the same subject. I am particularly impressed by Hawke's attempt to seek out the historical basis of the conflict:

Perhaps the key to the way in which the drama of Noonkanbah impinged so deeply on the consciousness of Aboriginal and European Australia lay in the echoes it contained of times past; the brutal conflict over land that is the essence of Australian history.

In its unfolding - from the initial skirmishing, through the endless and fruitless attempts at communication and dialogue, to the horrific finale of the juggernaut convoy bearing down as the police dragged away the singing band at Mickey's Pool - the dispute was a parable of the nationwide dispossession of the first custodians of the land.

It was as if the Yungngora people were the reincarnation of the Kalkadoon warriors, Yagan of Swan River, Jandamarra/Pigeon of the Leopolds. The Court Government was a throwback to the days of the righteous colonists of the Empire. The Federal Government took the role of the British Crown; disapproving of the excesses of its colonial agents, yet unwilling to exercise its authority to bring them to heel. The police were the troopers, and the convoy drivers the vengeance posses, come back to life. (p.327)

This is important: reading the Hansard in Western Australia, the "Native Question" is forever present. Its ultimate solutions, propounded by the brothers Sir John and Alexander Forrest, and the vitriolic abuse they heaped on those "t'othersiders" who questioned their credentials, is almost a verbatim of Sir Charles Court's reaction to "white stirrers" in the Noonkanbah context, eighty years on. The notion that "the natives" knew what they were on about was clearly, equally indigestible to both generations. Why is this? And why is it such an article of faith?

I have the strongest impression that the Noonkanbah dispute could have been easily resolved. The Aboriginal people wanted it resolved. Amax was deeply embarrassed and wanted a compromise. Even the legendary white-stirrers (who, on television, looked suspiciously like three Uniting Church clergy) could have been persuaded to delay the revolution. Why did the Government deem it so essential to crash through and have their way?

This is very important: notwithstanding the shortcomings of this book, the event itself is of the highest significance. In its own right, as well as its metaphorical position with respect to the most important unresolved question in two hundred years of Australian history. My view is that there can never be enough analysis of this archetypal conflict. All of us need to be reminded, so do our children, so will our grandchildren.

Paul Roberts, Fremantle

