

A few rough reds

Stories of rank and file
organising

Edited by Hal Alexander
and Phil Griffiths

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Contents

Bob Boughton	6
<i>Introducing the 'rough reds': Invisible, international, and inter-generational</i>	
Brian Manning	13
<i>Charlie India Echo Tango calling Timor Leste</i>	
Chris Elenor	27
<i>Calling Fretilin</i>	
Kevin Cook	43
<i>From building sites to Aboriginal education</i>	
Hal Alexander	56
<i>Red belt days</i>	
Murray Norris	63
<i>Rebuilding the North Australian Workers Union, 1942-1951</i>	
Beverley Symons	110
<i>Red councillors during the Cold War: Communists on the Sydney City Council, 1953-59</i>	
Ben Bartlett	124
<i>Origins of the Workers Health Centre</i>	
Drew Cottle	135
<i>Forgotten foreign militants: The Chinese Seamen's Union in Australia, 1942-1946</i>	

Preface

This small book had its genesis in the Seventh National Labour History Conference, held in Canberra in April 2001. The organising committee were approached by Hal Alexander and Bob Boughton with the idea of running a series of talks on the history of communists organising in Australia. Brian Manning, Chris Elenor, Hal himself, Drew Cottle, Ben Bartlett and Beverley Symons all contributed their wonderful stories and research about rank and file organising and defiance of official authority.

But there was something more: Bernie Brian, another Communist Party activist, had found a copy of the memoirs of Murray Norris and his work rebuilding the North Australian Workers Union in the 1940s. It was in the Northern Territory Archives. Then came the obvious question: would we publish Murray Norris' story? The answer was easy: Of course we would. We thank the NT Archives Service for permission to do so. There were omissions and lost words in the copy we received from the NT Archives Service, and we have been able to correct these using an earlier draft of Murray's memoirs from the Connie Healy papers in the Fryer library collection at the University of Queensland. We thank the Fryer and their staff for their assistance. We have made unobtrusive grammatical changes and occasionally spelled out acronyms or full names in Murray's text.

Drew Cottle's chapter previously appeared in the volume of papers published out of the 2001 conference, *Work, organisation, struggle*, edited by Phil Griffiths and Rosemary Webb (Canberra 2001). All the other chapters are previously unpublished.

We would like to thank Connie Healy and Chris Sheil for

information about Murray Norris, and Sigrid McCausland and Rosemary Webb for the significant work they did proof-reading, checking facts, and digging in archives to ensure the successful production of *A few rough reds*. The footnotes are the work of Phil Griffiths and Sigrid McCausland; the endnote references are of course the work of the authors.

While the format of this volume is modest, the stories are inspiring accounts of working class activism guided by a serious commitment to socialist politics. In fact, one of the great sub-texts of this volume is the way that strong rank and file trade union organisation provided a space for the most oppressed—Aboriginal people, people with leprosy, Chinese seafarers—to stand up and fight for their rights. It also provided space and resources to support those fighting their national oppression in East Timor. This is not to say that strong, political trade unionism meant an end to racism and sexism; they are ideological weapons too powerful for the ruling class to easily give up. But in these stories you can see the potential for really challenging them.

This small book represents but a tiny proportion of the stories that could be told about rough reds organising. This organising work represents the best traditions of Australian communism. These are stories to educate all who want to change the world.

Phil Griffiths

Convenor, *work, organisation, struggle*: the Seventh National Labour History Conference, held in Canberra, April 2001

Bob Boughton

Introducing the ‘rough reds’: Invisible, international, and inter-generational

Bob Boughton teaches adult education at the University of New England. He has written papers for recent Labour History conferences on the CPA’s role in the Aboriginal rights struggle, and on the ‘Advanced Chinese Methods’ of adult education taught to Australian communists in Beijing in the 1950s. A member of the CPA from 1975-1991, Bob helped organise the communists stream at the 2001 Conference, from which this monograph arose.

If the union’s history for these few years seems to revolve around individuals, I have no excuse. Individuals create history, and when they are organised they create better history.

— Murray Norris

SINCE the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) officially wound up its affairs in 1991, a steady stream of memoirs and reflection have emanated from some of its leading officials, which put considerable critical distance between the writers and the experiences they recall.

This collection is not like that. It unashamedly celebrates a tradition of rank and file activism by Australian communists and those who, while affiliated to other parties and organisations, associated closely

with the CPA. These stories are extremely important, not just for labour historians, but for labour and social movement activists who today are trying to maintain and build a militant opposition to globalising capitalism in Australia and the region.

What these stories tell us, among many things, is that often it is the 'invisible' people who do most to 'make history'; and they do it, above all, by being organised. When all the objective conditions have been described, when the influences of tradition and culture have been duly acknowledged, when all the social forces have been lined up on history's stage, their class and social character dissected, you still find, standing behind this good and valuable analysis, the organised militants. Unless labour history points a spotlight on these people and the work they do, it perpetuates a myth—that history somehow just happens, without the conscious intervention of organised and disciplined groups, the people who 'push the envelope' and help move society towards its future.

This is also as true of the writing of history as it is of its making. This collection arose from a lot of hard organising work, among ex-CPA members and their 'fellow-travelling' friends, prodded on in particular by one of the editors, Hal Alexander. Hal is a communist militant trained in the railway workshops, the CPA's Marx School in Sydney in the 1940s, and in China in the 1950s, and a mentor to many communists of later generations, myself included. Hal it was who convinced Brian Manning, Chris Elenor, Ben Bartlett, Drew Cottle and myself to make the Canberra conference of the Labor History society in 2001 an occasion for celebrating some vintage 'rough reds'. It was Hal who convinced his old mate and comrade in arms Kevin Baker ("The Oracle") to drive him to Canberra, and to chair the session. Kevin has his own history in the labour movement and was for a long time an organiser of the Missos Union. Kevin Cook would have come too, because Hal had asked him. But he was sick, so he agreed to be interviewed by Hal and Russ Hermann, and his story is now included. It was Hal who negotiated with Phil Griffiths, Rosemary Webb and others from the ASSLH Canberra, to

get this publication out. When I agreed to write the introduction, he even sent me a few suggestions for its themes!

One of the great things about Labour History conferences is the dialogue that occurs between working historians and the unionists and other activists about whom they are writing. This monograph takes this into print, setting up a conversation between the verbatim memoirs of activists and some detailed historical analysis. Drew Cottle's and Beverley Symons' papers fall more into the latter category, though both are also experienced activists, while the rest of the papers belong more in the former. One of the points of this introduction is to try to weave some of the connections between them all.

If the role of hard-working organisers is one theme that runs through this collection, then another is internationalism. As you read these stories, you will see that militant working class activism in Australia knew a lot more about 'difference', and for a lot longer time, than some of its contemporary postmodernist critics like to acknowledge. All but one of the authors is male, and only one is Aboriginal, but the actions they describe and the people who fill these stories are testaments to the solidarity that militants built across ethnic and international borders.

Drew Cottle tells the extraordinary story of three Sydney-based Chinese radicals, suspected by the intelligence services of being communists, who, assisted by the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) and CPA officials, helped Chinese seamen, stranded by war in Australian ports in the 1940s, to form an Australian branch of the Chinese Seamen's Union (CSU). Like Rupert Lockwood's tale of Indonesian-Australian solidarity in the 1940s, *The Black Armada*, Cottle's detailed research shows how the waterfront activities of communist unionists played a crucial role in breaking down racial and national divisions within the international working class, helping build a unity which delivered the goods.

Brian Manning's story of the illegal radio operation he helped to mount in Darwin in the 1970s is another variation on this theme. Without that radio, Fretilin, the East Timorese independence movement, would

have been unable to maintain contact between its guerrilla forces fighting Suharto's army in the mountains and its external leadership in Australia, Portugal, Mozambique and New York. A rank and file waterside worker, Brian had already been in more historic campaigns than most people achieve in a lifetime, including helping to set up the Darwin Aboriginal Rights Council, which played a key role during the Gurindji strike and walk off in the 1960s. Brian, of course, was only one of many who made the radio operation possible, and, Chris Elenor, a recent 'pommie' immigrant who drove thousands of kilometres from Sydney to camp in the bush outside Darwin to keep the radio link operating, has also provided his version of these extraordinary events to add to the mix. Chris, his fellow operators Andrew Waterhouse, John Wishart, Dave Arkins, 'Cosmos' and Estanislau DaSilva (now East Timor's Minister for Agriculture), were part of a younger generation which came to political maturity in the antiwar and anti-colonial movements in the 1970s. The fact that some, but by no means all, joined the CPA, allowed something to happen which is another key theme of this book, and the underlying reason for its production. History and tradition are not about the past, they are about the future. Unless the stories are told and passed on, new generations will find themselves having to learn all the old lessons over and over again. One of the achievements of the CPA in its 'Indian Summer' of the 1970s and 1980s was that it made it possible for this 'baton-passing' to take place.

Hal Alexander and Ben Bartlett were passing 'batons' (is that what they were?) in a hyperactivist CP household in Sydney's Balmain, to which Chris Elenor was a regular visitor, when I met them all in 1975, the year I too joined the CPA. As Ben describes in his paper, younger and not so young communists like himself and Hal were already organising a rank and file paper, *The Health Worker*, in Sydney hospitals, when they turned a great idea, in part inspired by the new women's and Aboriginal health services forming at the time, into the reality of the Workers Health Centre which opened in the Sydney suburb of Lidcombe in 1977. While it

eventually succumbed to the forces of government and trade union bureaucracy, the Workers Health Centre remains a demonstration of what is possible when university trained activists have an organisation which allows them to work in direct partnership and under the leadership of militant workers organised on the job.

Unfortunately, there's no denying it, *A few rough reds* is a 'blokey' book. Not only is there only one female contributor, but Beverley Symons' story is about two more communist men, Tom Wright and Ron Maxwell, who won seats on Sydney City Council in 1953. But look more closely into Beverley's paper, before you dismiss it as another example of the patriarchal slant of CP politics. While this does not excuse communists or labour historians from the obligation to publish more stories of the many women who were so important in communist activism, the story shows that Wright and Maxwell, once on Council, campaigned on issues which these days are often left to the women's movement and the community action groups they keep alive, the 'bread and butter' issues that so affect daily life. These included children's playgrounds, bus stop seats, lights in residential blocks of flats, saving the Domain Baths, meal allowances for Council employees, school transfers for children of parents moving out of the city, and domestic electricity subsidies. Wright won two terms, Maxwell only one, but it was a remarkable achievement given that this was at the height of the Cold War.

Kevin Cook's story forms another link in this chain. Though it's not mentioned in Beverley's story, Tom Wright was a long time activist for Aboriginal rights. In 1938, under his Presidency, the NSW Labor Council passed its first policy on the question, and Tom authored several party policies, still acknowledged as among the most progressive working class statements on Indigenous issues ever made in this country. So when Kevin joined the NSW Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), then under CP and left ALP leadership, the union was already aligned to his politics, and when he moved to Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe — itself a product of a 1950s alliance between Aboriginal activists and socialists in

unions, parties and churches — this connection continued. Kevin also tells the story of Tranby's own international links, with the East Timorese struggle, Vanuatu, Bougainville and South Africa, a story which reminds us that Aboriginal activists have been at the forefront of anti-globalisation politics in Australia for decades.

The biggest paper in this collection belongs to the mystery man, Murray Norris. A mystery man because, when we first began assembling the material for the Labour History conference, all we knew about Murray was that he had been an NAWU organiser in Darwin in the 1940s, and worked later on the waterfront there. His story was passed on to us by Bernie Brian, a Darwin-based activist and researcher doing a thesis on the NAWU, who had discovered the manuscript in the NT archives. Now, thanks mainly to Connie Healy in Brisbane, we have begun to learn more about this remarkable man, whose story speaks volumes about what is possible in the right conditions. We also hear that Chris Sheil of UNSW plans some time in the future to write a more detailed history. In the meantime, however, Murray's own words are reprinted here.

Clandestine comrades? Perhaps in 21st century Australia, readers may find such a term dated, even quaint. But the fact of the matter, as Hal's reminiscences of the Red Belt days in Sydney's South and Botany in the 1950s shows, is that militant communists have always been under surveillance, and the best work has, more often than not, required a level of secrecy and security that means, when the stories are eventually told, the activists are not even visible. It is certainly the case that many of the key events in Australia's history have been chronicled with little, if any reference, to the people whose stories appear in these pages, and the thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands like them, who did the work over many decades to maintain and build movements for social and political change. If this little monograph does something to help contemporary activists and labour historians remember some of those people, its work will have been more than worthwhile.



Ken Fry MHR, left, speaking to Fretilin in East Timor with radio operator, Brian Manning, right.

Brian Manning

Charlie India Echo Tango calling Timor Leste

Brian Manning recently retired after 35 years working on the Darwin wharves. He was a co-founder of the NT Trades and Labor Council, and is now Chair of the Darwin Port Welfare Committee. He has been involved in a wide range of industrial and progressive causes.

THE coup in Portugal¹ was no sooner a reality than Denis Freney² was on his way to East Timor. He filled me in on the prospects of East Timor becoming independent, along with other Portuguese colonies. At the time, he was on his way back to Sydney and stayed over in our caravan abode in Gardiner Street Darwin.

Denis was full of enthusiastic optimism at the prospects given the

1 On 25 April 1974, radical army officers overthrew the fascist regime in Portugal, unleashing two years of revolutionary struggle. One result was the granting of independence to Portugal's extensive colonial empire.

2 Denis Freney, 1936-1995, was a journalist for *Tribune*, the Communist Party's weekly newspaper, and a leading organiser of solidarity for East Timor. His autobiography is *A map of days* (1991).



Part of the team that kept communications going between the Fretilin in East Timor and the external leadership. From left: Brian Manning, John Wishart, Chris Elenor and Dave Arkin in Dili for the Fretilin Congress in 2000. Brian ran the “public” radio. The other three were underground operators.

aspirations of the people he had met. They had impressed him with their progressive plans to deal with illiteracy and poor health amongst the Maubere³ people in the development of a Democratic Republic in East Timor.

Denis woke screaming in the middle of the night. I leapt out of bed and went down to the end of the van where Denis was now sitting up still half- asleep. He was having a bad dream. I have wondered since if he had witnessed an insight into the tragic events that were to unfold over the next 25 years.

A year later, Fretilin⁴ invited the Northern Territory Trades and Labor Council to send delegates to the occasion of the first anniversary

3 The Maubere: From an indigenous Timorese language, the word was used in a derogatory manner to refer to the people of East Timor. The resistance adopted the word to mean the people of the resistance.

4 FRETILIN: Frente Revolucionaria do Timor-Leste Independente (Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor), the leading East Timorese independence movement.

of the founding of Fretilin. Darwin people were recovering from the ravages of Cyclone Tracy⁵ and desperately working to restore what they could of damaged homes. Consequently there were not many who took up the invitation. A Timor born ethnic Chinese wharfie, Lai Con Liong and myself were the only respondents.

We flew into Bacau on 19 May 1975 with Trans Australia Airlines (TAA)⁶ and on to Dili by light aircraft. I was booked into The Tourist Lodge and met some of Fretilin's leaders, Rogerio Lobato and Jose Ramos Horta, who introduced us to the President, Francisco Xavier Do Amaral, at Fretilin's headquarters in Santa Cruz. He was busily engaged welcoming delegations who were walking in to Dili from all parts of East Timor to join in the occasion. Timorese women in traditional dress played gongs and danced to entertain the gathering multitude.

The next day, 20 May, a procession of Fretilin supporters moved off in a sea of faces waving Fretilin flags. Some were in traditional dress, mounted on ponies and they moved to gather in the park in front of the Administration buildings. I would estimate 100,000 people at least were there. I took photos from the back of a truck which became the speakers podium, alongside Oliver Strewe, a professional photographer who was staying with Horta. The whole scene was one of joyous celebration at the prospects of independence. It made an indelible impression on me. I was privileged to be a witness to the birth of democracy in one of the last remnants of the 400 years of Portuguese colonialism. Fretilin clearly expressed the aspirations of the majority of the population. Ramos Horta pointed out to me the ominous presence of Indonesian agents photographing the scene from the balconies of the administration buildings.

I spent the next five days absorbing the lifestyle of the Timorese, meeting with Chinese workers who wanted help to form a Chinese

5 Cyclone Tracy destroyed most buildings in Darwin on Xmas Day, 1974.

6 TAA was then the government-owned domestic airline. It was later amalgamated with Qantas.

workers union to cope with their gross exploitation by Chinese merchants, and talking to Fretilin supporters. I learnt of their programmes to improve literacy using Paulo Freire⁷ methods and of the inadequate medical treatment of the Maubere people. Malaria was rife. Medical facilities were for the treatment of Portuguese expatriates. I witnessed the racist attitudes of elements of the Portuguese expatriates who just wanted to go home to Portugal. Fretilin had formed a coalition with the UDT⁸ towards the development of independence. This was to fail later as those elements attempted to stage a coup which then triggered the Indonesian invasion.

We left East Timor on 26 May and returned to Darwin intending to return in August, after reporting to the Union. I had my pictures developed by the *NT News*. In return, they used a photo of the celebration on their front page a few days later. I eagerly despatched pictures around the countryside to trade union journals and *Tribune*, keen to spread the good news of the encouraging developments in East Timor.

Fretilin leaders needed to leave East Timor to develop their foreign relations. They were denied visas for Australia unless they had accommodation in Darwin. I was able to guarantee accommodation at 6 Gardiner Street where our caravan was intact following the cyclone, and there was a bedroom not in use in the little house.

The coalition between Fretilin and UDT had collapsed shortly after I left Timor and the UDT, aware that they would lose an election to Fretilin, staged a coup in early August. Horta was in Darwin and I had received a telegram for him from Xavier, the President, ordering him back. However I was not able to find him to deliver the telegram until

7 Paulo Freire, a celebrated and radical Brazilian educationist who condemned the oppressive educational methods of the west, and argued for education to be informal, a conversation between “teacher” and “student”, in which both contribute.

8 UDT: Uniao Democratica de Timor (Timorese Democratic Union), described as “a smaller white collar and commercial group which wanted a gradual process of independence” from Portugal.

after the coup hit the news. By then flights to Dili had been suspended by TAA. Fretilin put down the coup in a couple of weeks and attempted to hand back control to the Portuguese Administration who would have no part of it. Instead they retreated offshore to the island of Atauro, awaiting repatriation to Portugal.

Refugees started arriving in Darwin, mostly UDT sympathisers and a few families of Fretilin leaders who anticipated that their families would become hostages in the event of an Indonesian invasion, which appeared imminent. UDT refugees spread horror stories of Fretilin atrocities. On a visit to Darwin by Abilio Araujo, where he addressed a public meeting at the Darwin High School Theatre, he was confronted by a hostile crowd of UDT supporters. As I understood the situation, UDT elements commenced their coup attempt by killing some Fretilin members. I don't doubt that there was killing in retaliation by Fretilin forces to quell the coup attempt. The extent of such will one day be chronicled when an investigation is undertaken by a democratic Government.

Fretilin obtained single side band radios (SSB) off the shelf in Darwin so as to maintain communications through the Darwin outpost radio, VJY Darwin. They would phone me and read out messages which I would copy in longhand and forward to Denis Freney who was one of the addressees. He would then forward messages to other addressees which included UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and supporting governments around the world. The Whitlam Government was sacked by Governor General Kerr on 11 November 1975 and Malcolm Fraser was installed as caretaker. Communications continued through VJY Darwin until just before Xmas. Alarico Fernandes had read a message which included Christmas greetings to his mother who had been sent out to Sydney. The operator acknowledged the message but then said, "But this message will not be delivered." Fraser had ordered the cessation of the service to Dili, no doubt on the insistence of Indonesia. We had been tuning in to VJY and recorded the message. We then had to face the task of setting up an alternative communications network.

Fretilin had set up an AM broadcast in the evenings which we listened to in order to obtain news of the Indonesian atrocities. These were not accepted by the Australian news media as they maintained that they were unconfirmed reports. The Indonesians had murdered six Australian journalists, so of course there were no independent witnesses until such scenes as the Santa Cruz massacre were seen on television 22 years later, filmed by a person who was lucky not to have been murdered whilst shooting the scene.

Radio Maubere as it was named, could broadcast only, and was of such poor quality it was barely audible at times. There was a need for two-way communication. So began a covert operation with Toni Belo going out of a morning with an SSB set and whip antenna to the outskirts of Darwin, and speaking to Alarico Fernandes. He would then come to my place and telephone whoever he needed to call internationally in Mozambique, Lisbon or New York, and pass on the messages. It wasn't long before I had a \$3,000⁹ phone bill for which I did not have the funds. The phone was cut off but miraculously was reconnected a day later! We reckoned that someone desperately wanted the information being transmitted over my phone and had it reconnected. We eventually paid the bill when funds came available.

Toni got a bit over-confident and despite warnings, continued to transmit from the fringe of Darwin, just off Macmillans Road. The inevitable happened and the Feds swooped on him one morning as he was returning along Bagot Road. He was surrounded by police cars and his radio seized.

We hurriedly set him up again, this time well out of town on a property near Batchelor belonging to a stalwart. Toni was marooned there for a couple of months unable to leave. He was virtually a prisoner. He had spread the word he was going to Macau and he indicated he was calling from Macau when he called up. His tapes were delivered to me and

9 In price terms, \$3000 in 1976 would be the equivalent of \$13,000 in 2003.

forwarded to Sydney by air freight. He was becoming stir crazy and insisted he be relieved. Rocque Rodrigues was going to replace him but was refused a visa.

I went to Sydney to consult with Joe Palmada¹⁰ and Denis. We decided to outfit a Toyota Coaster so a Timorese operator could travel around the Top End as a tourist with an Australian companion. Estanislau Da Silva was the operator with an ex-seaman, Neville Cunningham. An ideal set up but unfortunately not executed according to instructions and the operation was blown and another radio confiscated. Estanislau was arrested with Andrew Waterhouse, our genius technician, as they were about to break camp from a camp site on Cox Peninsula. They faced court, pleaded guilty, made compelling political statements and were fined one hundred dollars. Estanislau had his passport confiscated. Eventually after a bit of angst with Immigration it was returned so he could leave the country and carry on working for Fretilin outside Australia.

It was at this time we had to have another serious look at setting up a covert operation. Learning from our experience, it was decided to operate with an Australian operator, so the search was on for likely comrades from the South who could be self reliant, would be unknown in the Top End and who could be trained in the operation and move about with absolutely minimal contact with the local operation. Four remarkable comrades were selected over time and all carried out their tasks with dedication. They will all tell their own stories.

My role was backstop. In the event of running into difficulties, I would be called on to help. This occurred a few times. A mechanical breakdown, busted radiator needing repair, getting bogged in the treacherous melaleuca country in the wet season, help with maps and possible suitable sites, names, and where to find trusted people they could rely on. I obtained sections of mast materials which I installed on a five

10 Joe Palmada was a leading member of the Communist Party.

11 Five acres = 2 hectares.

acre block¹¹ I bought just out of Darwin. This was designed to monitor and record two way traffic each morning and expedite its despatch to Sydney where the contents would be telexed¹² to its destination. We had no problems getting supporters to monitor the receiver each morning. Geoff ----- was happy to live in a caravan there and tune up each morning. He would bring the tapes to me at my office and I would get them on the midday TAA flight to Sydney. *Tribune* agreed to instal a telex and Andrew and Denis (possibly others too) would work on transcribing the material to a telex tape to transmit to its nominated destination.

At the same time as we were meeting the needs of Fretilin's two way traffic between their external mission and inside leadership (largely conducted in simple code form), there emerged needs to provide direct contact access between the Australian media and Fretilin, humanitarian access for refugees who wanted news of family, opportunities for Australian politicians to speak directly with Fretilin, as well as transmitting taped messages from support groups around the world. It was decided to operate what was called the "Public Radio" which would operate on weekends "when required". Andrew modified a couple of radio receivers to convert to transmitters and eventually acquired a Codan SSB transmitter which was under my control. I received a crash course from Andrew on how to build a quarter wave length tuned inverted V dipole antenna at my brother Jack's place in Brisbane.

Denis and Andrew came up for the launching. He invited national media, journalists and politicians to participate. As the numbers grew beyond one carload, I eventually had to charter a bus to carry 15 people and their equipment to the transmission site! Covertly?

We started the day at 6.00am with a hearty breakfast and a working bee in the kitchen, making a pile of Denis's enormous sandwiches of thick crusty bread, ham and salad, corned meat and pickles to feed the multitude. We packed an esky with cold drinks and went off to pick up

12 A telex machine transmitted typed messages, letter by letter, along telephone lines.

the passengers at the Travelodge in one of Nancy O'Hara's buses by 0800.

Andrew and John [Louisa] had gone out the evening before to a site we had selected so as to set up an antenna and prepare the transmitter for a 1000 call up. The bus driver was told we were going "down the track" so we headed off, detouring first down Virginia road at the 17 mile, to check out the receiving site and the 90ft mast with Andrew's design of a tuned antenna which increased the strength of the receiving signal by a couple of decibels. This was the first such diversion to check out if anyone was following us. We still had time to kill so we took another detour down to the Darwin River Dam on the Berry Springs Road. We noticed a grey Holden sedan following us which had been observed earlier, obviously tailing us.

We stopped at Manton River for Jim Bowditch to catch up. He had been travelling in his own car as another check on whether we were being followed. He had noticed the grey Holden also which just then passed us and continued down the track on a long straight stretch until it was out of sight. We were certain by now that we were being tailed so we debated what we would do. Continue on was decided, so we set off from Manton River. Halfway along the stretch the grey Holden came back in the opposite direction and passed us. We continued on for a further couple of k's to a sweeping bend on the Batchelor turnoff where we disembarked to walk to the transmission site up the hillside. With everyone off I asked the bus driver to continue on to Batchelor and wait there until 12 noon when he should return for us. We would be waiting on the side of the road. I also asked him, if questioned as to where he had dropped us, to say something vague like, "Oh, back along the highway somewhere."

As the crowd were walking up the hill, we could hear a car speeding towards us. Denis yelled, "Everybody Down" and we all dropped to the ground, hidden by the tall spear grass. Except Topsy Secretary, an elder of the Larrakia people, who with Fred Fogarty had come along in support. Without hesitation Denis applied a classic flying tackle and brought her to the ground. The driver would have been watching the road and wouldn't

have gazed up to his left on the sweeping curve. He followed the empty bus to Batchelor where he and others quizzed the driver.

We were on air one for 90 minutes as messages of support were relayed from around the world. Ken Fry¹³ read greetings from supporting parliamentarians and various TV and radio journalists interviewed Fretilin as the cameras rolled.

The session over, John and Andrew walked over the hill to Coomalie Creek where a non participant was waiting to receive the transmitter. The rest of us walked down the hill to where an irate Radio Inspector with antenna wire trailing out the car door in the company of army and Federal Police exclaimed loudly, "There they are!" Just then the bus pulled up for our drive back to Darwin. As John and Andrew returned to the transmission site, it was crawling with personnel looking for the transmitter. Mission successfully accomplished! A most extraordinary event given that we were followed and frankly were expecting to get rumbled. We certainly had luck on our side following some very careful planning.

A cardinal rule for the public radio was to never return from a successful contact carrying the transmitter. Various contingency plans were made to dispose of the equipment before we returned. Alan, a casual wharfie, became an important part of many successful missions in disposing of the equipment which he would return to me a day later. On one occasion, after a session with a Channel 10 TV journalist in the Berry Springs/Darwin River area, I took off through the bush with the transmitter and intercepted Alan. John picked me up on the side of the Berry Springs road and we drove to the highway where we met the Inspector looking for us at the turnoff. We were escorted into Darwin with a Federal police car in front and another behind. We pulled up outside the Travelodge and they surrounded the vehicles looking for the transmitter. The journalist was worried he might lose his film and was

13 Ken Fry was Labor MHR for Fraser (ACT) from 1974-84. He was the leading supporter of East Timor in federal parliament.

nervously waiting for them to say or do something. I could see they were not able to lay charges given that we did not have transmitting equipment. I said come on let's go upstairs and have a coffee. We just walked away and went upstairs to their suite where we all breathed a sigh of relief as the adrenalin rush wore off. Other cardinal rules were:

- Don't use the same site continuously.
- Don't transmit for longer than 30 to 45 minutes.
- Don't follow the same patterns when going to transmit.
- Use different vehicles and vary the times when leaving home.
- Start off in one vehicle and change into another one.
- Go out the night before and camp out.
- Don't decide in advance on transmission site. Decide enroute.

I had gone out on a Friday night with Robert Wesley-Smith and camped out for a transmission the next morning in the Adelaide River area. We had both worked in the area and knew it well. We called up in the morning at the usual time and after half an hour there was no response, which meant Fretilin was not on air that day. We decided we would look around for other potential transmission sites. Wes had a Subaru 4WD so we went off road in the Glenlucky Creek area.

From the crest of a hill we noticed a Landrover on the other side in a clearing with 4 whip antennae set up in a square pattern with cables attached to a central piece of radio equipment and an operator engrossed in listening with headphones on. It was obviously a triangulation site, set up to pinpoint our operation. We depressed the clutch and rolled back out of sight and hightailed it out of there as we still had the transmitter on board. We disposed of the equipment on the way back and I collected it later.

Wes couldn't resist going back the following day on his way down to Adelaide River to see if the guy was still there (he was) and going up to him to ask him what he was doing. This caused a flurry of activity by the operator who hurriedly called up on his two-way radio to alert his backup that something was up. In a short while, the copper from Batchelor turned

up and quizzed Wes wanting to know what he was up to. Wes, feigning all innocence, wanted to know what the radio operator was doing. Wes wanted to take the radio out on his own to make his own contacts. I had some problems with this. I don't think he fully understood that the CPA organisation was in control of the operation. He didn't relish accepting the decision that the equipment didn't go out of my possession.

He was also not aware that by this time, Alarico Fernandes had surrendered and handed over the radio to the Indonesians, nor that Operation Skylight was being planned by them to ambush Nicolau Lobato. Wes was working with Community Aid Abroad and may have wanted to send material from this source as well as news items he selected. He may have been used unknowingly as a conduit for information in this double game.

Although we became aware that Alarico had surrendered and the Indonesians were orchestrating the contacts, we continued to maintain contact hoping to learn more of their intentions. In due course, when the time was right, the underground operator, Cosmos, broke off contact after giving Alarico a serve. He will tell his own story.

Radio contact was effectively finished for some time as Fretilin had lost their equipment. It now fell to the resourcefulness of Andrew, who created a transmitter out of a ghetto blaster. This was smuggled in to Fretilin through Dili. When it was anticipated that they would have the equipment, we began to monitor the frequency at the usual call up schedule. Eventually, a tentative voice called us. I was monitoring with a receiver scanner and hurriedly switched to the transmitter and responded. The voice came back, "Need Portuguese Operator. Need Portuguese Operator". He had no more English and my Portuguese was limited to a greeting and the Fretilin slogans. I got him to understand that we would have a Portuguese operator the next day.

I contacted Laurentino and Maria Pires who came out the following day and we made tentative contact. After contacting Denis, and consultation with the Fretilin external leadership, Agiu Pereira was

designated as the operator. We then recommenced fairly regular contact operating with Agiu and I going out mostly at weekends and tape recording the material. This was also recorded back at the Howard Springs receiver site. This material included updates on Indonesian atrocities in Portuguese which had to be translated and issued as press statements. As usual, the media was reluctant to use the material, again maintaining they were unconfirmed reports.

One of the last contacts was a major celebration in the mountains with speeches by Fretilin and Falantil¹⁴ leaders. We were expecting to be on air for more time than usual so travelled further from Darwin to the Grove Hill area. We had messages of support to play from around the world. We also had Andrew Olle¹⁵ lined up to interview them, but at the last minute he was prevented from participating by his producer because of the illegality of the contact! Andrew Olle listened to the contact from the receiving site at Howard Springs. He was very disappointed that he couldn't participate as he understood he was listening to a special event.

Contact was lost some time after that and although we monitored for another year on weekends, it was not resumed. We assumed that they had set up alternative channels of communication as the struggle continued and information continued to come out, eventually with graphic film footage of the massacre at Santa Cruz cemetery.¹⁶

There were many people in Darwin who contributed to the East Timor Radio, playing a supporting role in a variety of ways. Monitoring the receiver, helping erect the radio mast, lending vehicles, driving, being cockatoo,¹⁷ translating endless documents, typing press reports, and most

14 FALANTIL: Forças Armadas de Libertação (Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor); pro-independence guerilla force. Originally under Fretilin control, later the armed wing of all the independence forces.

15 Andrew Olle was perhaps the most famous ABC news personality at the time, and presented of the *7.30 Report*.

16 On November 12, 1991, Indonesian troops fired upon a peaceful procession to Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor killing 271 East Timorese.

17 Cockatoo: acting as lookout.

importantly, continuing to support independence and keep faith in the Maubere people's determination to resist the Indonesian oppression and occupation. This, despite the terrible price they paid over 24 years of betrayal by successive Australian Governments from Whitlam to Fraser; through thirteen years of Hawke and Keating's economic opportunism and Keating's disgusting subservience to Suharto.

Howard, forced by world outrage and Australian demonstrations to act, dragged his feet in sending Australian troops to support the UN costing a further toll in human misery and murder. He has agonised over getting Australian troops back out as soon as possible, being more concerned we might offend the Indonesian military rulers and damage our trading interests.

As for my part in the radio operations, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to make a contribution towards Timorese independence. I am sure there are plenty of Australians who would have gladly taken my place.

Tony Belo and Estanislau Da Silva, the Timorese radio operators in Australia, were both at the post independence Fretilin Congress in May 2000. Their contribution, along with that of the four Australian operators who attended, was recognized and thanked by the 1,500 delegates.

However, this is just the beginning of the struggle. Fretilin again look like being elected as the government in a democratic East Timor. They need to be vigilant against those who would betray their mandate and sabotage their embryonic democracy. They deserve our continued support to rebuild their country savagely mutilated by the Indonesian military thieves and vandals who smashed and burned what they couldn't steal.

A Luta Continua
Viva O Povo Maubere
Viva Fretilin

Chris Elenor

Calling Fretilin

Chris Elenor joined the Communist Party in Australia in 1976 after finding political enlightenment on the hippy trail from England to India. He now works as a strategy analyst with a large mutual organisation. He plays viola with the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra, is President of the Down Syndrome Association and is a Director of the Redfern Legal Centre in Sydney.

JOE Palmada rang me and suggested we meet. With Joe on the Communist Party National Committee and responsible for party security, it was a question of where and when to meet rather than whether to meet him. Besides I was intrigued to find out why he wanted to talk. Clearly it was business that should not be discussed on the phone.

It was 1977 and I had been working in Canberra and hadn't talked with Joe since the time of protecting the Party printery following the dismissal of the Labor government the year before. We agreed on Elkington Park in Balmain for the next day, close to where I was living in a shared house with the new love of my life—a location where it would be difficult for spooks of whatever variety to share our conversation.

As we leant against the wall in the winter sunshine Joe explained the Party was carrying out an important role for the East Timorese national independence forces. They needed a person to disappear from Sydney for six months to do this underground work. It would involve isolation, some physical risk and possible arrest. The job was pressing and he would need my decision in a couple of days and I would have to leave following training within a couple of weeks. He would tell me more on a need to know basis. Was I interested?

Interested? I was already completely taken with the idea. I tried to appear calm and serious, but I did need to know more. What would it involve? Why did he think I was the right person? We walked a little as he considered how much he needed to tell me to keep me interested. Once around the corner he started slowly.

The Party had been running a radio link between the Fretilin leadership inside East Timor and their external leadership which was now in Mozambique, Lisbon and New York. This was the only inward communication from the outside world to Fretilin. The radio operation had been financed by money from Dutch (and other?) support groups. Recently this operation, based near Darwin, had been raided by police, the equipment confiscated and those involved charged. No communications had been sent to East Timor in several weeks. Someone needed to go to the Northern Territory, re-establish the radio link and operate in a way that would avoid detection by police, ASIO, DSD¹ or any other forces of the State.

Now I was totally hooked but doubtful of my ability to do it; a boy scout recently arrived from gentle England did not seem a very adequate preparation for crocodiles: salt water and human.

As a relatively new Australian I had only a vague grasp of the geography to the north of Australia and had never heard of East Timor prior to the collapse of Portugese rule. I did however understand the

1 Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and Defence Signals Directorate.

Indonesian invasion had destroyed any chance for self determination in East Timor (wherever that was).

I said nothing, thinking furiously about the bigger problem of how I was going to square this with Paula, or even if it could be less than terminal to the grand passion currently underway.

I told Joe I was very interested but that I would have to discuss it with Paula. He seemed taken aback, perhaps not knowing we were a serious item. Joe thought that this would compromise the need to know principle. I said the principle was that Paula needed to know and I was not prepared to consider doing this unless I could be open with her. He was dubious: the less people in the know the better. I reminded him she had been active in Party organizations since she was at school and would clearly understand the need for absolute discretion about an issue such as this. Joe was troubled but agreed reluctantly and we arranged to meet again. I tried to maintain a sensible stride on the walk home but with my head zinging, my feet wanted to skip, only sobered by how this boys-only adventure would be viewed by the woman to be left at home. The political had become very personal.

It was rough, for both of us, discussions went on into the night. Paula understood the importance of the job but why me, why now? I had only recently returned from Canberra and presumed to move in to share her room. She had been here before, a partner who went to Moscow for close to a year. She felt deserted and what would she say to others who might think the same? But a boy's got to do what a boy's got to do and what she would do is decamp with Cassie, her daughter, to England in the University vacation. We were both bruised and I was relieved to leave it there, at least until the next round.

I told Joe I was keen to do the job at our next meeting and he gave me more of the picture. This was to be a different sort of operation from the previous one: complete security and very mobile. I was to start to put about the story that I was thinking of going to Western Australia for work. Meanwhile I had to find a four wheel drive, preferably short

wheelbase. Look for something ex-government.

Cruising the car yards down Parramatta Rd, I eventually found a Telecom Landrover ute in the red corporate livery of the time. It was however a longer wheelbase. This was checked over and purchased by someone else in the network and delivered to Harry Hatfield's, a metalworker comrade, for a few modifications. As an optional extra, Landrovers could have an extra fuel tank fitted for long range operations. Harry made a tank that was indistinguishable from the genuine accessory and fitted it complete with fuel line and tap to the Landrover. Access was from inside the cab, and once the disguising mud film and four screws had been removed from the lid, there was room in the tank for the radio, aerials, power cables, code books and other transmitting paraphernalia. In the bottom was an asbestos mat to keep heat radiating from the exhaust pipe running alongside away from the radio equipment.

I met with Denis Freney who was the prime mover in mobilising support around independence for East Timor. Denis and I had previously argued angrily over the tactics to be used in the Canberra Campaign for an Independent East Timor (CIET) and we had major differences in the strong internal Party debates of this period. But these issues were put aside for this venture. He laid out the current military situation. The guerilla army, with guns seized from the Portugese armouries, were defending significant areas of the high country and the people who lived in these areas. Falintil, the armed wing of Fretilin, had many guns but limited ammunition. Food and medicines would be in short supply. The Indonesians had control of the main towns and the major roads by day but insufficient firepower to attack the core Fretilin held areas in the high country. The counter-insurgency operations and mass killings by the TNI² were continuing.

It was imperative to quickly re-establish contact with the Fretilin leadership inside East Timor. The coded radio messages were the only

2 TNI: Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army).

link between the internal leadership and the leader of the external delegation, Marie Alcatiri in Mozambique, and others such as Abilio Araujo in Lisbon and Jose Ramos Horta who was focusing on the United Nations in New York.

The radio broadcasts were in breach of the Telecommunications Act, however the problem was not the likely fines. The operation could not afford to keep losing very expensive radios and vehicles. Two sets of equipment had been seized already. Until now the radio operators had been Timorese who spoke Tetum.³ One had finished his stint and the other had been deported after the last bust. The trick would be for me to lie low down the track outside Darwin, leading another life, and from this base make forays to operate, never the same place twice. Brian Manning, a wharfie in Darwin, had located a possible base and had some safe transmitting sites in mind, based on his local knowledge.

Denis was the Sydney connection in the pipeline and the coded and plain text messages and tape recordings would flow between us via Australia Post boxes in Darwin and Sydney, registered in other than our own names. The coded messages were then sent on via an old telex machine Denis had acquired, cheaper than international phone calls.

Arrangements were being made for training and I would be contacted. I met Andrew Waterhouse at the Café Sport in Leichhardt. Amidst the Italian din he said we were going away for a few days. I had to learn how to operate the radio, some electronics for trouble shooting, and as immediate homework, the international alphabet.

He took me to a safe house in the Blue Mountains and we started work on radio theory and electronics. Andrew was very skilled in this and was constantly learning from the experience of the operation, refining the gear and working to get a stronger, more reliable radio signal into East Timor. Power supply had been a problem with the previous operation;

³ Tetum is the primary indigenous language of East Timor. Portuguese is now the official national language.

this time the radio would be powered directly from the vehicle battery through detachable leads. He had sourced the radios. He was waiting for money to come through from the international support groups. Someone else in the network was buying the radios because he had been arrested when visiting the previous operation and was now known to be involved. He had to do some modifications to the radios to crystal lock the radio frequency which would be used.

We pored over the map of East Timor and Northern Australia and he explained how the aerial needed to be aligned by compass to punch a signal directly into East Timor. The rainy season was approaching and massive tropical storms would make radio communication difficult. Heavy rain, humidity and constant rigging of the equipment would lead to failure of the gear. Getting the dipole aerial up as high as possible (thirty feet would be good) in an area free of obstructions and with the two aerial legs in the correct alignment to the target was a tight specification. I set about learning how to make and rig aerials and troubleshoot the equipment.

The next time he picked me up we went across the Blue Mountains to a tin shed on an isolated property. We would be there for a few days. As we drove he explained that our objectives were two-fold. He wanted to try an experiment, to try and bounce a signal into East Timor late at night from several thousand kilometers further south than ever before. People in Darwin would be listening for it. He could also try out the transmitter he had crystal locked and it would give me some hands-on practice with the equipment.

We picked a transmission site on high ground and I got plenty of practice attempting to sling a weighted line over a high bough, the most difficult part of setting up. We checked the equipment and then settled down in the bitterly cold, star-bright night to wait for transmission time. Not even a small nip to keep out the cold; this was active duty. Andrew talked of how DSD would have used detection finding equipment to pinpoint the location of the previous transmitter and how all

transmissions would need to be kept to under half an hour. This had been the downfall of the previous operation. They had camped and transmitted from the one spot for too long, and even had a vege garden going when he visited them.

We fired up and bounced the signal off the ionosphere. Did anyone hear it? Andrew would find out from the Darwin listening post on our return to Sydney. The gear had worked well and I had been initiated into the cold and arcane rites of single side band radio.

Despite the urgency of re-establishing the radio link, preparations had slowed. Money was tight and the need to prepare in secret through the network added to the delays. I was conscious of appearing idle and unemployed to my friends. I could say nothing. I was now waiting in solidarity as Brian Manning later termed it.

I saw Paula and Cassie off on their way to England. All I wanted now was to get on with it. Preparations were now well advanced and I received final briefings from both Joe and Denis. I would stage a sudden departure to Western Australia with Paula apparently deserted in preference to a job. Contact would be through an address in Perth. In reality after driving the vehicle (at not more than fifty miles an hour) to Darwin, I was to immediately set about securing a base. I was to shun open contact with Brian Manning and keep contact to a minimum, however he had found a ramshackle demountable on an out of the way block which would make a suitable base. The rainy season had started and there may be difficulty in getting through to Darwin. At best it would take a week. Do not take any risks in getting there even if this means delays. A route was suggested which allowed for some variation depending on which highways were closed by the wet.

By the time I reached Tamworth I had transmuted into Steve. The shoulder length hair and the full beard were gone and I was getting used to living and sometimes sleeping in the ute cab. The rains had swept through Central Queensland and nothing without tracks was moving on the black soil plains. So we all waited in Winton. Some drank, others

watched from the hotel balcony as the boys drag raced their V8 utes up and down the mainstreet in the rain. Two days lost. A lot of miles, slow down, don't cook the truck, keep concentrating, try and keep it out of deep water. The pommy new chum, awed at being alone in this wide land stretching to every horizon. Sleeping in the stardome by a little fire, more for company and ambience than the need for heat.

More miles and then further delay through flooding at Newcastle Waters. We sat for a week, the makeshift camp growing bigger as people arrived daily and waited for the waters to subside. They rose. As I had to keep largely to myself the highlight of the day was eating in the roadhouse, well stocked from the stranded road trains. I was impatient, conscious of how relatively close I now was and of the amount of time the radio link had now been down. The river had peaked and was now falling very very slowly. It could be another week before it was safely passable. How much would the water need to fall before I could attempt the several kilometre long crossing? The local police had already warned me they would push the vehicle off the causeway into the river to clear the road if I failed to proceed. In preparation I had sealed and taped up the distributor, removed the fan belt and moved the radio gear from the false petrol tank and had it perching it as high as possible inside the cab, hidden in a sleeping bag. The big trucks and snorkel equipped 4WD's were now negotiating the crossing. I watched the bow wave of a truck. The displacement was creating a moving spot immediately behind the truck where the river level was lower in the vortex. Eventually I took a risk and went into the water right behind one of the largest trucks from the camp. If the truck stopped I would be in trouble and if my depth estimates were wrong I would be stranded with a wet engine. The water was quickly over the floor of the cab, and lapping my feet. How much higher would it come? How much longer would the motor keep operating?

On the other side I backed off from the truck, gave him a relieved wave and pulled over to take stock, well away from the camp which had

formed on this side of the flood. Harry Hatfield had built well. No water had got into the dummy petrol tank despite its total immersion and the radio gear was soon safely stowed away again for the remainder of the trip to Darwin.

I arrived in Darwin in a downpour and tracked down the owner of the block and the demountable to his house in one of the suburbs rebuilt after the cyclone. He was not in the know about the operation and his wife was particularly happy to negotiate a rent for the place which had been uninhabited. It had power and water and that's all. He had plans for the block but not for a few years. For my part, I needed a place to stay to do some writing, I did however plan to put up a television aerial tall enough to get line of sight from Darwin.

From the track leading from the main road it was difficult to pick out the hovel (as it became less than affectionately known). The spear grass rose high around it, a four-cell, flat-roofed box which had air conditioning units in a previous life but sadly no longer. It was uncomfortably steamy. The ablutions consisted of minimal breeze block walls with a shower rose and tap, open to the sky and the elements. The water in the pipes was warm from the sun but clean.

I moved in my meagre possessions. A camp bed a few books, the mosquito net and a second powerful radio to receive signals from Fretilin which would captured by a tape recorder for later transcription. All I needed now was to set up an aerial. I set about constructing a tall TV antenna from galvanized pipe held up by stays running to pegs in the soft ground. I made sure the TV antenna array was pointed in the right direction. The dipole radio antenna aligned to East Timor was disguised by running it down the stays.

Brian paid me a surreptitious visit at the block, armed with a few creature comforts and some equipment salvaged from the previous operation, such as a small mobile generator. He was sure he had not been followed. He talked of the difficulty and danger of operating in the Top End in the wet alone in a single vehicle. Many areas were impassable and

there was grave danger of getting seriously bogged or stranded whenever you ventured off the roads. He was concerned that out there, I could possibly die in a roll-over or other mishap before anyone knew I was missing. I could not be seen delivering anything to his house in town so we set up a system where I would leave a note in a dead letter box saying how long I would be out for, and my likely operating area so he could raise the alarm and start a search if I failed to notify of my safe return. It was a small consolation to have this safety net after he had rightly scared me with Top End horror stories.

He talked of the bases and airstrips that had been bulldozed from the bush during the Second World War as part of the forward defence of Australia. These places had all weather tracks leading in from the bitumen highway to clearings in the bush where the runways had been. These were big enough to get a signal out over the trees. He showed me some possible sites on the map which I should check out. He suggested a place for the initial attempt to re-establish the radio link. The plan was to break in over the regular broadcasts which were still coming out of East Timor.

I was starting to panic, it had taken me longer to get to the transmitting site than planned and I had difficulty slinging the aerial high enough into the dripping trees. It had been an early start before dawn but time was running out, and the rain had started again. I was fumbling in my haste to make the connections and keep the gear dry. The last connection made, sweating and dripping I hauled myself into the cab pulled on the headphones, switched on to receive and turned on the tape recorder. It all seemed to be working so far.

Amazing, through the crashing storm static, I could hear the tinny strains of Foho Ramelau.⁴ This was it. Somehow, from somewhere, they were still broadcasting: “Viva Fretilin, Viva puovo Maubere.” Alarico Fernandes started his news bulletin. Deep breaths as I nervously caressed the microphone switch and waited to break in. He finished the first item. I

4 National anthem of the Timorese independence movement.

hit the microphone button and the needle indicating signal strength soared strongly as I croaked out in as calm a voice as I could muster, "This is Kolibere, This is Kolibere. Calling Alarico Fernandes and Fretilin. This is Kolibere in Australia. Can you hear me, over." No response, Alarico had continued with the next news item. I tried again and this time he stopped reading the bulletin, a short silence, he had heard something, who was it? I hit the airwaves again and this time, a response. "Hello Kolibere, Hello Kolibere, this is Alarico Fernandes. I am receiving you." I pulled out the rapidly smudging paper with the frequencies, and radio schedules. They would need to listen at 10.30 am on any of three days and I would do the same on the other three. Were these schedules OK? He extravagantly confirmed the schedules and I then read him urgent messages from Jose Ramos Horta and Denis.

Very quickly secure transmission time was up and it was all over, the gear was back in the dummy petrol tank and I was out of there, singing in the rain about to put fifty plus miles between the radio and the transmission site. I tried to concentrate on the driving, but it was hard to stop grinning to myself. It had worked, first time, and I knew they wouldn't catch me, not this time. What a blast.

The tapes went to Denis in Sydney and I collected my mail through Steve's post box and bank account which I had established on arrival. I had also picked up a prospectors permit, a panning dish and some rock samples as a valid and legal reason for roaming around in remote areas.

The news from East Timor was mixed. The Indonesians had acquired A10 ground attack aircraft which flew slowly enough to pinpoint vegetable gardens and settlements in the Fretilin defended areas. Falintil was however still holding these areas and had stemmed the attacks.

I settled into a solitary pattern of checking the post box, stocking for a sortie, and away for two or three days and then returning to record long messages from Alarico, dispatch the tapes and transcripts and disappear down the track again. The hovel leaked, necessitating keeping supplies off the floor. I shared it with a variety of crawling and flying

things which were difficult to keep at bay.

Brian Manning had a scheme hatching, as always. I heard his latest project was to put up a 90 foot aerial on his block to receive signals from East Timor. He had acquired the triangular sections for the bottom part of the installation and was working out how to stay the top. I of course could go nowhere near him. At our meeting he had had given me the name of a bloke he trusted who knew the country well and could possibly help with additional sites, particularly as the wet receded and the safe areas of operation could expand beyond the all weather tracks.

Norm Hack had a truck and bulldozer and did earth moving jobs in the area. He also had a shack on a gold lease down the track towards Pine Creek which could be a useful place for me to camp on some of the transmitting trips. Norm was described as more of a fellow traveller, close to the Party but never a member. He was married to Maureen who came from the Docker River area. Norm was close to the traditional owners around Oenpelli. He had helped them negotiate terms for the mine site and now looked after the mothballed exploration site for the company. Norm felt strongly about what was going on in East Timor and was likely to help. I should see him.

I met Norm over a beer in a pub in Darwin after he finished work and sounded out the possibilities. Norm was going down the track the following week to check on his claim at Fountain Head. If I came too, we could check some places out along the way. Norm became very important to my sanity. As well as helping find safe sites and using his goldmine as a forward base, he and Maureen were my only regular human contact, infrequent as it was.

Paula and I had hatched a plan for her to visit me secretly on her way back to Australia. I didn't think my Sydney controllers would approve so I didn't tell them. Cassie would come back with Paula's best friend. It was planned for all to arrive back in Sydney about the same time. Paula arrived from the mid winter cold of London to the steaming heat of a Darwin evening. I looked very different without the beard and I had to

take her back to the hovel where conditions were still very basic. For Paula it was purgatory, the heat and isolation. When I went for a couple of days to transmit she was alone in the wet heat of the hovel with no transport and just the radio for entertainment. She was pleased to leave for Sydney. Her visit however enabled me to see through the rest of my stint. Mail to and from Paula via the underground contact in the west proved to be slow and intermittent. We had however arranged our own private cut out mail system in anticipation of this difficulty.

Gradually the wet receded and operating became easier. I moved further afield in search of new sites. I wanted to give the all weather sites a rest and save them for the time when the rains came again. I was starting to feel that despite my best efforts to operate unpredictably over several thousand square miles, after several months my operating method was detectable. There are so few people and vehicles in the remoter areas that any movement is noticed with interest. I was also thinking that as there were only a couple of roads out of Darwin and my base at the hovel, all the forces of the State would need to do if they wanted to catch me badly enough would be to road block the appropriate highway for a period after the transmission and search all vehicles. The false petrol tank was good but not that good. Perhaps I was getting paranoid or suffering a touch of hubris. Starting to do the solitary confinement hard.

I put a proposal to Joe and Denis that I should explore the possibilities of moving camp further west towards the Daly River. The answer was no. They did not share my security concern. The operation was working successfully, just keep doing it.

Andrew had to return to Darwin in connection with his arrest at the previous radio site, we met at night in the car park by the Beach. The sand flies ate us in the cool seeming breeze. My Sydney controllers apparently thought my idea to migrate to Daly River was a sign of restiveness. How was I holding up? I could honestly say, well. I was healthy, operating safely and I had come to terms with having too much of my own company. I was however starting to cross off the weeks and days on the cell wall, glad

that this tour of duty had an approximate end date.

Norm had told me that after the wet he had to drive out to the exploration site with diesel and supplies and do some grading with the bulldozer. He asked if I wanted to come with my vehicle to assist with any unbogging. He thought there was also an abandoned Landrover out there with a hard top that might fit the back of mine. The trip to Narbalek was rough but uneventful. We stopped at Oenpelli so Norm could renew friendships. We found the Landrover canopy, it fitted after much sweat and swearing and then on to Narbarlek close to the mouth of the East Alligator River. Norm was now a trusted part of the operation and we transmitted twice from the area around there. Norm found a tobacco tin from his last visit with some grass in it. Active duty or not we laughed and solved the problems of the world for a couple of hours watching the giant ants in the sun at Green Ant Dreaming.

Whilst the transmitting was always a great adrenalin boost, I had a lot of time to fill in between the radio schedules. Much of it was spent driving or waiting, either because I had gone out early to set up transmissions or to stagger my return to the hovel and not create patterns of travel which correlated with the transmissions. I was still operating carefully and securely but starting to go stir crazy with the isolation. It was a mind game that was now more difficult than managing the physical environment.

By the time John Wishart arrived to replace me I had built up a bank of 25 usable transmitting sites based on Norm and Brian's local knowledge and my own explorations. Some of these were being kept back for the wet season others had not provided good signal projection. John and I had a week to do the handover, we went over the maps and down the track and I introduced him to Norm and Maureen and said my goodbyes to them. I was eager to share my work with another and leave the operation in good hands.

I had only a small twinge as I parted from John and the Landrover outside the airport. The Landrover had gone well and so would he, I was

out of there. Enough waiting in solidarity. R&R here I come. The flight to Sydney seemed interminable. Joe Palmada met me at the airport and drove me over to Balmain. We were both very happy. Paula and Cassie were there. We were all very happy.

The operating plan had worked well. It had been more than six months so far and never a sniff of being caught. Perhaps they were not even trying? Denis had told me the codes being used were simple substitutions which was all that could be set up in the haste prior to the invasion. The intelligence community may have realized that the radio messages were a valuable source of information and decided that their interests were better served by allowing the radio to operate. We of course could not know or presume this and the radio continued to operate underground for another 2 years as the only link between the Fretilin leadership and Falintil and the people in the areas they were defending.

Postscript

It was strong turbulence and a small plane. I held my seat and stomach. We finally broke through the cloud on the descent to Dilli. Long deep ridges running East-West. The world crumpled and pushed up on its edge. Few roads, tropical rainforest. Perfect guerilla country. The plane was directed in by an Australian forces ground controller as a UN helicopter clattered in. We clambered out (from the back first please so the plane does not tip up) into an unusually late wet season. Collecting our bags we enter the spartan terminal building. The sign on the wall proclaimed:

Welcome to East Timor.

The Newest Country in the World

Year 2000.

UNTAET⁵ put a stamp on my passport for 90 days and I was in. Peter, a long time Party member and East Timor activist was there to meet me. We climbed into a minibus with an A4 Fretilin flag taped to the windscreen and drove in to Dilli along a street of burnt out buildings. Twenty five years on, here I was in an independent East Timor. The thought of this moment had sustained me during the isolated months in the bush with the radio. How little I knew then that it would be so long coming and in such reduced circumstances. Peter broke into my thoughts. We are going straight to the Fretilin Congress, there are about 2,000 people meeting in the basketball courts. Nine of the Australian delegation have already arrived and there are five other comrades from the radio operation here.

Viva Fretilin

Viva povo Maubere

5 UNTAET: United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, which administered the country from October 19, 1999 to May 19, 2002.

Kevin Cook

From building sites to Aboriginal education

Kevin Cook was for many years General Director of the cooperative that ran Tranby Aboriginal College in Sydney.

This is a lightly edited transcript of an interview Kevin did with Hal Alexander and Russ Hermann in February 2001.

Q I want to ask some questions about early days and about your work in the unions and other questions about Tranby. How did you come to Sydney—and from where—and what were your first impressions?

KC I come to Sydney from Wollongong and I got a job at the paper mills as an ironworker. I'd been working in the steelworks in Port Kembla under the Ironworkers [union]. I didn't like the hierarchy of the Ironworkers. It was right-wing. Never did anything for us down in Wollongong. And we had a few strikes at the paper mill, and they never did anything for us in Sydney.

Q You finally ended up working in the

building industry. How did that come about?

KC Well I worked with a guy called Roy Bishop. We used to get one another jobs. We used to work on shut-downs, mostly. And if he knew of a shut-down and he'd got a job there, he'd try and get me in—or vice-versa. I was working at Tumut at the time and he rang me up and said that he'd got me a fantastic job. And so I snatched it straight away, come back down to Sydney, and lo and behold he'd got me a job as a dogman.¹ And the only time I'd seen dogmen is when I drove past and seen 'em clinging on to loads and going up six or seven stories and...

Q How did you feel the first time you went up?

KC (laughs) Well, I went up on a—you're not supposed to do it—on a concrete kibble.² And when I landed up at the top, you could see my fingerprints on the steel kibble. That's how much I thought about it. And I was heading down the stairs goin' home. But they talked me into staying. So—yeah, that's how I got...

Q But you got used to heights...

KC I didn't mind the heights so much as I got used to riding the loads. And that was pretty dangerous at the time.

Q And you became part of the rank and file movement in the Builders Labourers Federation?

KC Yeah. The rank and file—when we were dogmen, it was a job where you could do things. You had control of the crane. If you didn't lift and didn't put things where they wanted it to go, well it'd hold up the job, and you were a pretty important cog in the wheel. And the dogmen, on a whole, were pretty strong. And at that time they had a dispute on with the builders. When there wasn't any work for the dogmen, what we'd do was

1 A dogman: A worker who rides with the load being lifted by a crane.

2 A kibble: Steel container filled with wet concrete being lifted by a crane.

clean the crane down and work in and around the crane. What the builders wanted us to do was to be brickies' labourers and do other work, taking away the right of another person to have that job. So we refused. And both Roy and I got the sack three times in three months for doing exactly the same thing. That was refusing to do other work. So the other crane—the other dogmen—supported us and we got on fairly well with a lot of the other dogmen. And then Roy went and became an organiser and not long after that I became an organiser of the BLF, the union.

Q What do you think about the relationship between the leadership of the union over that period, and the rank and file?

KC Well the leadership and the members of the union were one and the same. We had as much say as the president of the union. As I saw it from where I was sitting, we dictated the disputes that we'd get into. We dictated what was going on in the union. And even to have a sit-down and talk with the secretary of the union, Munday, or the president, Bobby Pringle, was like a breath of fresh air—where in the Ironworkers, you didn't even see the organisers. In the steelworks we were on strike for three days, and we called out the organiser—it took him three days to get out. And he come out and said, get back to work. So we stoned him. He went to the boss first, came out to us and said get back to work. So we stoned him and stayed off another couple of days, never saw anybody else and we went back to work.

Q What do you think about the position of the unions in relation to Aboriginal struggles over the years. Do you think that the unions have played a useful and helpful role?

KC I was involved a lot within the Builders Labourers Union. Anything to do with Aboriginal issues came to Bobby Pringle and me. And then Bobby Pringle said, look, you handle it. And so—the Builders Labourers Union played a very good role of supporting Aboriginal issues. As did the Wharfies, the Seamen, the BWIU then, Metalworkers, Teachers Federation

and a lot more unions: the Missos,³ at a later stage the Public Sector Unions, and there's the Nurses' Unions. And there's a heap of unions that you wouldn't think that would get involved, which were involved. And were involved in a supportive way. They didn't come up and say, look, this is how you should run this dispute, they said, look, if you get into any trouble, you should have a look at doing things differently. But not telling you what to do. So it was really good. The Land Rights dispute which I was involved with since 1977 til it went through in 1983—we had huge support from unions, church groups, and a lot of individual people supported Aboriginal people over that period of time. And only for the people supporting us, and the unions, we wouldn't have got to first base. And we had a Labor Government in power then; Wran was in power.

Q Where were you when the '72 Aboriginal Embassy was busted?

KC I was in Sydney. But the following weekend thousands of people from all over the country went down. We had buses from Sydney. We organised buses. The union movement played a role there and paid for buses.

Q I remember seeing you in 1982, walking out of the Watch House in Brisbane after being arrested at one of the quite heavy demonstrations held in connection with the Commonwealth Games at the time.

KC Yeah. I went up there and—I was a bagman. Both Gary Foley and myself. We worked for an organisation that gave us money to take up there. And we were supposed to bail the people out who got arrested. And we weren't supposed to be arrested on that occasion. But we all sat down and they started arresting people. They came up and asked people to get off the street or they'd arrest them. And we watched the coppers

3 In order: the Waterside Workers Federation; the Seamen's Union of Australia; the Building Workers Industrial Union (which at the time mostly covered trades workers, rather than labourers); Amalgamated Metal Workers Union. Missos: Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union. All these have since amalgamated into larger unions.

come down and bundle people into the back of the police wagons. I didn't see Foley get arrested, and the copper come up to me and he said, git up, get off the effin' road. And that's the first time I ever heard a copper say 'fuck' (laughs). And I was taken back and I told him to get fucked. So he threw me in the back of the wagon—from about thirty foot away. When we went to get charged the sergeant behind the desk was counting all this money. And when he finished I looked him straight in the eye and I said, I think there's a bit more there. So he went really red in the face. He started counting it again, and when he got to the end, I said, that's right. I wasn't going to trust me luck—asking him to count it again.

But yeah, that dispute was very well organised. The people who were organising on the ground—the Aboriginal people from Brisbane, and there was a few other people from other states but mostly from Brisbane, or Queensland, they organised it—no violence—when the arrests were made there was no violence by us. They were very well disciplined. And it got the publicity that we wanted and we were in the back of the van and we could hear whoever was in charge of the police operations was saying to the coppers, you done a fantastic job. We watched it on TV—you done a fantastic job. There was no violence, etc etc, and he was praising the coppers. And—but it wasn't the coppers, it was the Aboriginal people who got arrested that day—there was no sign of violence. There was a few niggles and that but they got into the wagons and off they went.

Q So, you've also been in many other demonstrative actions, as well as all kinds of other work. What do you think about all that now. Do you think that it's wise to pull the coppers on, or do you think people went too far?

KC I looked at my involvement with the Builders Labourers as a very good training ground. You know, we had the green bans, and especially the Rocks,⁴ where people got arrested and the police used a lot of force.

4 The Rocks is an old and tiny suburb of Sydney, on the south of the harbour around

Victoria Street,⁵ where there were some heavy people running around Victoria Street and wanting to loosen a few people up. But once again it was very well disciplined. And I think that's the key, you have to be disciplined. And I think the marches where the coppers might like to get in and have a bit of a go now and again, just to keep them in practice, but it's the governments, like Askin, 'run over the bastards.' It's the governments who can say yay or nay to the coppers doing what they like. So it's not actually the coppers. They're doing a job for their bosses. They don't have to do it so violently, but they're doing their job. And I think that you have to have a go. It was a very small union, but it got the backing of the people, and that was the main thing. It got the backing of the people. That's why it was so good.

Q I remember one demonstration in the early 90s I think it was of another kind, that is, in which there were differences of opinion in the Aboriginal movement about proposals arising from the then Labor government's Green Paper. And the proposal to allocate a certain—whatever it was, five or seven per cent—of land taxes to Aboriginal Affairs. Looking back on all that, what do you think about that situation at that time, and whether it was good or bad—or useful?

KC You'll always have difference of opinion within your groups. Some people wanna go this way; some people wanna go that way. And that's right. Like you can't have it all one-way traffic. There has to be a few disputes between the different people and coming from New South Wales, we were a diverse Aboriginal population. You go fifty miles down the coast and their issues are a lot different to the issues in Sydney. So it's good. But the thing is that in the end we might go different roads, but

the approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was threatened with redevelopment in the early 1970s.

5 Victoria St, Kings Cross, was a poor, close-knit, inner-suburban community threatened with redevelopment in the early 1970s. The stories of both these struggles are told in Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann's book, *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation* (1998).

we're wanting the same thing at the end. And you get angry with one another at different times, but that's all right. And I think that in the end people get together on the main issues. Land Rights was one. I think that you see people now have land that never would have owned land, only for the Land Rights Act.

You see people who have got cattle stations and all different other industries that they've built up since 1983, that they never would've been able to get into, only for the Land Rights Act. So, the battles were long and hard-fought, but I think that it's paved the way for development. But the Land Rights Act was never, ever gonna fix everything up. Same as the Land Rights Act in any other state was not gonna fix everything up. But it does go a little way to giving people some self-confidence, self-respect—ownership. Ownership of land is a very big thing in Australia. You could be the world's worst person and own large areas of land and command heaps and heaps of respect. That's the status of owning land. And I can't see why people were scared of Aboriginal people owning land. Everybody else in Australia owns land, so why not Aboriginal people.

Q Aboriginal people owned it all, once.

KC Yeah. We're only getting a little—a tiny, tiny bit back and they still—the governments haven't paid yet, in full.

Q Well Kevin, you've led a very active life to come to the attention of various forces throughout — within the state — particularly the secret police, the Special Branch, and even more so, ASIO. What is your view about that kind of thing in general, and do you know of any specific instances of ASIO agents interfering in the affairs of the Aboriginal people?

KC We didn't worry about ASIO or anything like that, because everything we did was very open. We had open meetings and everybody knew what we were doing. We knew that ASIO would be there. Since then I've read people's dossiers and how they tapped people's lines and

said that this person gave all the names of people that were at meetings. But no, it didn't worry me. And I don't think it worried any of the Aboriginal people. Because we were up front. And the other thing that we used to laugh about, was people saying, and especially ASIO or people like that, were looking for white people who were behind the Aboriginal people telling them what to do. And we used to laugh and say, that's great. If they don't give us credit for our ability to organise—you know, while they're running around looking for somebody, then they're leaving us alone. So no, we didn't worry too much about that. In fact we used to laugh about it.

Q Well at the end of your working career—or even during it—you became associated with Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe. Could you just give us a quick rundown on how that came about, who were the characters, what support you might have got from the labour movement—from the political parties of the labour movement—and of course from the unions—and how successful was all that?

KC Well, there was a lot of players there. Alf Clint came into the union and we had a meeting—but when he came in there was a strike, so we had to deal with the strike—and I arranged to meet him the next day. He came in again and Tranby was after money. I didn't know much about Tranby and went out to have a look at the building. I talked to Alf; I talked to Bobby Pringle, who knew more about it than I did at that particular time. We gave Tranby some money and some other unions gave them money. I forget what the issue was at that time. But I liked what I saw. He asked me to get onto the board of directors, which I did. And then right throughout there was a number of union officials and a lot of other unions who supported Tranby.

And when the BLF closed down, the NSW Branch, I was down in Wollongong fishing and Alf asked me to come up and be a student there and also to work there. So I went up there. The place has always struggled for money. And it's still struggling now. But it had some incredibly good

backing. The trade union movement, the churches, and individual people supported Tranby, but not in an organised group, like we've got now. We've got the Friends of Tranby. Tranby College is an organisation that has practised reconciliation since day one.

Q What Tranby has done, in connection with education amongst Aboriginal people is one thing, but Tranby had played some role—quite a big role—in many wider political questions in connection with American Indian people, in connection with the East Timor people, in Bougainville and in other ways. Would you like to comment about that?

KC Well when I was first there, Mal Clint had a close connection with Walter Lini⁶—they were both Anglican priests—and before Independence we had a number of people coming over from Vanuatu and they stayed at Tranby—Barak Sope,⁷ Walter Lini's sister—and our students got to know what was happening there and supported the independence struggle in Vanuatu. A lot of American Indians came and spoke at Tranby. The South African struggle: a lot of the people from the ANC, Oliver Tambo.

Q Kanaky?⁸

KC Yeah, a lot of people from Kanaky. And a couple of the people that were in Australia went home and were killed, that we knew. And that was a very sad thing. We've got a very good link with the Maori people. A lot of people from interstate find out about Tranby. They might come to Black Books, or they might have heard by word of mouth about Tranby's involvement in the different issues. So they come to Tranby and that's really good, because it gives the students a very wide view of what's happening all around the world. And we feel proud that that our small

6 Walter Lini was a leader of the Vanuatu independence movement and later prime minister.

7 Barak Sope was a leader of the Vanuatu independence movement and later prime minister.

8 Also known by its French colonial name, New Caledonia.

help helped in some way the people from Vanuatu. Zimbabwe, when they were going for independence, people came out from Zimbabwe and we knew people from that struggle. So there's a lot of other people. East Timor is the latest. And there's all the Bougainville people. While there's ever any discrimination going on in countries, Aboriginal people will fight that, because—we've got a hand from international groups as well.

Q What do you think are the major struggles that you've been involved in over the years?

KC With Tranby, there's been 1988, I think that was the biggest, and I think it showed people that Aboriginal people from all over Australia could organise themselves to be a force to be reckoned with. We had thousands upon thousands of Aboriginal people at that march.⁹ And you know, thousands upon thousands of people helped organise it.

We had a lot of non-Aboriginal support in the '88 struggle. Deaths in Custody—that started at Tranby College. The first meetings were held there. Building Bridges—that was an organisation that we set up with the Maori people in the first instance, and so that we could show the younger people our different programs and issues, using rock 'n roll bands. And we got the best non-Aboriginal bands in Australia to support us: Midnight Oil, Hunters and Collectors, Paul Kelly, Scrap Metal and—the New Zealand band, Crowded House, among others, and to get them all in the one place at the one time, and doing it for nothing, it was a huge achievement. And after—we used to have Building Bridges at Bondi Pavilion every year. And then it was taken over by an Aboriginal mob—Survival—and that's still going. Which is what we wanted it to do. The people who were organising for Building Bridges were non-Aboriginal people. And we said we had other work to do as well. And as soon as we can get an Aboriginal group to take it over, it's gone. So that went. And it's still going and it's still attracting thousands upon thousands of non-

⁹ Forty thousand mostly Aboriginal people marched behind banners saying, "We have survived", on 26 January 1988 in central Sydney.

Aboriginal people who are building up that support-group base for us.

The next struggle is gonna be the Treaty. And that's gonna go for a few years I'd imagine. And it's gonna be a lotta work. A lot of education of non-Aboriginal people. A lot of education for Aboriginal people. To find out exactly what people want in that Treaty. So it's like the struggles that have gone on before are for gaining experience, I reckon, for what's gonna happen in the future. We can organise, there's no doubt about that. And I believe that Aboriginal people are the best-organised group in Australia. And I think, too, that Tranby has led the way. And I'm not saying that other Aboriginal organisations are not doing it, because that's not right. We've got the Friends of Tranby. We've always had non-Aboriginal people supporting the organisation. One, because we started off without government funding, and we ran into the eighties without government funding. I think it shows the maturity of the organisations, to be able to work with different people. And I'm glad to see Tranby has led the way, I believe, in that field. And it'll continue to lead the way.

Q Can you talk about Tranby's survival until you got government funding in the 1980s?

KC Tranby College, from the fifties to the eighties, closed down three times for the lack of money. We didn't have enough money to pay the wages for any of the employees and we didn't have money to bring the students down and look after the students when they got here. The governments weren't interested in Aboriginal adult education. It wasn't a vote winner, so they didn't worry. And it was only the Trade Union Movement, the church groups and individual people that saw the need for education that kept Tranby going. And they didn't have very much money at all. I'd been there since the early seventies, or the mid-seventies. And — only for the Trade Union Movement, on a number of occasions, in my time, we would have been closed down.

At one stage we'd called everybody together and said, look, after next week we haven't got any money at all to pay wages. We had enough

money I think just to keep us going with the students. And a couple of the teachers, who were teaching there, who were getting very little money at the time anyway, had to get a job—I think one of them got a job teaching English as a second language. And people were going to apply for the dole and still work at Tranby, if they could. Somebody left us some money in an Estate, and it come through three days before we had to close down. Things like that. Tranby has never gotten a lot of money. But with the Friends of Tranby—that's a fund-raising group—and they come from all sorts of backgrounds. But mostly working-class background. And they're in there raising the money, you know, and it's—like we shouldn't have to do that. The government should be funding the organisation. We get incredibly good results with our students. But without people like the Friends of Tranby, without the Trade Union Movement, without the church groups, Tranby would have been closed down years ago.

Q There's another one we forgot, and that's TUCAR.

KC In 1975, when we were involved in an organisation called Black Defence, we were looking at different issues and one of the issues was a cattle station in North Queensland. Aboriginal people owned a cattle station up there and the next-door neighbour was a non-Aboriginal person and each year they—or when the both of them were non-Aboriginal people-owned, the cattle stations, they used to round up the cleanskins and divide 'em 50-50. When the Aboriginal people bought the cattle station, lo and behold, all the cleanskins were on the white person's property. They used helicopters to push 'em over onto their property, they branded 'em and there was no 50-50. So Aboriginal people came down to Sydney saying look, this is what's happening, can you do anything?

The person who owned the cattle station in the Northern Territory was the guy who owned Suttons Motors. And we had demonstrations outside his Parramatta Road car sales. Police stopped, all the traffic stopped. There was a big fuss about it. The outcome was that the cattle station paid compensation to the Aboriginal people, and also they got a

percentage of their export market. Which was incredibly good. And the bloke from Suttons Motors, he was more than generous working with the Aboriginal people after that.

The Black Defence Group saw the need, when Aboriginal people came down from all over the country, for some sort of land rights. Under the different Acts Aboriginal people weren't getting a fair go. So they decided to set up the NSW Land Council. At that meeting they decided to set up a TUCAR—Trade Union Committee for Aboriginal Rights. Where before we used to go to the different unions, and get support, this way we could have a Trade Union committee and have the organisation set up and we'd have a meeting once a month, come up with the different issues, then the delegation would go back to their unions to vote on the issues and whether they'd support or whether they wouldn't. That's been going since 1977. And since the 80s Kevin Tory's been involved in it. It's been going from strength to strength. You know, there's a lot of issues that TUCAR has gotten into like helping out with organising the '88 march. The different Aboriginal people in trade unions—or not in trade unions but in the workforce—they don't know their rights, so that TUCAR has played a role in getting them involved with their unions and getting the union to help with their disputes in the workplace. I think that's been a really positive step, because it's all right for Aboriginal people to go out into the workforce, but it's really important that they know their rights as a worker, and not to be in a job for four or five years and not getting any upgrading in the Public Service especially. And that's been happening to Aboriginal people for a long time. They've been in the same job for five or six years. And very competent people, and not been able to get up that ladder.

So I think on the whole, Tranby College has been responsible for a lot of that. A lot of the setting up of the different organisations. And I think that we can be quite proud.

Hal Alexander

Red belt days

Hal Alexander was for many years an electrician, mostly in heavy industry. Joined the then-illegal Communist Party in 1941, at the age of 17 and stayed till its dissolution in 1991. Paid [sic] organiser from 1954-1967 in Sydney, then Adelaide. Many arrests, three jail terms, two on hunger strike. Worked and lived with Arrente people on and off since 1985.

ABOUT three years ago I participated on a committee, sponsored by Marrickville Council, to plan a mural on the footpath outside the former Newtown Town Hall to depict the history of the area. This led to me thinking more about the Party's industrial base in the forties and fifties and hence this story.

South and South East of the Sydney GPO, in an ever expanding corridor down to the Kurnell peninsula, hundreds of thousands of workers and their families were born, lived and died serving the interests of those living easy elsewhere.

Just as those living vampire-like on the labour of others (thank you Karl) the workers also depended on the existence of the industries in this area for the wages to

buy the food, clothing and shelter necessary to sustain and reproduce life and ongoing generations of wage labourers.

Railway workshops, tram/bus depots, power generation, textiles/clothing, manufacturing, breweries, oil refineries, hospitals, construction, brickyards, glassworks, foundries, the airport, and more: these enterprises were often at the centre of working class struggle for higher wages, shorter hours and to improve working conditions, none of which were won without the bitterest of sacrifices. On the other hand they were synonymous with lockouts, victimisation of militants and Communists and wholesale sackings once the ruling class had sucked the maximum of profitability from the labour of its employees.

If, in pursuit of higher living standards or in defence of the existing, workers in one industry or factory took direct action it was to all the others they looked to and gained support. In the postwar forties/fifties some very bitter strikes took place which won certain concessions because of the determination of participants on the one hand and the period of expanding capitalism on the other in which the bourgeoisie were forced into concessions driven by labour shortages and competition.

So for a period it was possible to win higher wage rates, shorter hours and less onerous and dangerous working conditions. How odd that it all is being lost. How correct were those that warned that the honeymoon was fleeting. That the real gains lay in the expanding unity of the workers and that the future demanded the abolition of the wages system itself. Socialism.

While workers were linked through the trade union movement this could be either an asset or liability, depending on the political direction of the respective union bureaucracies.

A vital key was the existence of union shop stewards and in a purer sense the shop committees. Union stewards were mostly elected by the members, sometimes appointees of union officials. Distinctions or blurrings between the two forms varied.

Shop committees transcended craft/labourer union divisions. Sections of workshops elected representatives on the basis of capability, numbers involved etc. In my area of Eveleigh the shop committees were mainly led by 'unskilled' workers. We saw them as future bodies in a new society. Soviets if you like.

The Shop Committee movement also helped the breakdown of divisions between industries. There were inter-workplace and inter-industry connections. Exchanges of experience. Contacts. These provided the framework for solidarity actions, money collections, picket lines or provision of food and clothing in times of severe strike action. One enemy one struggle.

Industries like the Railways and GMH [General Motors Holden] formed combined central councils to coordinate the work. Understandably some union bureaucrats regarded all this as a threat to their hegemony. Quite rightly too. That was the beauty of it.

But there's more! Unlike the trade unions, traditionally shackled to the ALP and reformism the Shop Committees were free political agents. That is not 'open ended' ('freedom for ALL', including exploiters?, asked Brecht) but with clear goals of a truly independent political position for the class.

So they were free to promote 'non union' politics – The Suez Canal for Egyptians, Oz out of Korea, Vietnam and so on. As well as a plethora of other political local issues. Health, transport, education. Attitudes on every issue regarded as the precious domain of politicians and their hangers on. Highly dangerous indeed if you include, at one stage, a trade union movement largely in the hands of notorious Communists and other no good bastards intent on overthrowing the system.

So how did all these actions and ideas come about?

The spontaneous upsurge of the downtrodden poor? Not bloody likely.

While ideas might well lag behind changes in material conditions

and a good kick in the guts is a great thought provoker the movement has to be given common ideological purpose, a linking together of the whole chain as Vladimir Ilyich and others suggested.

This was provided by a Communist Party, seeking to relate Oz reality to the new awareness of Marxism as the tool of the oppressed. The rest they learnt the hard way, in practice.

In consequence, over several decades the industries spoken of before and many other places became centres of Party influence and with Party cells or contacts in all of them. These Communists were encouraged to the view that practice without theory is sterile and theory without practice is blind (ta again, Karl).

In Newtown, Redfern, Alexandria, Waterloo, Marrickville, Sydenham, Mascot, Botany and elsewhere the primary task was to educate workers to the bigger issues. Using their own experience as the starting point, factory bulletins, written or related by the workers inside, would be produced often with no regard to libel, distributed at the factory gates by local Comrades (to protect the identity of the authors).

These roneoed missives were named by the Comrades on the inside in keeping with the place. 'Metters News', 'In the Running' (railworkers), 'Crystal Clear'(ACI glassworks), 'Bronze Worker'(Austral Bronze), 'The Honey Pot' (apropos of the tapped keg, the one with the nail in it at the Brewery). General Motors, Bunnerong Power, Hospitals, Textiles and all the many others that made up the Red Belt had their own underground Party-produced bulletins that were shitstirring, knowledgeable and hated by the employers and hangers on. Rough and ready does the job. As they would say at the gate, 'Who's arse are we biting this month/Here's a couple of bob for the cause/Meet us at the Oxford after shift, we've got some good gen for next issue' was the go.

The industrial cells or branches (there were dozens of members in the Railway workshops alone) met regularly to discuss the job and wider political issues. Off the job they met in local homes of other Party

members after work and Newtown, Redfern, Marrickville, etc. were central to this. Houses were depots for *Tribune*, stocks of paper from the back of trucks, flatbeds and so on. The locality branches dealt with street issues while regarding their main task as helping to build in the workplaces. Fortnightly education circles were organised, sometimes combining several factories or a whole industry. Tutors from the Sydney District Office or experienced on-the-job workers guided these study groups. No airy, fairy political mumblers this lot. Realpolitik ruled OK? How to change the bourgeois moulded think-frame to one where the working class could see and act upon its own initiatives and for a fundamental change in production relations.

All this goes some way to explain the strengths and prestige given to the CPA in what became known as the Red Belt.

Enter ASIO. Set up by the Chifley Labor Government in 1948 and refined by the Menzies Government its aim was supposedly to protect us from foreign spies and agents, particularly of the USSR. A partial truth continually espoused by the likes of David McKnight and others. ASIO loves them! In practice its main purpose was to spy on the labour movement with no regard for whether the victims were CPA members or ALP or non-party.

Information (down to minute personal details in some cases) were placed on file and made available to Government agencies *and* employer groups and individuals. Names, where working, what said etc. Unexplained sackings followed, often precipitating defensive and debilitating strike action.

One classic in my ASIO files reports a weekend meeting of Communist workers from industry in this area. Descriptions of individuals not known to them previously are given along with other information as above. In similar vein ASIO even listed names and/or descriptions of the most innocent who were merely counting scrutineers for Communists in polling booths in the Grayndler electorate and carrying out an expression of the much vaunted democratic process.

Then came the anti-Communist referendum.

True to its hearty history in earlier free speech fights, Newtown and surrounds became a battleground. People would spend their non-working hours to leaflet, attend rallies, harangue crowds, provoke discussion and argue the point. And they won! They made Australia a better place for all of us. We are heavily in their debt.

So ASIO was not just about Russian spies, about Ivanov, Mick Young—a good mate of mine, who when Secretary of the SA ALP and I was the Party organiser, we worked hand in glove together on matters concerning the interests of the working class.

It was mainly about destroying the influence of Communists, ALP and other militants in industry. I joined the Party, aged seventeen, when it was illegal and deeply underground. In my ASIO files from 1941 to 1969, which Jack Rice couldn't jump over, there was a mid-fifties meeting of industrial Comrades in the Red Belt in the Pensioners Hall, Redfern. The names of those present. Their factories, what Union, whether Shop Stewards, and personal details. Example. Young man of Mediterranean appearance, not known to agent, who spoke passionately about something or other.

Wally Cunningham from Malley's was in the chair and said Comrades should disperse after the meeting and not go to near pubs as this meeting was under surveillance. It was under surveillance all right. There was a bastard in there!

This information is fed to employers and led to the destruction of lives and families of people who were fighting for all of us. I loved those Comrades. For about ten years I was their Party organiser. So ASIO is the instrument of the ruling class.

One of the great unknowns was Tom Burke. He reckoned that 'them as writes about history are part of it.' His back ruined by an overturned road grader in Katherine and only partially mobile, he gave his whole life and savings to the Party. He asked me to come up to Minto

Party School where he was staying. He'd got a dozen beer and a few old Communists mates – Bill Britten, Pottsie, and other larrikins. After we'd sunk a few he turned to me and said, "When ASIO says the party is now respectable, it's fucked!"

How true.

I would like to tell a story on a lighter note. Some have asked me how the Actors Union was going. Great confusion. There are, were, two Hal Alexanders. Hal was a great comrade except his real name was Ron Williams. Hal Alexander was his stage name. He was Secretary of Actors Equity and for over twenty years the ASIO dickheads could not decide whether I was organising big cultural exchanges through the Soviet Embassy (Bolshoi and all) and other countries, or him getting busted in 'adventurous' escapades.

I was in China for most of 1957 at the Beijing School of Higher Party Education. Whether all this makes me a Stalinist or a Maoist, take your pick. Someone sent me a press clipping about a Liberal Queensland Federal Member, Pierce, who claimed that the Secretary of Actors Equity was a notorious Communist which shows the extent of Communist influence in the trade union movement.

Eddie Ward, Labor member for East Sydney, who knew me and I him, got up and said this was a slander on a decent trade union leader. Which was Eddie's own brand of anti-Communism. Later Pierce got up and said that he was wrong and would like to make an apology. Two apologies in fact.

One to the Secretary of Actors Equity for calling him a Communist and the other to the Communist for accusing him of being an actor.

Very clever for a bourgeois.

Murray Norris

Rebuilding the North Australian Workers Union, 1942-1951

After leaving the Northern Territory, **Murray Norris** (1914-1986) was for many years an active trade unionist on the Sydney waterfront. Murray was a member of the Communist Party from 1932 until his death in 1986. He wrote this memoir in 1982.

AFTER Mick Ryan, who was Secretary of the North Australian Workers Union at the time of the bombing,¹ was taken out of the Northern Territory by the Army, most of the executive of the union left the NT either into the Army, or were sent out in the general exodus that took place at that time. The only ones that were left to my knowledge were Joseph “Yorky” Walker, Bob Anthony, Jack Meaney. One or two drifted back later but never was there a quorum to hold Executive meetings (unless union reps were brought in). Yorky Walker in Darwin, Bob Anthony and Jack Meaney in Katherine, Bert Field at Pine

1 The Japanese air force bombed Darwin on 19 February 1942. There was sporadic bombing until November 1943, but 19 February is remembered as the day 243 died and the exodus from Darwin began.

Creek, were the main ones trying to get the union back on a solid footing, without much success as the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Works and Housing and the Minister for the Army had stated very firmly that it wasn't necessary to have a union in the NT and if there was to be one it would be the AWU,² not the NAWU.

The union's newspaper, the *Northern Standard*, had been taken over by the Army and they printed their own paper, the *Army News*, on the machines taken from the Standard Printery. The union building was like all other buildings: taken over by the Army also. Yoriky Walker arranged for Jack McPhillips, then Assistant General Secretary of the Ironworkers Union, to become Trustee for the NAWU and this kept some of the assets of the union together. Yoriky was acting as provisional secretary of the Union. He had been Vice-President before the bombing and also Vice-President of the ALP Darwin Branch. He had been put to work on the Railway Line after the bombing as he had refused to leave the NT and had then been conscripted into the CCC³ when that organisation was set up. He lived in a railway house nearly opposite the Parap Hotel.

Bob Anthony who was a railway engine driver, and used to stay in the house when in Darwin, arranged for Yoriky to move in. The railway management were given a gentle hint not to interfere and in the interest of peace they turned a blind eye to Yoriky's occupation until the end of the war, when the Manager paid him a visit, and expressed great surprise at seeing him there, and told him that he must get out within the week. As arrangements were in hand to take back the union building (without the permission of the Town Marshall) and have the power put on, this didn't

2 The AWU was, and still is, a very large union with members in a wide range of manual labour jobs, such as shearing, farm work, road construction and the building industry. Its leadership was pro-Arbitration, often cooperative towards employers and fiercely anti-communist, though independent of the industrial groups movement. It was extremely powerful within the Labor Party, and at the time, dominant in the Queensland Labor government.

3 The Civil Construction Corps consisted of civilians (and sometimes "enemy aliens") drafted to carry out war works.

worry Yorky very much.

During 1941 and part of 42 I had been working on the East-West Road, from Mt Isa to Tennant Creek, and had managed to set up camp committees in nearly all the camps, and have delegates elected to a central camp committee so that we could have a general plan for the part of the road. We were very hostile at the methods and attitude of the heads of the MRC⁴ on the road, especially after the bombing. We had a meeting convened at Camoweal, two chaps came from Brisbane, and we claimed that the lack of planning and incompetence was holding up the building of the road.

We challenged them to leave one section of the road under the direct supervision of a camp committee and we would guarantee to compete a mile a day of bitumen. At that time if a camp did half a mile a day it was a record. My camp at Cattle Creek was chosen (we were pretty naïve at the time) as the guinea pigs, and to the great amazement of the heads we did a mile a day for 28 days and the[y] ran out of all materials as the heads couldn't keep up the supply. They broke the camp up and transferred us hell west and crooked. Three of us that had been the main spokesmen finished up at Snake Creek, outside Adelaide River. This was a big camp and I met here some of the chaps that greatly assisted in getting the union going again—Ron Hancock, who later became Assistant General Secretary of the BWIU (and who is now retired and living at Yeppoon near Rockhampton Qland), Reg McCawley, Ted Goonan, Ken Scott and a few others whose names escape me now.

We set up a camp committee and I put forward the idea of getting all other camps to set up committees and to elect delegates to a central camps' committee. Ron Hancock and myself met Yorky Walker and talked it over with him, and we had a further meeting at Pine Creek with other members that Yorky brought along. It was decided at this meeting that that would be a good way to really give the union a solid base. After

4 Main Roads Commission of Queensland.

that we used to meet at different places once a month, sometimes at Katherine, sometimes Pine Creek, sometimes at Adelaide River or Darwin. It meant leaving your camp very early and hitch-hiking sometimes 200 miles to the meeting and then getting back. Sometimes we would get a truck to go “fishing” and then take off. We wouldn’t get any fish that day but we were laying the groundwork to get some fish in the future.

In later 1943, conditions in the camps as regards medical health were very poor and we couldn’t get the Army doctors to take any notice of our complaints. Neither would Senator Joseph Silver Collings, Minister of the Interior, take any notice of us; instead he would refer the matter to his head men of the Works and Housing and CCC, “Red” Ted Theodore and Frank Packer,⁵ and apparently they used to take the same attitude as the Army.

We finally issued them with an ultimatum that unless some action was taken to improve the medical situation we would stop work all over the NT at a certain date. They must have laughed their heads off. They knew that we didn’t have any transport or communications or so they thought. It never entered their heads that we might use their transport and their communications. The ultimatum expired and work stopped and the amazement was great. Army brass made threatening sounds about driving us back to work at the point of the bayonet etc. After three or four days, when we were holding a strike committee meeting at Snake Creek, a high Army brass in a big staff car with a mass of outriders came over and told us that John Curtin the Prime Minister wanted to speak to the Strike Committee. He [the Army brass] was nearly having a stroke at the same time. We went over to the Signals Headquarters and Ron Hancock and Yorky Walker spoke to Curtin. He claimed he was amazed that we would strike in wartime. Ron and Yorky explained the whole story to him and he

5 Theodore was a former Queensland Labor Premier and Federal Treasurer. Frank Packer was the father of Kerry. Theodore and Packer were partners in Australian Consolidated Press, publishers of the *Women’s Weekly*.

said he had never been told anything about it and asked what it would take to get the men back to work. He was told that if he gave his word that he would send an investigating team to the NT to check our claims and do something about the medical situation, we would have the men back at work the next morning; that if he would tell the Army to provide transport we would perhaps have them back sooner.

This was done and at 8 o'clock next morning, all camps were back at work bar one. The men at Nightscliff, who were tunnelling into the cliffs to provide safe storage places, wouldn't go back to work as one of the chaps had scabbed and they demanded that he be sent out of the Territory. The boss wouldn't so they stayed on strike. Yorky and I were taken up in a big staff car and we addressed the meeting. I was first up and I thought that I was very diplomatic and convincing but I got nowhere with them. They weren't going to go back to work with a scab. Yorky Walker then got up and in his usual very blunt manner told them: "You give me the shits, call yourself miners. Don't you know how to get rid of scabs? There is plenty of rocks that can fall and steel that can slip. Ten minutes after you get in that tunnel that scab will be out. Now get to bloody work". There was dead silence for a moment and then someone started to cheer and they went to work. As Yorky had predicted the scab left hurriedly and asked to be taken out. The boss had him put on a convoy and sent south. The Army drivers gave him a tough time on the way.

This strike and the way it was handled made a good impression on the workers. Men who had come from every state in Australia and had not known much about the NAWU now started to become members when their own tickets⁶ ran out. We used to tell them that we recognised their tickets and would represent them in any dispute, but when their tickets ran out they were expected to take a ticket in the NAWU. Most of them thought that was fair enough. We had printed quarterly and half yearly tickets. We had no constitutional right to do this but felt it necessary to,

6 A ticket was a membership card for a specific union.

firstly to get some finance and secondly not to force men to take out a full year ticket if they were leaving in three or four months. It was successful in a mild way and kept us going.

In 1944 we started a campaign to get Yorky Walker out of the CCC and recognised as Acting Secretary of the NAWU. He was doing the job as Secretary and working full time for the CCC and it was starting to get him down. We had a meeting at Pine Creek and decided he should notify the CCC and the Minister of the Interior that as from a certain date he would be resigning from the CCC and becoming full time Secretary of the NAWU. The heads of the CCC in the NT notified him that they would charge him with about six charges if he didn't continue to turn up for work. The charges carried penalties that meant about 12 months gaol. Yorky's reply was that he really needed a holiday and that 12 months would be about long enough. We, that is the members of the Executive and union reps, started to organise like mad and were soon able to notify the CCC heads that the day they took our Secretary to court was the day that all work would stop. We were able to do this very successfully and the day that Walker appeared in answer to the charges in the Darwin Court the Legal Officer for the CCC told him that all charges had been dropped and they and the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of the Army would recognise him and the NAWU. We had the men back at work as soon as we could get the word down the track to the camps and jobs.

At the next meeting of the Executive it was decided that I be appointed Organiser for the union and take up duties as soon as possible, which meant getting out of the CCC where I was a grader driver stationed at Katherine. However the word got around and one day I was given a movement order and with "my" grader was put on a low-loader for Alice Springs, to have repairs done to the grader. Just before leaving one of the clerks in the Katherine office called me aside and told me that the movement order contained an instruction to the Alice Springs office to keep me there and send me out putting in station roads etc; in effect keep me out of circulation. Somehow that instruction was mislaid on the road

down to the Alice and as soon as I was issued with another grader I was on my way back to Katherine. There was great surprise amongst the heads but it wasn't long before another ploy. When I had been conscripted into the CCC I was already working on the East-West part of the road and when they were taking down personal particulars I had given my home town as Rockhampton in Queensland. It wasn't, but I had picked it out as the place to go for a holiday. Now the heads suddenly discovered that I was overdue for two weeks holiday. I had to go. As quickly as possible I turned over my union work to some staunch union reps in a number of camps, such as Dave Chalmers at Daly Waters, Jim Galliano at Mataranka, Jim Watts at Katherine. I only had to worry about the CCC camps as the railways were firmly in the hands of Bob Anthony, Jack Meaney and Jimmy Quinn.

When I finished off my holiday in Rockhampton I had to go to the local CCC Personnel Officer, a joker named Heinze, to get my movement order to Marlborough as a fletcher on the railway line. I refused to go and called his attention to John Curtin's policy that skilled men must be so used so that their skills would be of benefit to the country. I was a Plant Operator, which was skilled occupation. I could handle practically any kind of road making equipment. I told him that I would come back in a week and see what he had for me. When I did he was nearly foaming at the mouth. He said that he had a job as a plant operator for me, looking after an air compressor at Biloela.⁷ I again refused and told him that the plant I had operated had either wheels or tracks on them. He then told me that he had been instructed by the head personnel officer at Alice Springs that I was not to be sent back to the NT and showed me the telegram that he had got. I then requested him to discharge me as unfit for heavy duties as I had a crook lung. He sent me up to the Government Doctor, a Dr Gordon, and after he looked at an x-ray of my chest he marked me as fit only for light duties. I took this back to this Heinze and was discharged

⁷ Biloela is in central Qld, 145km south-west of Rockhampton: the point is that this job would keep him out of the Territory and unable to organise for the union.

from the CCC.

I managed to get on a train and get to Townsville and after a bit of organising got on a train for Mt Isa. I saw an engineer named Marsh there, he was from the NT and I had always got on OK with him. I asked him for a job as a Grader Driver and he said he couldn't give me one straight away but as soon as one was available it would be mine. In the meantime I could go to a camp near Camowéal and work as a truck driver while I was waiting. I did this and after about three months this Engineer came through again, and told me that he had been instructed not to give me a job in the NT. I left this job (as I had been marked as fit only for light duties I couldn't be manpowered) and went to Camowéal and after a few days had organised a ride on a convoy to Katherine. I kept out of sight of the Officer in charge of the convoy, but somebody must have blabbed. As soon as I got to Katherine I was picked up by two Provos and placed on a convoy for Mt Isa. I knew the driver of the semi-trailer I was on and when we got close to Newcastle Waters I told him that I was going to leave him. There was a bit of a bend in the road and he steadied down and said that he wouldn't know where I had left the vehicle.

I threw my swag into the bushes and followed it. After the convoy had passed I walked up to Newcastle Waters and told my old friend Maxie Schober, the store-keeper hotel-keeper what it was all about. He was one of the real old timers and would do anything for the union. He arranged a job for me with a droving plant as a cook and we left the next day. I had rung Yorky Walker up in Darwin and he came down the next day and followed us out the Murrarji track until he was held up by water and then walked about three mile to where we had camped for the night. He tried to convince me that I should leave the job and come back with him to Darwin, and the union would fight for the right to employ me as an organiser. I couldn't agree with him that it would be a successful fight and I thought it would do the Union harm at that stage as I would be taken straight out of the NT as it was still under Army control, and they would be fighting to get me back, not keep me there. And besides if I was going

to be an organiser for the bottom end of the NT, which included nearly all the station country, I had better get some experience of it.

I had been a ringer⁸ before the war and had done some droving with sheep and some cooking but never with a pack-horse plant with cattle. I finished droving the day the war ended. We rode into Camowéal after delivering the cattle at Moorstone and was in time to hear Atlee⁹ speaking. I got a lift through to Tennant Creek the next day and then a lift through to Darwin the following day, and was then appointed Organiser for the NAWU from Maranboy to the South Australian border and the WA to the Queensland border. I promised to give it at least twelve months but asked the union to keep their eyes out for someone to take my place. The union hadn't been very active as a union since before the war in the southern end of the NT or on the stations, and it was hard sledding for some time getting the union accepted again. Fortunately there generally was an old timer in each town or camp who was a unionist to the backbone and would always back up a union organiser.

Jimmy Williams became the Organiser for the Top End, from Katherine to Darwin. He left after about six months, and Frank Whiteoak became the Top End Organiser and remained for about two years before he gave it up and went back to the wharf.

After the war finished the war controls still hung on in the NT to everyone's annoyance and bureaucrats continued their mad way. The first of a number of settling down strikes started about this time. The Works & Housing Department decided that they would charge the men for their meals and accommodation and put the price of two pounds ten shillings on it.¹⁰ The union immediately called a strike and demanded that meals and accommodation be free as they were during the war. I had the job of

8 Ringer: shearer, the fastest or lead shearer.

9 Clement Atlee was leader of the British Labour Party during the war, and Prime Minister 1945-51.

10 By comparison, the minimum ("basic") wage for men in 1946 was £5 5s. Of course wages were higher in Darwin.

keeping all the camps from Maranboy to Alice Springs in line and I did some pretty long trips very fast to do so. We won the “blue”¹¹ partially; meals and accommodation were supplied at one pound one shilling, which remained until late 1951.

Then there was the Great Beer Strike. During the war we had been given a ration of two bottles of beer a week (not all the time), and in 1946 Cashmans got a load of beer on one of the first boats to bring civilian goods up. He wanted to charge three shillings and sixpence a bottle,¹² hot, and you took it away to drink. A broad strike committee was set up and a black ban was placed on all beer unless it was sold at the pre-war price of two shillings a bottle. Pickets were set up under their captains and it lasted six weeks before Cashman gave in. Imagine that in a place like the NT where the blokes hadn't had a drink-up for years! Some of the moves to break the strike deserved to be on films. After a about a month of the strike, Cashman or some of his employees tried a sure fire method, so they thought. Hornibrooks' old camp had been taken over by the union to house about a hundred single men, and every day some of these men used to walk up past the union office and through the long grass to the mess in Cavanagh St for their meals.

Two of the thirstiest men in Darwin were old Jack Lloyd and Tommy Heath. Their skins were fairly cracking but they were also two of the very staunchest unionists in the NT. This particular day as old Jack and Tommy were going up for their meal they discovered, strategically placed along the path that they had to follow, bottles of plonk, gin, beer etc. Their eyes bulged out of their heads. They carefully gathered it together and sat down to decide what to do with it. One said, “we will take it and hide it until the strike is over”; the other said, “we wouldn't you know, we would sneak away and drink it and that would be the start of the end of the strike”. They looked at it a bit longer, then old Jack said with

11 Blue: dispute.

12 Approximately \$8. A shilling in 1946 would be equivalent to \$2.30 in 2003; There were twelve pence to a shilling, so sixpence was half a shilling.

great sorrow in his voice, “the spirit would be willing but the flesh would be weak,” and he started smashing the bottles. Tommy joined in and when they had finished, with their backs a little straighter, they went up and reported to the Strike Committee. From that day onwards the committee knew that they would win, and they did.

After, when the Clubs and Pubs became a regular thing again in Darwin, ships beer was three shillings a bottle and overland beer was 4 shillings. When draught beer became available an 11 ounce glass was a shilling, all spirits were a shilling a nip except for Scotch which was 1/6d. This remained the same when I left in 51.

The next strike of any size was the Silver Seal Strike. This Silver Seal mob were disposal speculators, taking advantage of the stores built up during the war and now to be disposed of to the advantage of people with big money and a pull with some of the disposal officers. Silver Seal had got in early and amongst other things had bought 100,000 drums of petrol, diesel, oils etc, that had been stacked at different places around the NT, for one shilling a drum. They had also bought a vehicle park for peanuts. The disposal officers would gather a park of vehicles together and then call for buyers; the buyers would have a meeting and would decide who was to get it for how much. They bid for the whole park. You couldn't go in and buy a single vehicle; you had to buy from the big speculators after they had bought the park, and you paid through the nose for it. Silver Seal bought 1000 vehicles, over half of them good goers and it cost them about five thousand quid¹³ for them, or five pounds a vehicle (plus what they slung the joker in charge). The union had a letter from Frank Forde, Minister for the Army, giving us the OK to purchase one of the vehicles in this park. The officer in charge tried to hold out on us but finally had to obey Forde's letter. The vehicle cost us two hundred and forty quid. The next day Silver Seal got all the vehicles in the park, some 3000, for approximately five quid each.

13 Quid: pound (money).

We had a team of men working for Silver Seal at well over the new award. They had to get the vehicles in shape to make the long trip to Adelaide or Brisbane. The method of travel was to piggy back small trucks up on the back of larger trucks or place the front end of large trucks up on the back of other trucks, as the drivers had to have travel allowances, return fares, besides overtime and a bonus for delivery. The men were doing OK but were only staying OK because the union rep kept a very close watch on payments etc. There would be a dispute every payday over short payment of allowances, overtime etc. Finally as labour became more available as young soldiers were discharged, Silver Seal decided that it was time to make a change.

They started by sacking the union rep. The union's reaction was to demand that he be reinstated. They refused and all the men walked out. Silver Seal had a team of young soldiers who had just been discharged lined up to take their place. These young fellows felt that they were on top of the world. They hadn't had a job before they were conscripted and here they were being paid up to 25 quid a week and free tucker and accommodation. We went down and talked to them, pointing out that they were being used by the company to try and break down the union conditions etc. They refused to take any notice of the union. The Union had to take very [strong] action, and a few nights later these young, would-be scabs found themselves on a convoy going south after getting a belting. They kept going. Silver Seal had to come to the party again and reinstate all the men and pay for the time lost. While they remained in the NT they never tried anything again.

Qantas had set up a large camp at Berrimah and Frank Whiteoak got it organised and was getting the conditions fixed up a bit at a time. That was really the only way to work it as it being a semi-government authority they were really more bureaucratic than a government department under the control of a Minister. Everything was going along OK and the organiser reckoned that within six months the conditions would be better than the old established jobs. However things took a

dramatic turn. An ex-organiser, from a big union in the south, got a job with Qantas and decided he would fix things up in a very short time. Against the advice of the union officials he pulled a strike and placed the union in a position where they had to go along with it. Qantas dismissed the strikers and flew up a large bunch of scabs and broke the strike after six weeks. The union never really got back the coverage it once had. After the scabs had served their purpose and left and new men came up they were generally signed up in Sydney in a public service association. We were only able to maintain a small number of real unionists there.

Before the Qantas strike was pulled, I had come up to Darwin to report to the executive on the union's progress in the southern end. Among the numerous matters reported on was the conditions of the workers at the Government Batteries at Tennant Creek. These Batteries crushed all the ore from the small miners in the area. The Mining Award had not been touched since 1937 and as such the rates and conditions were way behind present conditions. We had drafted an agreement to bring the rates and conditions up to date and the mine owners had agreed to it and signed up. But the two batteries, being under the control of the Mines Department, which in turn was under the control of the Minister of the Interior, the usual run-around took place.

I got the agreement of the Executive that I could close the batteries down, but that I would have to look after the men as far as tucker went out of the slender resources of the Tennant Creek area. I would also have to get the sympathetic understanding of the small miners who would be without the batteries to crush their ore. This of course was before we had any indication that a loud mouth was going to put us in an impossible position at Qantas. When I got back to Tennant Creek I had a talk with a number of small miners and got an assurance that they would give support to the battery workers and protest to the Minister about the rates and conditions which were not up to the standard of the agreement that they had signed. The battery workers came out on strike but stayed at the batteries and used the facilities there. We had set up a committee to feed

the men and a voluntary levy of a pound a week was agreed to from all the workers in the area. This was enough to feed the two strike camps.

This strike also lasted six weeks. Then the government decided that they would have a Conciliation Commissioner come up and hear the claims. He did and told the Mines Department to sign the agreement which then became the award. At this time I was doing all the industrial cases for the union. I had done the first one in Adelaide in December 1945 before Chief Conciliation Commissioner Rowlands and caused a bit of a stir. All the clothes I had were sweat shirts, shorts, and sandals. Rowlands told me that I had to be correctly dressed to appear in court, so he lent me a tie, and his sports coat. As he was a man of about 20 stone [130 kg] and over six feet [180cm] tall, how they reckoned I was correctly dressed I could never make out.

Early in 46 the first of the Aboriginal strikes took place. I can't remember the date now, but it was after the first strike that took place on the wharf. I had come up from the Centre to report, which I generally did about every four months, and was sitting in the union office when I heard a stone drop on the roof. I had a look around and couldn't see any kids about. A little later I heard another one on the roof so I figured that I had better take a better look. As I walked all around the buildings and at the back I heard the familiar sound "Eh", the sound that an Aborigine makes when he wants to get your attention. I walked over to some long grass and hidden there were seven Aborigines. They told me that they wanted to talk to the union about striking. They wanted assistance and advice what to do. As I am tone deaf I have great difficulty in translating broken English and they had to keep repeating what they were saying. I told them to hold on and went back to the union office. Frank Whiteoak, the Darwin Organiser, was there so I told him about it and took him back down. Some of them knew him and he was the bloke they had really come to see. They were too polite to tell me that they didn't know me. Frank took over and formed a strike committee with himself as adviser in the background. I still have a photo of this first strike committee with

Frank.

At that time male Aborigines were brought in from the tribes to do the work around town and provide labour for the “silver tails”—public servants and their wives. The male got six shillings a week and one meal a day for doing all the outside work around the house and garden, cleaning and burning the “Flaming Fury”.¹⁴ The female did all the inside work; all the washing, ironing, looking after the children, all the house work and got 4 shillings a week and one meal a day. They were kept in Bagot Compound and Berrimah Compound and were brought into town each morning by truck and taken back in the evening. They were not allowed in town after dark except on Saturday nights for the pictures. They cleaned the streets and cut the grass etc. They told Frank what they wanted in a series of meetings and if I remember rightly it amounted to an increase in wages, more and better clothes and blankets, etc.

They set a day for the strike to start and it did. There were no scabs. After a couple of weeks the “silver tails” got so tired of looking at a mountain of unwashed clothing etc, that the Administration gave in. They got the “magnificent” sum of two pounds a week and better food, more clothes and blankets. They were very happy. The union told them that they had to organise again and get better wages and conditions and a school for the children. Later they did this and got a school up to fourth grade. These things happened while I was down the southern end and I was kept informed by Yorky Walker, the Secretary, and through the columns of the *Northern Standard*, the union’s newspaper, which had got going again.

We had got the machinery back from the Army and two of the old staff turned up and we were very lucky in getting a really good Linotype operator from Brisbane. Yorky became Editor, in addition to his other duties as Secretary. The paper started off at eight pages and worked its

14 Flaming fury: A toilet constructed over a pit, the contents of which are periodically doused with oil and burnt; common at the time in the Northern Territory.

way up to sixteen every Friday. Besides we had done a fair amount of printing.

We had ten employees—two organisers, the secretary and a girl bookkeeper. Keeping staff such as an editor was hard. After Walker left in 47 I managed to get Ron Haas from Brisbane. He stayed twelve months and then I got “Smacker” McCarthy from Brisbane. He stayed six months. Then I got Ron Brown and he stayed over two years. They were all good men in their way, very dedicated, but more suited for the cities than Darwin and the NT which at this time still had a character of its own that had to be understood. Otherwise the Territorians didn’t understand them.

Some cases that the union ran on behalf of individual members around this time greatly helped build up the status of the union amongst its members. First was the case on behalf of Ted Styles, who had been wrongly classified, underpaid, not paid allowances, for some two years by the Department of the Interior. I took the case before a Board of Reference at Alice Springs and as expected, the Advocate for the department claimed no case could be heard because the Statute of Limitations (then 9 months) had run out. I knew that this was to be the defence and I attacked on the basis that no government could put forward such a defence to get out of paying what was due, especially when it was guilty, knew it was guilty, and was seeking to defraud a man of his just wages by a legal technicality. The magistrate, who was Chairman of the Board of Reference, agreed with me and also became really indignant himself at the attitude of the department. He found in the union’s favour.

The advocate for the department said to me after, “You know the old man’s mad, we’ll appeal against his verdict.” I told him that I would bet him a dozen of beer that we would get the money. He said “done”. A year later he paid up. It took a full year writing to the minister and asking the ACTU to intervene. Finally I got a letter from the minister agreeing to pay the amount claimed—£668, some shillings¹⁵—and enclosed the

15 This was a colossal sum of money at the time: enough to buy a house in the suburbs of Melbourne or Sydney.

cheque. We had it photographed and placed on the front page of the *Northern Standard* newspaper with the caption, "Unionism Pays". Another claim settled for wrongful classification and underpayment of wages that helped to get the union respected in the Southern end was a claim against Banka Banka station, for underpayment of a driver of a cattle transport. He was being paid under the Pastoral Award. That would have been all right, only he was also carrying back loading for stations and towns along the way back. I claimed that he must be paid at the much higher rate of the Works & Housing Award. After a hearing before the Chairman of the Board of Reference, the Chairman advised the station owner to confer with the union and make a settlement. These claims caused a large number of employers to ask the union to confer with them as they had no wish to go to court or have a stoppage on their hands.

The union was quite busy in the Top End during this time. Quite a number of men had been made redundant from different jobs at the finish of the war and they had no place to have meals or sleep. As they wanted to remain in the Territory something had to be done to assist them. The first thing was to find them accommodation and a place that was ready-made was Hornibrooks' old camp. As the huts were empty the union took them over and placed a large number of men in them and set up a committee to run them. Then the union went to the Administration and after a lot of argument got them made over to the union. The rent was 12/- a week for the lot.

Then the necessity of providing meals became apparent. There wasn't even a café or a store to buy things, except the Army ration stores. There were a number of large store sheds in Cavanagh St and it was decided that they would be good to set up a kitchen and provide meals for the men.

In letters to me, the Secretary, Yorky Walker, told me of how they got the buildings, two of them. A deputation led by the Secretary went and saw the Administrator, Charles Lydiard Aubrey Abbott, very vice-regal. They put it to him, but he refused to allow them to use the sheds.

They notified him that if that was his attitude, it left them no option but to take the sheds. This they set out to do and as they were attempting to open the door with a piece of four by two timber, a car containing the Commander of Norforce came past. He stopped and came over. Being a naval person his approach was rather strange to the chaps present. He said, "I say, my man, what are you doing?" As Yorky was not his man he retorted, "we are opening this bloody door, my man." He must have got the hint because he changed his tone a bit. He asked why, and as it was a good question, it got a good answer. He was quite interested and when he found out that many of the men would be unloading his ships, he suggested that the Secretary came down to his office and he would make over the buildings to them, for as he said, "The Yanks built them and when they left they gave them to me. That makes them mine. Now I'll make them over to you and that will make them yours." Quite a refreshing change from the usual run of bureaucrats. They went down to his office and he called in his writer and made over the buildings to the union. The Administrator had to get in on the deal, as of course the sheds didn't belong to the Navy, they belonged to the Administration, so they charged the union rent for the sheds, 12/- a week if I remember correctly.

The union went ahead and opened up one of the sheds and made the necessary alterations. There was plenty of voluntary labour to do everything. Some had trucks and they were sent down to recently vacated camps and stoves, tables, stools, cooking gear, eating gear, even cold rooms were put to use again. The tucker was only Army rations cooked up until better supplies were available. The other shed was earmarked for a Workers Club. When the rules could be drawn up and the necessary funds collected, members put in what they could as loans and in the first half of the year 46 the Workers Club was registered and obtained a licence. I was one of the foundation members, and before I left the NT did a stint as barman there. Beside the club, the union built the stadium, which besides being used for a while as a fight venue, was the meeting place for the union, pick-up place for the wharflies, and basketball court for the town teams. The union social committee used to hold many

concerts there, ably assisted by the many artists amongst the community. These concerts and socials were mainly held to collect finance for some good cause, such as the Leprosarium Committee, children's playgrounds, etc.

Early in 47 I got a letter from Yorcky Walker asking me to come to Darwin urgently. He didn't explain why, perhaps thinking that I would not have come if he had. When I got to Darwin he told me that he was finished and was leaving the NT the following week for Melbourne and that I would have to take over as Acting Secretary. This came like a bombshell. I had agreed when appointed organiser, to stay for twelve months. I had been there now nearly two years and didn't wish to make a career out of union work. Firstly I didn't consider that I had the necessary qualifications to make a union official and all that meant in the NT where there was not assistance available and everything depended on the Union Secretary. And secondly I didn't have much education. I had been forced to leave school at 14 years of age, and only for a travelling scholarship for nine years in the University of Hard Knocks (carrying my swag) I would be as dumb as any 14 year old at the age of thirty. However it was impressed on me that I had to do the job because there was nobody else.

I had never been in an office doing office work, overseeing a newspaper and printery. I not only taught myself to do Arbitration Court work, but even taught myself to type, as when Yorcky left he took the typist-bookkeeper with him. They had got married some time before this; she was the daughter of Percy Laidler¹⁶ of Melbourne. I managed to get an editor in Ron Haas from Brisbane and a bookkeeper office girl also from Brisbane, but she couldn't type. There was a portable typewriter and I had to start the old hunt and peck system, and, with some difficulty, teach the typewriter to spell. It meant that I had to do all the

16 Percy Laidler (1884-1958) was a long-standing Melbourne bookseller and socialist, prominent in the Victorian Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World, and then in founding the Communist Party of Australia. He remained active on the left into the 1950s. His story is told in his daughter, Bertha Walker's book, *Solidarity Forever* (1972).

correspondence, and what was worse do all the Awards over. There wasn't one that was later than 1940, and a lot of water had flowed under the bridge since then.

I started with the Works and Service award, which had about 120 classifications in it and most of the workers at that time came under it. As we would be dealing with government departments, I decided that the only way was to get the "Heads" to realise that, unless they came to an agreement with the union to have the case heard swiftly, there would be no work done. We only had one organiser after I went to the office. Later on we managed to get another one, so Frank Whiteoak and myself used to hold breakfast-time meetings, dinner-time meetings and night-time meetings and tell the members what we proposed and get advice and suggestions from them.

When we had talked to the great majority of them, we approached the "heads" for a conference on our "log of claims". We got knocked back as we expected, so we sent the word around and the members struck and in Darwin marched up to the Works & Housing. The Director and the Deputy Director were reasonable chaps and were only carrying departmental instructions and they assured us that they would advise their "heads" to have a conference with us over the log of claims. They did and we had the conference in Darwin, with the Director and his Deputy sitting in as advisors. We got a very firm agreement on the log of claims, but we still had to go to court in Melbourne to get them OK'd.

Sometime before this we had got agreement with Dr Evatt¹⁷ that he would appoint a Conciliation Commissioner solely for the NT. He appointed a chap from WA but he refused to come when he found that he would have to travel to the NT quite a bit, so he appointed Portus to deal with NT Awards. Portus also had the job of dealing with other awards in other states, so he rarely came to the NT and 95% of all cases were heard

17 Presumably in Dr Evatt's capacity as Federal Attorney-General, a position he held while also Minister for External Affairs in the Curtin and Chifley governments, 1941-49.

in Melbourne or Adelaide or sometimes Sydney. As there were some dozen awards that had to be redrafted, put to the members, redrafted again, served on the respondents and the Industrial Registrar, and then handled at a conference and pushed through the courts, my time was more than just taken up.

It usually meant starting the day early and holding breakfast-time meetings at camps, sometimes up to fifty miles from Darwin, then back to Darwin and do office work and correspondence, and look after complaints all day. After tea it was back to the office and work on the log of claims until the wharfies knocked off at midnight. Their bus always pulled up outside the union office and one or two would drop in and put the hot water jug on and make a billy of tea, after which I would go home. This would usually be about 1 o'clock. This intensive work, and at the same time teaching myself how to do the court work etc, started to get me down.

To give an example of how you got treated by some of the court bureaucrats, one of the first logs of claims that I ever sent to the Industrial Registrar was returned with a curt note saying that it was incorrect. No where, why, or how, it was incorrect, just that it was. I went over it very carefully, couldn't find anything wrong as far as I knew, so got the proof reader for the newspaper to go over it. He couldn't find anything wrong, so I sent it back again. After about a fortnight it was returned with another curt note saying it was incorrect; no further information. I wrote the gentleman? and asked where it was incorrect. No reply.

After a month of waiting I sent a copy to Jack McPhillips of the Ironworkers Union and asked him to let me know where it was wrong. All he could find that this gentleman? could be possibly be objecting to was that the log of claims wasn't bound together with green ribbon. So I tried that and he received it and fixed a date for the hearing. I got on to Dr Evatt and made a complaint to him about the stupid set up and got a sympathetic answer. Some action must have been taken because I never

ever again bound a log of claims with a green ribbon or any other kind. This same Registrar held up our change of rules for years. Instead of trying, he was to our way of thinking, deliberately obstructionist.

We had a number of attempts to get Award wages for Aborigines but always came up against the backward policy of the Native Affairs Department which, even though there was a Labor government in office, continued to make and carry out a policy that was not many years away from the slave days. In many cases it was no better than the slave days. These people called themselves “protectors”. If they had been truthful they would have called themselves by their proper name, “persecutors”. They were racists and carried out a racist policy, carried it out for the benefit of the employers, mainly the cattle station owners. This is now history, but a history that is being covered up with a lot of whitewash. I suppose that the history of the NAWU could be part of the history of the development of the Aborigines’ struggle for their place as people and all that means. We did as much as we could with the means available to us, which was very little.

Union tickets those days were 25/- a year until 1948, then 40/- a year. It was very hard to get dedicated people to work as organisers. They got £9 a week and no expenses, while they could get £15 a week, plus allowances, as a truck driver. They had to live in their swags; no hotel beds for them. They got most of their meals at the camps they visited and most of the petrol for their vehicles also. It wasn’t until 49 that a motion was pushed through the union to pay the Secretary and the organisers twelve pounds a week. No mention was made about other expenses. It went without saying that expenses were to be kept to a minimum, and they were. It was the usual thing for an organiser to be away for three months and do perhaps 15 thousand miles and put in an expense account for under ten pounds.

The union just didn’t have the money. It couldn’t have carried on the work it did if the newspaper hadn’t carried part of the expenses by buying vehicles, paying an organiser-reporter and paying a rental to the

union for the use of the machinery to do the printing on. But we were always short of money for the things we could see wanted doing. The most members we ever had while I was there was in 1951 when we had 2504 members.

The union helped in the struggle of the Indonesian people.¹⁸ When the Dutch ships came into Darwin to be refuelled, they weren't and that's where they stopped for quite a while. Numbers of Indonesian people were sent to Darwin by the government to wait until it was safe for them to go back to their homes. Dr Evatt used to either ring the union or write and ask us to look after them. We got numbers of them jobs while they were waiting.

Then when Streeter & Male, the pearling people, came to Darwin and used it as their base during their pearling operations, they had indentured natives of Indonesia to work their boats and do the diving. We disagreed with this policy and demanded that they employ Aborigines and train them for the job and pay them proper award rates. We got no help from the Native Affairs Department, so when the company used some indentured labour ashore during the wet, we were able to take action, as indentured labour could only be used on ship. Once they came ashore and worked they had to be paid full award rates. That year, the May Day parade was led by over 200 Aborigines, who had just won a strike of their own, and the crews of the pearling luggers. We had given them pride of place for the struggles they had taken part in and they were very proud. We were proud of them.

The government decided to take into account the desires of the people of the NT for a say in their government and set up the NT

18 When the Japanese military conquered Indonesia, then called the Dutch East Indies, in 1942, the Dutch colonial administration escaped to Australia. After the war, they attempted to reimpose colonial control, but a mass Indonesian nationalist movement rose up to take control of the country for themselves, and keep the Dutch from returning. Australian trade unionists played a major role in stopping the Dutch from returning. The story is told in Rupert Lockwood's book, *Black Armada* (1975).

Legislative Council. It was very undemocratic—six elected members and eight appointed ones, plus the Administrator who was the President of the Council with a vote. We had three people elected who represented the broad union policy and made the debates a bit interesting instead of being just a rubber stamp.

About this time we managed to get Judge Kirby up to hear a claim for the Basic Wage. In unity with the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), we had worked gathering and preparing evidence to place before him. We finished up with an unbeatable case for some £17 a week. At the time the wage was about £9 pound a week. It was February and really humid. The judge came into court, dressed in his wig and gown, and had a look at us jokers. We were dressed in shorts, sweat shirts and sandals. Before he could sit down I went up and asked him could I speak privately to him. He hesitated for a moment and then motioned me back to his quarters. I told him that he would finish up as a bucket of sweat if he tried to sit out the day dressed like that, and that we were very informal up here, and dressed for the country. There wasn't even a fan for the room, although we got two small ones later. He agreed with me and disrobed. I picked up two small towels and took them out and when he sat down I gave them to him and told him to place them under his elbows to catch the sweat. He must have thought I was a valet. We started the case about 10.30am, and I had the job of opening up our case. I spoke for about two hours presenting our case and by that time everyone was getting pretty thirsty.

The Judge called and adjourned until 2pm. I told him that we were all going over for a drink and invited him to have a beer. He said, "We may as well continue to be informal," and came over to the Vic Hotel with us. Beer had been in very short supply and I had been very surprised to hear that the Vic had beer. Danny Holden, a well known character, was the barman, and he had just put four glasses on the bar and started to open the bottles. Harold Souter, the AEU Advocate, didn't drink and called for a squash. Danny poured the beers and we all took a mouthful

and promptly spat it out. Beer has got too bad when you couldn't drink it in Darwin those days. This wasn't only bad beer it was bloody awful. It was called Red Castle and was brewed (or something) in Geraldton WA. Nobody could drink it and we finished up in George Limb's with a pot of his lemon squash. The case went on for two and a half days and even the opposition's advocate, Ian Pearce, agreed we had a case that couldn't be disputed. The Judge notified us that he would adjourn the case to Adelaide and give his decision the following month. He did, and his decision was to give no decision, but to leave the case of a Basic Wage for the NT until such time until there had been a national inquiry, which of course simply meant that the NT would be held out on the end of a stick and would get only what it could take.

It was usual in those days on the anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, 19 Feb 1942 at 10 minutes to 10am, to hold a service on the wharf for all those wharfies and seamen who had lost their lives. The service was in the form of a short address as union secretary, then the throwing of wreaths into the harbour. In 1948 a number of things took place that caused a bit of talking for quite a while. That morning a Yank luxury cruise ship came into the harbour to be moored. It was the ex yacht of the King of Norway. The tourists had been told by the Administrator that they would be able to see a corroboree out at the Bagot Compound, however the Aborigines were on strike at the time and had decided not to co-operate. The wharfies took the lines and moored the ship, but before they could do anything else, the time had come for the service of Remembrance and they all gathered around on the wharf in front of the bow of the ship and the service went on.

When it was over the wharfies assisted in placing the gangway etc. One of the wharfies was Billy Rowe, a coal black man from Beagle Bay WA. Billy was a well built six footer with a big black beard. When the Yanks came down the gangway, festooned with cameras, binoculars, timing gear, and what have you, they were dressed in Hawaiian shirts with palm trees and canoes and more maidens on the back. When they spotted

Billy they trotted over to him and said, “say guy you are going to go corroboree for us this evening?” Billy roared, “Get away you yankee cock-sucking bastards or I’ll corroboree up and down your guts with both boots.” It was like the retreat from the Philippines.

That evening they were taken out to the compound to see the corroboree but the Aborigines refused. “No more,” they said, “we been on strike”. The Yanks offered them money and their brightly coloured shirts but it made no difference. “We been proper sorry,” they said, “that Administrator not been ask us, he been tell us, and we been on strike.”

The union secretary also used to give the address on behalf of the citizens of Darwin at the town service on this day. It was about this time the town planners came around with their plans for the rebuilding of Darwin, and asked us how many blocks we needed for the Union. We picked out sites for the union office, the printery, the Trades and Labour Council. May Day was always a good turnout in Darwin those days, it used to start from the union office and march through the streets to the park on the Esplanade where after speeches, sports used to take place for the rest of the day. Union Picnic Day in August was another good turnout. It was held at first at Berry Springs, next at Howard Springs, and thereafter down at the Gardens.

One of the Awards we got fixed up in 48 was the Wharf Award. This was a complex matter as the respondent to the Award was the Commonwealth Railways (NT). The railway used to run out on the wharf and they did all the carrying to the Bond Store and so became the employers of labour. Now there was no railway on to the wharf and all the carrying was done by the Lorry Owners Association which was affiliated with the union. We asked the stevedoring company (Burns Philp) to become the respondents. They refused, as they were only acting as agents for the shipping company, which was the Australian Shipping Commission. They also refused, so we asked the Minister for Shipping to accept. He also refused, so we had a meeting and the feeling was all for strike. I finally got them to accept a different method of strike—a go

slow, properly policed, at one ton an hour. Doing one ton an hour was harder than working normally at about ten ton an hour. The Culcairn was the ship that was the unlucky one. The men carried out the go-slow in a very disciplined manner. After one gang had been fined a tenner each, after the normal time of unloading had passed, over three-quarters of the cargo was still aboard.

The Minister of Shipping, Senator Bill Ashby (fix it Bill), gathered a team of so-called experts and came up one Sunday by plane. Being a Labor senator we could have been forgiven for thinking he would have gotten in touch with the union, however the first we knew of their presence was late that afternoon. We found that they had come early and had been met by the Administrator (who was anti-labour even though he was appointed by Labor). With the Manager of Burns Philp they had all gone down to the ship and spent the rest of the day conferring together and deciding on a plan to confront the wharfies with. How stupid they were was shown by ignoring the presence of the two stewards who had to wait on them all day. When their great planning conference was over the stewards got a taxi and came out to my place at Fanny Bay and were able to tell me the whole plot. I gathered the Wharf and Bond Committee together and it was agreed that I would answer the senator and that silence would be the order of the day. No interruptions of the senator's bullshit. This was carried in an excellent manner.

Next morning while the pick-up was progressing, in came the Administrator with four policemen, then came the senator and his experts from shipping and the Stevedoring Industry Board. I as Secretary, and nominal owner of the Stadium, walked over and asked the Administrator did he have a warrant to enter our premises with police. He claimed that the police were there to protect the Minister. I pointed out in a very loud voice that no Labor minister needs protection at a workers' meeting, but that he, as Administrator, would need more than protection if he didn't get out of our premises with his police and stay out until he was invited or had a warrant to enter. He left with his police, but the senator asked could

he come back on his own. Having put him in his place, I agreed and he rejoined the senator's party. I had by this time been informed as to why they had come and introduced to each one, I took them up into the boxing ring and introduced them to the wharfies and informed them that the senator wanted to address them.

The silly old bastard started telling them that they were bludgers etc, just repeating like a parrot what ever the Administrator had told him. When he had finished there was dead silence. I entered the ring and dealt with his speech and showed with facts where he had been told lies. I also pointed out that when Eddie [Ward]¹⁹ was a minister, he had first visited the union to get the union's view first and we thought that was the correct thing for a Labor Minister to do. I then pointed out that he should have known more about bludging than to accuse wharfies of doing it as it was common knowledge that he had run a hazard school²⁰ in Lithgow before entering Parliament. He staggered back against the ropes and I thought he would have a stroke.

I then suggested that the party come down and observe the unloading of the ship and then leave his experts to confer with the union. He had a real expert with him in the person of Reg Reid, who had started as a wharfie, then a foreman, then cargo-supervisor for Patricks. He was on the Australian Shipping Commission etc. After spending some time at the ship and explaining what was going on to the senator, who knew very little about the practical side of unloading a ship, we went back and started our conference.

The Administrator decided that he should be chairman, we put up with him until 5pm and then, as we adjourned, I suggested to Reg Reid that we would get nowhere with such a big conference and such a chairman, and if he would deputise two jokers from his party and with

19 Eddie Ward (1899-1963) was the leading left-wing federal Labor MP, and Minister for Labor, then Minister for Transport and Territories in the Curtin wartime government. Ward's story is told in Elwyn Spratt, *Eddie Ward: Firebrand of East Sydney* (1965)

20 Hazard: A dice game involving gambling.

two union officials we might get somewhere, George Gibbs and myself to represent the Union. George Gibbs was then the Secretary of the Wharf Section of the union and had worked the wharf before the war and had very good knowledge of what we wanted and how we proposed to get it. Next day we met the two negotiators and took them into a small room at the back of the union office where we wouldn't be disturbed. At 5 o'clock that afternoon we had gained every point that we had asked for in our log of claims that could be handled by the negotiators.

The only point that remained to get was perhaps the hardest, our rate on a divisor of 20 hours.²¹ We were lucky, as the union had the early records back to 1936, of the hours worked by each gang, each day, each week and month right up to the time of our log of claims. Darwin was perhaps the first place to have an equalisation scheme for work on the wharf. It was brought in in 1934 and we had the records from 1936 onwards. We were the only party in this present dispute to have any figures at all. "Clicker" White, who was an organiser at the time, had assisted me in going through the old books and getting out the figures of the hours worked. We had spent over a month, working every night from seven till twelve o'clock when we wouldn't be interrupted. We asked Jim Healy, the Federal Secretary of Waterside Workers Federation, to handle the wage and divisor and date of starting before the court for us and he agreed. He expressed some surprise at our hourly claims and divisor claims as we were well ahead of the WWF rates and below the WWF divisor. However in briefing letters to him we were able to convince him that our claims were good.

He took the claims before Judge Kirby, who was at that time dealing with the wharf claims all over Australia. Kirby first objected to our high claims but Healy produced our figures and the opposition couldn't dispute them, they didn't have any figures of time worked. Kirby blew them up and granted our claims. He refused to make it retrospective, so when Jim

²¹ The divisor was the number of hours a wharfie had to work to earn an agreed weekly rate.

Healy wired us that our wage rates were to be 6/- per hour and our divisor was to be 20 the wharfies were very happy. At a meeting with them we managed to get them to carry on the go-slow campaign to win the retrospective part of our claims. The general opinion was that we couldn't win it, but after only ten days the government agreed to pay retrospectively. Jim Healy was sent a case of pipes as a mark of thanks for his work on our behalf. We had always worked closely with the WWF even when the groupers²² were in the majority on the Federal Council and sent Jim Healy up to Darwin to take over the wharf. He agreed with us that fragmentation of the NAWU would only weaken all sections, and reported back to the Federal Council that as the Wharf Section of the NAWU would always work hand in hand with the WWF that it be left as it was.

The first big attempt to body snatch members from the NAWU came when we were rebuilding the union in the late months of 43. During the strike for medical attention we got information that the Australian Workers Union (AWU) had sent an organiser up to the NT just before the strike, and he was laying low until he thought the time was right to make his move. He was staying with the personnel officer and getting a lot of information from them about different people he could expect to get assistance from, and ones he could expect resistance from, as he had been an organiser in Queensland for the AWU. I got in touch with Mick Healy, who was Secretary of the Trades & Labour Council in Brisbane, and asked him to send me any information he could get on the gentleman. Mick sent me a cutting from the *Townsville Register* and the Griffith paper from the NSW Irrigation Area. These were two of the places where he had been organiser for the AWU.

22 Supporters of the anti-communist industrial "groups" in the trade union movement. As part of the cold war, they took control of several key unions, such as the Federated Ironworkers, the Federated Clerks Union, and the Shop Assistants' union, their remaining stronghold in 2003. For a short period in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the industrial groups had a strong presence in the Waterside Workers Federation, gaining the position of Melbourne Branch Secretary, and in 1950, a right-wing Federal President.

He started his career as a body snatcher in the NT at our camp at Snake Creek, and the committee agreed to call a meeting and have the men hear him. He gave the usual spiel about the “grand old union” and how they would get all sort of things for us if we would only buy their tickets. After he had finished I got up to reply to him and after giving the history of why and how the NAWU had broken away from the AWU, I quoted from the *Townsville Register*. “After the finish of the great sugar strike over Weils Disease, a mass meeting of canecutters and mill hands had branded one F Scholls, AWU organiser as a procurer of scabs and agent of the boss”. He couldn’t and didn’t deny that he was the person referred to but tried to use the old bogey, “that’s a commie paper”. Unfortunately for him everyone knew that the *Townsville Register* was just the opposite. I then told the meeting that the AWU had then transferred him to Griffith in NSW and quoted from the Griffith paper that a mass meeting of the area members of the AWU had declared no confidence in the said organiser and demanded he be removed. He was, and here he was; so what is the meeting’s wishes that we do with him? In the main the wishes were that he be dropped in the nearest hole and covered over as he stank. He left the NT after that as every camp he went to had a copy of the report of the Snake Creek meeting, and they gave him a very hot reception.

Then we had the Transport Workers Union (TWU) send an organiser up to try and sign members. He made his first appearance at Katherine. He contacted our union reps “Wild” Bill Donnelly and Scotty McLean. They agreed to call a meeting so he could be heard. It was one of the biggest meetings held at Katherine for the Works and Service workers, and after they had listened to him, the chairman accepted a motion that he be chucked to the crocodiles in the river. He left in a hurry and went south that night on a convoy. Later another one was sent by the TWU from Queensland and with the help of a traitor on the Executive of the NAWU managed to sign up a number of members at K40, one of the large Works and Housing camps, we heard that he was going to hold a

meeting on a certain night and would have as his bodyguard the traitor executive member, one “lucky” Leichhardt (Lechliutner) who had only just missed out as the Australian heavyweight boxer to go to the Olympic Games.

Jack Meaney, Treasurer of the union, and myself went [and] called a meeting a little earlier and told them we wished to challenge this body snatcher. We explained to the meeting that in Queensland, the TWU left their members north of Rockhampton to the tender mercies of the AWU, so why were they coming to the NT at this time? They had never been here in the past, and we had pretty good information that they were here to do a job for the employers and attempt to smash the NAWU. We asked the members that had signed up with the TWU to get in touch with the TWU organiser and his bodyguard and tell them to come out and face our accusations. They did and nobody turned up. After waiting about an hour they tried again and still nobody turned up, so we went on with the meeting and all but one of the chaps that had signed up with the TWU rejoined the NAWU. The one exception was leaving for NSW the following week so we let him go. That for the time being took care of the body snatchers.

One important strike that took place on the railways in 45 was the Bank-to-Bank strike that was centred at Katherine. The men working the line were required to travel any distance to start work and also to come home in their own time. They demanded that they start and finish at their camp. The Railway refused to allow this and the strike lasted three weeks before the strike committee got in touch with the minister and persuaded him to intervene and grant the Bank-to-Bank. Jack Meaney, Bob Anthony, Jimmy Quinn and Jack McGuinness were the leaders of this strike.

In 1948 we also had the long hospital strike; it lasted six weeks. We had served a log of claims on the Public Service Board for the Hospital Employees Section of the Union, and what the Board granted was thought to be very poor. We appealed to the Board for a hearing and were refused, so we gave notice that unless we were given a hearing by a certain

date all labour would be withdrawn. There was no response from the Board so when the date had expired, all labour was withdrawn and then the screams were heard. The union was called every name that distorted minds could think up. Even the Minister of Health got in the act. He hadn't bothered to reply to our letters to him before the strike but he had plenty to say after his silence had brought about the strike. The union was able to pay a small strike pay to the members after the first fortnight.

Wonderful solidarity was shown by the Aboriginal workers to the union. The "silver tail" women decided to try their hands at strike breaking and attempted to go to the hospital, but first the picket line was a bit too much for them and secondly the Aboriginal workers that were doing all their house work, walked out, when "their employers" tried to scab. As soon as the "silver tails" found that there was nobody at home to do all the dirty work, they quickly turned tail and went home. Then the Aboriginal workers, having taught their "white masters" a small lesson also returned to work. After six weeks and the intervention of the Minister of Labour, a hearing was granted and the employees returned to work. At the hearing, we were successful in 95% of our log of claims.

The publicity that this strike and others received in southern papers caused the groupers and the employers to decide that they must make a concerted effort to smash the union by getting rid of the Union leaders and from about this time onwards a number of groupers were sent or brought up to the NT and went to work for the employers.

During 1948 we also had the Hotel and Restaurant Award made applicable to all workers south of Tennant Creek. Up till then it had only applied to all workers from Darwin to Tennant Creek, and employees south of Tennant Creek were just paid what the employer liked. Girls working in a café would be getting £3/10/0 a week in Alice Springs and the same girl could be getting £8/0/0 a week in Darwin or Tennant Creek and a barmaid would be getting the same rate as a barman. This made a great change for the better in the southern end.

We had agreements with the Building Workers Industrial Union

(BWIU). We acted as their agent and issued their tickets and looked after their members the same as our own. While BWIU members remained in the NT they came under our control and we received 50% of their ticket money from the BWIU. This was a very satisfactory agreement. We also had a working agreement with the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). Where there were a number of tradesmen working together the AEU looked after them; in isolated places we did. Harold Souter²³ always gave any assistance he could in Arbitration Court cases. He made available his CAR²⁴ library available to me and sometimes accompanied me to court when a tradesmen's classification was coming up for argument.

It was during 48 that the union decided to take up the plight of the patients at the Leprosarium on Channel Island. There were some 110 patients over there and to state that their conditions were bad was hardly touching the surface of things. It was decided that to alleviate their conditions finance would be needed, so a meeting was called with the AEU, Clerks Union, and the Truck Owners Association. The NAWU put forward the proposal for a May Day Queen contest, the proceeds to be divided between the Leprosarium Welfare Committee (which was set up at that meeting) and the Children's Playground Committee. The NAWU chose for its May Day Queen Jane Ah Matt and after a hectic six weeks of concerts, raffles, socials and other fundraising methods, came in second to the Truck Owners Queen. Some £1600 were raised and divided up between the two committees. With volunteer labour and a lot of "voluntary" materials, playgrounds for the children were built in all the suburbs.

The Leprosarium Committee started to find out what was needed to make the living death of the patients a bit more bearable. We purchased sandshoes, singlets, shorts, dresses, fishing lines, musical instruments etc and got together a concert party. We took these purchases together with

23 Souter was the AEU's Arbitration agent. He later became Secretary of the ACTU, 1956-77.

24 CAR: Commonwealth Arbitration Reports

fruit, biscuits, ice cream etc aboard a “duck”.²⁵ It was an amazing thing to witness the looks of wonder on the peoples faces when they saw the “duck” climb out of the water and proceed on land. They had never seen such a vehicle before. Great was the talk as they climbed all over the “duck” and underneath it and discovered the wheels and then the propeller. Their explanation was that while it was swimming “all same pelican, him been run all same car” and that was that. One of our members used to take movies and much later when we showed them and they recognised each other. Their joy and laughter was worth all the trouble.

Their appreciation of what the union was doing to try and make their lives a bit easier was best shown when some time later we were holding a series of concerts and socials to raise funds to send a young coloured lad over to America to have his eyes operated on. We had provisional agreement with the Minister of Health that he would go pound for pound with us to send the lad to the Mayo Clinic, providing the government doctors said there would be a chance of a successful operation. One day, four patients from the Leprosarium turned up at the back of the union office with a donation for the little boy, £4 17s and some pence. They had heard what we were trying to do and they had taken up a collection and sent four of their members on a long walk at low tide right round the harbour to the union office, and they had to walk back. When we got word that they were back again we published their donation on the front page of the *Northern Standard*.

About this time, a pathologist, Dr Couani, and his wife, Dr Strelletski, came to work in Darwin and he took over the job and started to get in new drugs, and after a bit patients were being sent back to their homes. He was very hostile about the conditions they had to live under and the union decided to get Channel Island closed down and to have a new one built on the mainland where there would be fresh running water, plenty of hinterland for gardens and close to the sea for fishing and

25 Duck: amphibious vehicle, probably an army personnel carrier.

swimming. We had an old timer look about for a suitable place and when he had found one we started a campaign about the conditions. We had “Clicker” White, the organiser, go over to the island and take a set of photos that were terrible to look at. As “Clicker” did not have permission to go over there he had to go bush until after we had published the photos. The Minister of Health came up to Darwin at this time and we had a deputation to him requesting him to build a new Leprosarium on the mainland. He claimed that the Lands Department had no land that was suitable so we offered to take him and the Lands Department out to a suitable site. He never came but the Lands Department had to admit that the land was very suitable, and that’s how Channel Island was closed down and the new Leprosarium was built on the mainland.

In 1948 the Citizens Committee was set up and as Secretary of the union I was appointed as representing the area from the old Vestey’s meatworks southwards. We carried a bit of weight and got some things done.

I think that it was in 48 that the Duke of Gloucester, “Governor General” of Australia, came up on a visit. The “silver tails” went mad, “oh, the dear Duke” etc. They couldn’t even recognise that he was the closest thing to an idiot outside Callan Park.²⁶ The Administrator came down to the newspaper office with great bundles of paper and photos showing him and his Duchess in every kind of uniforms, from childhood to senility, and wanted us to publish them in the paper. We refused. The Administrator then asked the Chamber of Commerce to have all their employees outside on the street when the Vice-Regal cavalcade drove through the streets. They refused. They said if he declared it a half holiday they would close their shops and the employees could do what they liked. He wouldn’t, so the only ones he could stand over were the school children. He had them standing and waving flags etc. At the Vice-Regal ball we were informed that he messed himself and wouldn’t leave the room until the Duchess stood over him and made him go out and get

26 A large psychiatric hospital in Sydney.

washed and changed. He had very weak bowels. One of the “heads” of the Works and Housing showed me the plans of what they had to do for his trip through the NT. Three new trucks fitted up with demountable toilets, had to go before the “vice-regal” safari, and every fifty miles a toilet was taken off a truck and suitably placed in a position for the duke to take a leak etc. Then after cleaning the truck would leapfrog the others and set up again at the proper mileage. We went up to take photos of the royal toilets and had an estimate of the costs made (including penalty rates for the cleaners) and in the next *Northern Standard* we gave them the publicity leaving that we had refused to give them when they came. The “silver tails” didn’t appreciate it but we sold more papers that week than we had ever sold before.

We managed to get an Apprenticeship Committee set up with two union reps, two employer reps and the Government Secretary as chairman. In 1949 quite a number of Award cases came up for hearing for which I had to go to Melbourne. Working up these cases and putting them through the courts was becoming harder.

As the demand for work to be done was slackening off, so also was the employers resistance increasing and they were taking various ways to overcome any push for better wages and conditions. We noticed that a number of organised groupers were being sent into the NT and were starting to cause disruption. They were being assisted by some members of the union for different reasons— religious, selfish, political etc. It really got started with the stop-over by Cardinal Spellman²⁷ and his entourage in Darwin. Our informant told us that he had blown up the parish priest for not taking an active part in setting up the “movement”²⁸ in Darwin and told him that he would advise that a bishop be sent up to organise the opposition to the policy of the Union. This was done and meetings were

27 Spellman (1889-1967) was Archbishop of New York. and the leading Catholic priest in the USA.

28 Catholic Social Studies Movement, the key mass organisation underpinning the industrial groups. The story is in Paul Ormonde’s book, *The Movement* (1972).

held and instructions were issued to members of the union and those that could become members. Qantas, the Shell Company and the Department of Civil Aviation soon became a hotbed of the grouper movement; also the hospital employees were taken over by the groupers.

I had been working non-stop since 1942 and was becoming exhausted and full of bad nerves. Instead of sleeping when I went home of a night, I would find myself reliving the day's work, going over what I had done and why I should have perhaps done it some other way. After court cases this was particularly bad; it would go on night after night. I decided to retire after the yearly general meeting and try an 8 to 5 job for a while.

It was about this time that “Stuttering” Paddy Kennelly, Federal Secretary of the ALP, came up to Darwin and being too “respectable” to come down to the union office, rang me up from the Darwin Hotel and asked me to come up and see him. I knew the reason. In 1946, when the Federal elections were to come up, no opposition was to be put up against “Chilla” Blain, the Country Party²⁹ member for the NT. The union members didn't want Blain and they asked the union to choose a candidate to run against him. Yorcky Walker, the Secretary, who before the bombing had been Chairman of the Darwin branch of the ALP, got it together again, calling it the NT Labor Party. They chose a young ex-Army doctor who was then in charge of the Katherine Hospital. He had been a member of the Labor Party in South Australia. When it became fairly obvious that we were going to win with our candidate, the SA ALP picked an engine driver from Katherine and ran him to split the vote. The result was our man got beaten by some two hundred votes and Blain got in again. We didn't want that to happen again this time and I had given hints that I was going to stand as a union candidate. Knowing that they couldn't win against Blain with a union candidate standing, the ALP called for help and so here was their Federal Secretary responding to the call. I went up to the Hotel Darwin with the editor of the paper, Ron Brown,

29 Now the Country-Liberal Party in the NT.

and we had a long discussion with Paddy. He beat all around the bush for a while but finally asked me what I wanted to pull out of the contest.

We told him that the Union wouldn't stand a candidate if the ALP chose the right man to stand and we had very set ideas on who the right man was. Paddy asked us to name him and we did. There was great relief on his face when we did. We named Jock Nelson, who was the son of Harold Nelson, who had been Secretary of the old Union (Northern Territory Workers Union) and who had led the fight for representation in Federal Parliament. Harold had led the tax revolt and the revolt against corruption in the Administration and for expelling of the heads of the Administration at the time. He had been exonerated by the Royal Commission and became the first member for the NT. We told Paddy that the union would give full support to Jock Nelson and elect him. He was chosen and the union gave him full support, not only through the union but the paper also. We sort of became unofficial campaign directors. He was elected and remained there for 17 years until he retired. Whitlam appointed him Administrator of the NT. The wheel had turned full circle: his father had been the leader of the people that had run a previous Administrator and Government Secretary out of the NT, and now his son had become Administrator.

George Gibbs became organiser for the southern end and built union rooms at Tennant Creek. Bob Anthony who had retired from the railways, became the Darwin-Katherine organiser and did a very good job. He was one of the real old timers. He and Dick Riley were the only ones left of the first Executive of the NAWU when it was formed in 1927. Later that year Yorcky Peel became organiser in Bob Anthony's place and did a good job for a few months (he was a real four-furlong horse). Arthur Olive, who had been an organiser with the Ironworkers union came to the NT again. He had been here in 46 for some time, and worked for the Works & Housing at Francis Camp. After some months I had him appointed Acting Organiser when Bob Anthony left. He was very capable and when I retired in October 49, I recommended him as Acting

Secretary in my place and he was appointed until such time as applications could be called for the position. As he had not much experience in court work I agreed to continue as Industrial Advocate. I was elected President of the Union, as a few months later Olive was injured in a motor accident and after some time in the Darwin Hospital was sent to Sydney for further treatment.

The Pastoral Award conference and Award hearing was to come off in Alice Springs about this time. George Gibbs was to arrange the meetings with the pastoral workers and it was left to me to go down and handle the conference and the Award hearings before the Conciliation Commissioner Portus. We managed to get the award brought up to date. Nothing more than that was OK'd by the Commissioner. The only thing in the Award that could be considered a victory was the deletion of a clause that stated that a cook, cooking for a certain number of persons, would count two Aborigines as one person!! Great opposition was put up by the station owners and managers against this deletion. They started off claiming that Aborigines didn't need the same tucker as white workers; and that one white stockman was worth six Aborigines!! I was able to prove just the opposite. The award for a droving plant laid it down one man for each 259 head of cattle. As each mob was generally 1500 head, that meant six men for the job. Most drovers had two, sometimes three white men, and three or four Aborigines, the Aborigines being the most useful men in the plant. They didn't have three white men and eighteen Aborigines. Even the Commissioner could see silliness of this claim by the employers; and as the rations laid down in the Native Affairs Ordinance for Aborigines working on stations were the same as that laid down in the Pastoral Award for white workers, he agreed to delete the clause. This was about the only success the union had in this award at this time.

The Commissioner claimed he had no power to give equal wages to Aborigines in the pastoral industry. The buck was always passed from one court to another and one minister to another.

Following this Pastoral Award case I had to go to Sydney for a claim before the Full Court (Kelly, Foster and Dunphy). The Advocate for the employers asked me beforehand would the union be bringing witnesses, as they wouldn't bring witnesses if the Union didn't. As we didn't have the money to bring witnesses from the NT to Sydney, I notified him that we wouldn't. I got quite a surprise when he sprang two travelling inspectors as witnesses on me during the case. They gave evidence that would have completely ruined our case, as we had no witnesses. Jack Sweeney (later Judge) was waiting in court to do a case for the AEU. At the adjournment for dinner I grabbed him and took him to the pub for a beer and asked him would he take my brief and I would go in the box and try and prove that the employers expert witnesses didn't know what they were talking about. We didn't have any dinner, we worked all the time lining up questions for Sweeney to ask.

When the court started again I asked permission to hand over the brief to Sweeney and to go in the box as an expert witness. Dunphy objected, claiming that I couldn't be an expert witness. He claimed that he himself was an expert witness as he used to spend his holidays on stations owned by Connors, Docherty & Durack in WA. I interjected and said, "all you know about stations is from the front of the house. I know it from the back of the house and the cattle camps." He nearly took a fit! and was talking about contempt when old Foster broke in and calmed him down. Foster said that he thought I would make a good witness. I was accepted, and I was able to point out that the inspectors lived in the "Big House" not the stock camps. They didn't know the work of the stock camps only the business side of the stations etc. After about two hours in the box, I had proved our case to such an extent that the two inspectors left the Court. They could see that we were going to put them back in the box so they shot through. Foster came on side again with the union and we finished up with the claim being granted (Dunphy dissented).

George Gibbs was Acting Secretary while Olive was in Sydney, and one day in early 51 he came out to my place. I was a bit sick at the time.

The quacks³⁰ said it was gall bladder and it would have to come out. The union had a summons to appear in the Conciliation Court in Darwin on the Monday to show cause as to why all members of the NAWU who could be covered by the TWU and the Storemen and Packers Union (SPU) should not be in those unions. It was Friday afternoon and I was going to have two days and two nights to try and work up a case in answer to the claim. I asked George to get around and see that all the workers from the Wharf and the Bond who were not working, would pack the court on the Monday morning. I went to work and by Sunday evening had decided how we were going to meet the summons. The Federal Secretary of the SPU, Cleary, was appearing for that union and Horan, the Federal Secretary of the TWU, was appearing for that union.

On Monday when they had made their appearances, and Cleary, who was to do the main work for both of them, went to open the case, I interrupted and asked Portus what authority he had to hear a case that really dealt with the registration of the union. I told him that I denied his authority to adjudicate and that if he did so I would seek a writ of mandamus against him. I had decided to just keep on speaking until such time as I was shut up. The rest of the day was taken up by me, developing all sorts of subjects that had a bearing on the claim. Cleary managed to speak, putting the bones of his and Horan's claims for about half an hour and we adjourned till the next day. I spent much of the night looking up matters that I could use, as I had the agreement of the Executive to put all union members in as witnesses. Next day we started and I claimed that both Cleary and Horan had been paid by Shell and Qantas to bring the claims against the NAWU and that it wasn't a genuine claim, that it was as spurious as they were. They used to appear outraged and would demand that I be made to withdraw, I would do so after a lot of argument, and then attack from another quarter. This went on all day, and the following day. Portus asked how long the case was going to go as he said he had other cases to hear. Cleary said it would only take him half an hour and

30 quack: doctor.

Horan said the same. He looked hopefully at me and I said “at least a month”. I then explained that I proposed to call a number of witnesses in Darwin, then at Adelaide River, Pine Creek, Katherine, Daly Waters and so on all the way to Alice Springs; at each and every place where members would be affected by this attempt to smash the union, by using these “professional bosses men” to body snatch.

I started to call our Darwin witnesses and that took care of that day. The next day, more witnesses and more crowds in the courtroom. On the Friday the union had taken up most of the day with witnesses stating that they wouldn't join the SPU or the TWU even if they were paid as much as Cleary and Horan were getting from the bosses. They were made to withdraw of course. Portus explained to them that they couldn't say things like that. They said “well we'll withdraw but we still think it.” After dinner Portus decided that he would adjourn the case to Melbourne. When I objected, he refused to hear me and walked out. He, Cleary and Horan, got well and truly booed by the crowd. About a fortnight later I was called to Melbourne for the adjourned hearing. I took the transcript of the hearing down with me and showed it to Jack Lazarus and Jack McPhillips and also to Harold Souter. They spent half a day giving me CAR cases that they said were applicable to the case. When I went to court I had to get a taxi to cart the books and the driver to help me up the stairs. Cleary and Horan had profited by our actions in Darwin and had packed the court with their members, but I reckoned that they would be much more “respectful” than our members in Darwin. When the court was ready, Portus asked Cleary and Horan how long they wanted and they said that an hour would be enough for them. Then he asked me how long the NAWU wanted? I pointed to the great pile of CAR books that I had and said at least a week. He then decided that he would give a decision to give no decision. He would leave the position as it had been before which of course meant that the SPU and the TWU would not have much chance to body snatch if the NAWU continued to do its work.

The change of rules always gave us trouble as Taylor seemed to be

determined to put every block he could think up in the way of the NAWU for a change of rules. We were still trying in 51 and still being refused.

The last case I did for the union was the High Court cases on behalf of the leader of the Aborigines in a number of strikes. We had found over the years that when an Aboriginal became a leader or spokesman for his people he didn't last long afterwards. He was either sent back bush or framed up on some charge and sent over to Delissaville, a so-called convict settlement over the Harbour. Sometimes they died in questionable brawls; later the participants in the brawl were given their freedom and sent back to their own country. So it became necessary to have a hidden leader, one who could get advice from the union and take it back to the nominal leaders and lead them from behind.

Fred Waters became this hidden leader and he was a good one. At last the Native Affairs found out about him and took measures to get rid of him. They first expelled him from the Bagot Road Compound. He and his wife put up in a hut belonging to Bobby Fisher and the union Social Committee gave him a job as a carpenter. He was a good rough one and a good worker. The union was paying him £15 a week, which was the wage for Carpenters, and he was working at the Stadium, repairing the seats etc. One day his wife came to the union office and told the organiser, Yorky Peel, that the police and a Native Affairs man had come to their house the day before and taken Freddie away and he hadn't come back. Peel and George Gibbs went up and saw the Native Affairs. Gibbs had to take out a licence to employ Fred, and they were told that Fred Waters had been exiled to Haasts Bluff, west of Alice Springs, as a troublemaker. This was a sentence of death for Fred and if the Native Affairs knew anything about Aborigines they knew this.

I was in Melbourne on a Rules case when I got word of the exile of Fred Waters. I was staying with Frank Purse, BWIU Federal Secretary, and Jack Sweeney turned up later that night. Between them they convinced me that I should take immediate action to get a writ of Habeas Corpus on

Fred Waters behalf. I told them that the only ones who could appear on behalf of Aborigines were the “protectors” of Aborigines, in this case the “persecutors” of Aborigines. However I would have to go back to Darwin and get the consent of the Executive Council and all the details. I flew back to Darwin and the Executive Council meeting gave me the full authority to go ahead. We had very little money in the Union’s coffers at that time. Judge Wells, the Supreme Court judge, was in Sydney at the time and I booked to fly to Sydney and approach him for a writ. Clive Evatt, who was then Chief Secretary in the NSW government, rang me that day and asked me to come and see him and offered all kinds of help, none of it very practicable unfortunately. The following morning I was met in Sydney by two wallopers in a big black car. They had been sent by Evatt to pick me up and bring me out to his place. I conferred with him for a while and told him of my plan to see Judge Wells. He sent me out in his car. I knew Wells very well, and knew that I would get some assistance from him. Sad to say I didn’t know that he had a slight stroke a little time before this and was not allowed to do court work for some months. He advised me to go to Melbourne and try for a writ there before a single judge.

I went to Melbourne and ran into Jim Healy, Idris Williams³¹ and Dr Evatt who was appearing for them. I told the tale to them and Dr Evatt told me to get myself a solicitor and barrister and getting a writ would be like getting “a pound of sugar”. I approached Jack Lazarus, who used to do quite a bit of legal work for the NAWU and explained the set up to him, telling him that it would have to be a “freeby” as the union had no money. He agreed to take it and also got a “true blue liberal” solicitor to do the case for free. We appeared before Justice Fullager and after a full day’s argument, Fullager claimed that he had no jurisdiction to give a

31 Idris Williams was a leading Communist Party trade unionist. This may well be a reference to the High Court case brought by a number of unions against the Communist Party Dissolution Act, in November-December 1950, in which Evatt (then Leader of the Labor Party) acted as counsel for the Waterside Workers Federation and the Federated Ironworkers Association.

decision on the case.

On leaving the court we ran into Dr Evatt, Healy and Williams again and the Dr asked me how we had got on. I told him that sugar must be still rationed, and told him of Fullager's decision. He went to town and said where is your barrister? I introduced Lazarus and the solicitor to him and he advised them to issue another writ. I forget the name of this one. We did so and after a wait of about a week appeared before the full High Court. The Government wanted to make sure of this one. Each department, Native Affairs, Administration, Interior etc, had their quota of QCs, barristers and solicitors. I was the only joker there without a wig. The case lasted two days and turned out as I expected. They ruled that I had no authority to bring a case before the court on behalf of an Aborigine. Under the law only the "protectors", the Native Affairs, had this right, so they found against us. When I was going out of court the Clerk of Court stopped me with a bill of costs for some £666. I told him to send it to Mr R G Menzies,³² Canberra or Vestey's Ltd³³ who would be sure to take care of it. I never heard anymore of it.

The Civil Rights Council had become very interested in the case and told me that they were prepared to arrange a series of meetings throughout Victoria, NSW and Queensland. I was very happy with this help and started talking. I arranged a series of talks to suit every occasion, 10 minute talks for smoke-ohs,³⁴ half-hour talks for dinner-time meetings, and anything from one to two hours for night time meetings. The Civil Rights Council did a good job and arranged some very [good] meetings and interviews. After six weeks of nearly non-stop speaking which included addressing the Federal Labor Party at Parliament House in Canberra, addressing all aggregate meetings of the Miners Federation, the Miners put a car at my disposal and as I would finish one meeting I would

32 The Liberal prime minister, 1949-66.

33 A large British meat company. The famous Gurindji land rights claim was for land owned by Vestey's in the Northern Territory.

34 Smoke-ohs: Short work-breaks during which workers would often have a smoke.

hop in the car and go to the next one. All business would stop until I had spoken, then resolutions etc, and I would jump into the car and on to the next one. After a week in Queensland I had lost my voice and only a whisper would come out. I decided to return to Darwin. On the plane on the Monday, the stewardess gave me the paper and the big headlines were "Aboriginal Strike Leader returned to Darwin". He had been returned on the Saturday. He beat me back by two days.

Of all the fights the union had engaged in in my time with them I think that this case and the first strike in 46 were the ones to be proud of. Fred Waters showed his faith in the union and his courage when answering questions from the "presstitutes of the press". I was informed that one question put to Fred was that, "The Administrator brought you back because you promised to be a good boy and not cause any more trouble"? Fred was about 48 years old; he said "What you mean boy? I'm a man and I'll cause trouble till I die while my people want me," and to a further question that the Administrator had let him come back, Fred said "That fella Administrator never let me out, he put me in, union got me out." Some time after I had left the NT I was told by a Territorian that I met in Sydney that Fred had been framed for having a drink and sent to Delissaville and killed in a "brawl". I think that the leadership that he showed and the sacrifice that he made may have helped set in motion the struggle of the Aborigines that have taken place in the NT to this day.

I left the NT in May 1951 and after working in the coal mine at Collinsville, joined the Waterside Workers Federation in Sydney and took my place in that union's struggles over the next thirty years.

If the union's history for these few years seems to revolve around individuals, I have no excuse. Individuals create history, and when they are organised they create better history.

Beverley Symons

Red councillors during the Cold War: Communists on Sydney City Council, 1953-59

Beverley Symons was a CPA member for 20 years, 1970-91, and on the National Committee in the 1980s. She was a peace movement activist and a full-time worker for the Vietnam Moratorium Movement. In the 1990s, she was President then Secretary of the Sydney Branch of the Labour History society. She got her PhD at Wollongong Uni on women workers during the war and is now enjoying retirement in Newcastle where she is involved in The Greens.

AS is well known, the Communist Party of Australia was represented in Parliament only once—by Fred Paterson in the Queensland state seat of Bowen from 1944-50. However, the party's electoral successes in local government have attracted little historical attention. As far as I know, the only published material outside the communist press were two articles in 1985 and 1986 examining the CPA's 1944 victory in winning five of the eight seats on the Kearsley Shire Council in the northern NSW coalfields.¹

During a period of over 30 years, CPA councillors held office in numerous city and municipal councils in several states. The first—Fred Paterson and Jim Henderson—were elected in April 1939 to

the Townsville City Council and Wangaratta Shire Council respectively; and the last — Bill Flynn and Bill Whiley— who were on Broken Hill Council for 21 and 12 years, were defeated in October 1974.

Subsequently, some communists have been elected to councils—such as Jack Munday and Brian McGahen to the Sydney City Council in 1984— however, they stood as community independents and not for the CPA.

Of comparable significance to the Kearsley wartime victory is that, throughout the Cold War 1950s with its prevailing anti-communism, the party continued to achieve electoral successes in local government. In the NSW municipal elections in December 1953, eight CPA candidates were elected—two to the Sydney City Council, one to outer-suburban Penrith Council and five to the country councils of Lithgow, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Broken Hill and Binnaway. Three of these councillors served only one term, two served for six years, two for eight or nine years and one for 21 years. This paper examines the experiences of the two communists elected to the Sydney City Council for the first time, Tom Wright and Ron Maxwell.

At the time of their election, Wright, 51, was NSW Secretary and Federal President of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union and had led the NSW Branch for 17 years. He was the CPA's General Secretary for four years in the 1920s and since then, had continued to be a leading member of its Central Committee. Maxwell, 42, a waterside worker, was a senior vice-president of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Sydney Branch and had been a party member for 10 years.

Given that the 1953 municipal elections occurred only two years after the CPA had narrowly escaped being declared illegal, it seems pretty remarkable that it was able to break through the anti-communist barriers and gain entry to the aldermen's chambers in the Sydney City Council. In fact, if it had not been for decisions made by the Labor Party in its own interests, it is a pretty safe bet that no communist would have got a toehold in the council during the 1950s. Shortly before the elections, the CPA's task was made much easier when the Cahill Labor government

brought down legislation “which radically changed local government election practice.” Its amendments abolished the ward system, reduced the number of aldermen to be elected from 30 to 20, provided for direct popular election of the Lord Mayor and—most importantly—introduced proportional representation (PR) voting.² Without those changes, the party and other minority groups would have had little chance under the former “first past the post” voting in wards. On top of that, the CPA’s team of 15 candidates, headed by Wright, drew first place on the left of the ballot paper, thus picking up a good proportion of “donkey votes”.* This added bonus probably ensured the unexpected win of the second candidate, Maxwell, along with Wright.

To understand the political context behind the Labor Government’s hasty decision to radically alter the conduct of the 1953 municipal elections, we need to go back a few years. In 1947 it introduced legislation to redraw the city boundaries, which finally resulted in a greatly enlarged city divided into ten wards, each electing three aldermen. Eight surrounding municipalities that were all Labor-held councils, were incorporated—Alexandria, Darlington, Redfern, Waterloo, Erskineville, Newtown, Glebe and Paddington. Their addition meant “that the Labor Party would now have its ‘permanent’ majority at the Town Hall,” at least until the state government changed.³ The large working-class populations of these incorporated areas, added to those in existing city areas such as Millers Point, Ultimo/Pymont and Kings Cross/Woolloomooloo. In the late 1940s-early ’50s, a large percentage of these male residents would have worked for one of the city’s three biggest employers—the Eveleigh Railway Workshops, the Waterfront, or the City Council. The benefits to Labor of these changes were apparent at the 1950 election, when it won 24 of the council’s 30 seats. The rival Citizens’ Reform stood candidates in only two of the ten wards.⁴

By October 1953, in an effort to quieten adverse criticisms about

* A donkey vote is one where the voter gives first preference to the candidate at the top of the ballot paper, and works their way down.

Labor's absolute domination of the city council, the government acted to alter the rules for conduct of the December elections, as explained above. In the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Labor's reputation at the time "was at a low ebb. In plain English, it stank." The amalgamation of councils and the rigging of ward boundaries were seen to have produced "an unhealthy ill-balance of representation." The government calculated that its changes to the voting system "could redress some of the worst evils," while still ensuring Labor control of the council.⁵ It argued that PR voting would give "Reform and the minor parties seats to match the number of votes they won."⁶ After the elections, Premier Cahill said the legislation "was brought in to create a more equitable distribution in the City Council and that has been achieved".⁷

The Labor Party had also been rocked by intense publicity about allegations of long-standing graft and corruption against several Labor aldermen. The attacks were led by the virulently rightwing *Daily Telegraph*, which advocated a vote for the Civic Reform-Liberal team and for Labor to be swept out of office.⁸ In the event, Labor retained control although with a reduced majority and the Lord Mayor, Pat Hills, was elected outright without going to preferences. Tom Wright, with 6,909 votes, was one of 3 out of 54 candidates who won on primary votes (the quota was 4,189).⁹ The election of one communist was not entirely unexpected, given that Jim Healy had polled 6,600 votes for the CPA in the city area in the recent Senate election. However, a week later, Ron Maxwell also scraped in, as the last candidate left in the ballot. The composition of the new council was then: Labor 11, CR-Liberal 6, Communist 2 and Independent Labor 1.¹⁰

To the conservatives, one communist was bad enough, but to have two gaining entry to the council chambers was a disaster that should never have been allowed to happen. They were quick to blame Labor for changing the electoral rules and thus, enabling the Reds to get in. As the State Opposition leader, VH Treatt, said, the government "was warned its legislation would put Communists on the City Council" and "must have

known it would happen.”¹¹ The Liberals’ State Secretary, JL Carrick, said it was a “dreadful thing” that proportional representation had been applied to the council election, as it was “a gift” for the communists. He warned that “Communist representation on the Council, although a minority, represents a fifth column which cannot be treated lightly.”¹² And according to the CR-Liberal leader, Alderman RJ Bartley, the election of a second communist was a tragedy. “With one Communist alderman to move a resolution and another to second him, they could give the Council an unhappy time,” he said.¹³

Soon after his election, Tom Wright was asked whether he would press for a royal commission on alleged corruption in the council. The Communist Party’s view, he replied, “is that the danger of corruption arises daily because of the way business is conducted in our present society. The best guarantee against corruption is to alter our ways of doing business.” He went on that he would “support any genuine move from any quarter which wishes to improve the integrity of the Council and raise its standing with the population.”¹⁴ He also said he would “advocate primarily an adequate housing scheme and would urge the City Council to seek the support of other councils in a united approach to the Federal Government for funds for housing.”¹⁵ And in a letter to the *Herald*, he said the communist aldermen:

will work to the best of our ability to strengthen and improve the Council so that it may better serve the needs of the people. All proposals brought forward by the Labor Party or any other councillors which are in the interests of the majority of citizens will receive our support, while we ourselves will endeavour to submit constructive proposals of benefit to the people.¹⁶

The issue of pressing the federal government for substantial direct funding for local government needs, was clearly a long-term policy objective that had little chance of being realised. Nevertheless, it was the major policy point advanced by all CPA candidates in the 1953 NSW

municipal elections and for the next several years. They advocated an immediate reduction of the huge annual defence budget and diversion of funds to municipalities for priority services to the people.¹⁷ More specific policies of the Sydney Council candidates included: full use of local government powers to enforce home repairs; reduced rates on workers' homes, with full rating on factory and business premises; basic wage adjustments for council employees; a clean-up of market rackets; and suitable city premises to be made available to pensioners' clubs. Wright believed that much more could be done through local government bodies 'to insist on the provision of housing and to improve housing conditions. More must be done to assist the cheap marketing of fruit and vegetables for the benefit of the city consumer and the grower.'¹⁸

So, what were the communist councillors able to achieve in their first term before Maxwell was defeated, and in the next three years when Wright was on his own? The short answer is not a great deal, in terms of the party's objectives for major social changes in the local government area. This is not surprising, of course, given the right wing majority on the city council and the general political climate of the 1950s. On a more modest level, however, they did achieve some gains for Sydney's working people—mainly through assistance with problems of housing conditions and rentals, and pushing for more parks, child-care centres and other facilities. An important success was the campaign to save the Domain Harbour Baths from destruction in 1954. Following a majority vote for the baths to be closed concurrently with opening of the council's new Victoria Park pool, Wright, Maxwell and an Independent Labor alderman succeeded in getting the Lord Mayor and other aldermen to confer with various groups using the baths who were opposing its closure. The upshot of that conference was that the council rescinded its earlier resolution and voted to keep the baths open and to expend funds for their continued maintenance.¹⁹

During Ron Maxwell's term on council, he worked on the waterfront, as well as being an honorary senior vice-president of the

WWF. With a family to support, he had to keep up his working hours and so had limited time to put in at the council. In those days aldermen received no financial allowance at all, not even a telephone reimbursement, and the only assistance provided was a gold pass for use on government buses. In a recent interview, Maxwell, now aged 89, recalled that often on his way to and from work, the drivers would query him when he showed his pass instead of paying the fare, probably because they didn't believe that a bloke in overalls was a city councillor.²⁰ A Sydney Branch stopwork meeting had voted for him to be allowed Mondays off on council business, so the one day a week he spent at the Town Hall interviewing constituents and doing other work was only possible because the union covered his wages.²¹ At first, Ron says, the union's President, Jim Young, didn't believe that aldermen got no payment whatsoever. "He even rang up the Town Hall to find out, because he thought that if I'm getting paid from them, I'm not going to get paid from the Wharfies. Quite right too. But he got the shock of his life, he said that's wrong."²²

Both the communist councillors spent a lot of time talking to people who came to see them and following up their concerns. Many of their problems were to do with landlords, the state of their houses, the plumbing and so on. The great majority of working people then were renting and Ron says the landlords:

were very hard in those days, they'd do nothing unless you pushed them. But the moment someone had a city council alderman behind him, they moved pretty quickly. And we got a lot of work done with repairs and so on. And if they threatened the tenant by putting the rent up, then I really got stuck into them. Many times, as an alderman, I attended the Fair Rents Court to have rents kept as they were or reduced.²³

Some estate agents and landlords "bailed up and refused to do any repairs. The usual excuse was that the owners lived overseas... But with a little persuasion and pressure, they were compelled to carry out necessary

repairs.”²⁴

Other issues pursued on behalf of groups of residents included provision of pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, playing equipment in parks and use of Council halls for community activities. One problem that many people experienced then was trying to get their children transferred into schools in the outer-western suburbs, following the family’s resettlement into Housing Commission homes. They often could not get into the local schools and their kids would have to travel back to their old inner-city schools. Ron particularly remembers one Town Hall employee who was “a vicious anti-communist until I got his two children transferred from the Glebe school to St Marys.” It didn’t matter what department it was in the State Government or the Council, he says, “we were always given a good hearing, no viciousness, in fact we got on very well with everyone... And within 24 hours, I had those kids in the schools... It just shows what can be done if you’ve got something behind you.” In those days an alderman “had quite a bit of push behind him” and would usually get put through to the right people straight away on the phone. “It made a big difference being on the Sydney City Council.”²⁵

Ron Maxwell believes that he and Tom Wright won the respect of their fellow aldermen. “They knew we were working hard and it wasn’t for ourselves, it was for the people of Sydney,” he says. “And the shopkeepers, we had to work hard to do a lot for them, because they were raided a lot by inspectors, often over silly things. But where there were lots of vermin and cockroaches, well then we really got stuck into them. We used to do a lot of inspections.”²⁶ Whatever he and Tom did, “it was always in the interests of the working class,” he says. “And not only for the working class, but for the middle class, we did lots for them too. A lot of them appealed to us because they couldn’t get things done. You’d be surprised, a lot of the shopkeepers who were real Liberal minded, a lot of them came to us for advice.”²⁷

In a report to the CPA’s Central Committee in late 1955, Tom

Wright said that until the 1953 municipal elections, the Party “had taken only a desultory interest” in local government work. But since then, there had been a much greater display of interest in this activity and for the first time, a Party Programme for Local Government had been adopted. Since their election he and Ron Maxwell had “endeavoured to work in a united front way with the Labor Party aldermen on matters of benefit to the citizens, and while we can claim a number of minor successes, we cannot claim to have made any great impact.” He also pointed out that one of the main weaknesses was the failure to link up the local government work with the Party branches. “The work is largely that of individual aldermen working with individual citizens, without the local party organisations coming into the picture.”²⁸

Half-way through their first term, the CPA paper, *Tribune*, said that Wright and Maxwell had played an important part in the council’s work and given outstanding service to the people who elected them. Their achievements included approval of a children’s playground, provision of more bus stop seats and halt signs, forcing landlords to restore lights in blocks of flats and residentials, and initiating the campaign to save the Domain Baths. They had also gained increased meal money allowances for city council employees, as part of their support for improved wages and conditions for these workers. And they had successfully pressed for an explanation from the city council’s representatives on the county council, which distributed electricity, as to why domestic consumers missed out on a reduction in charges.²⁹ In 1956 they again protested against a 14% rise for domestic electricity consumers. Maxwell led a party deputation to a county council representative³⁰ and Wright’s demand for a review of the new charges was supported by Lord Mayor Hills and adopted by the council.³¹ At a further meeting, he extensively questioned two county council officers about the injustice of the increase to domestic users.³²

For the 1956 city council elections, the CPA again ran a team of 15 candidates. A main point in its program was for the council to develop

housing projects, to be recognised as a housing authority and share in government housing loans, and to have power to prevent demolition of homes.³³ The growing trend for demolition of inner-city housing to make way for commercial businesses, was already an issue of concern to residents whose rented homes were increasingly being sold for development. Protest campaigns increased over the next few years as more and more houses and blocks of flats were replaced by non-residential businesses. In February 1957, Tom Wright successfully moved that the city council send a deputation to the state government, seeking power to prevent such demolitions by commercial developers. Because the council currently did not have that power, he said, “a large number of habitable houses were being destroyed to make way for more profitable commercial and industrial undertakings”, despite the terrible housing position for low-income people. One example was the St Kilda flats in Woolloomooloo, where 26 people were being threatened with eviction by the big secondhand car dealers, Auto Auctions, in order to build a car park.³⁴

In the 1956 elections, 102 candidates stood for the 20 council positions and five for Lord Mayor. Five political parties ran, including the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) for the first time. Following the 1953 experience of the communists drawing No. 1 position on the ballot paper and two being elected, one can imagine the consternation among conservative circles when the CPA again scored the favoured first position. In an editorial headed “The Red Marble Comes Up Again”, the *Sydney Morning Herald* said the Cahill government alone was responsible for the CPA’s entry into the city council in 1953 and it “can now be thanked for the prospect that Sydney will still have two Red aldermen after December 1.” It also said that the two aldermen “have been an improvement rather than otherwise on some of the Labor representatives”.³⁵

As it turned out, Maxwell was defeated for the last position by a DLP candidate, while Wright’s vote dropped from his 1953 figure of

6,909, to 4,510. The ALP retained control with 10 aldermen, plus Lord Mayor Harry Jensen, with Citizens Reform getting 4, Liberals 3, DLP 2 and the CPA 1.³⁶ Clearly there would now be less possibility for the lone communist to make much headway, with 9 solid conservatives and a majority of right wing Labor aldermen opposing him.

By early 1958 the Labor Party decided that the ward system of elections should be reinstated, while retaining PR voting. This move was a “step backwards” for minority parties, Wright said. They would find it much more difficult to get candidates elected, as irrespective of the voting method, the ward system favoured the major parties. “A division of the City into wards, each electing two, three, four or five aldermen, would ensure a safe Labor Party majority in the present period,” he said.³⁷ In April, government legislation authorised the city council to reinstate wards without having to take a poll of electors, which had previously been provided for in the Local Government Act.³⁸ Wright commented that the Labor Party had returned to a division of the city area into wards in order to strengthen its position at the expense of other parties. They were influenced by the fact that the city’s working-class population was being rapidly depleted because of the demolition of houses, which was bringing about a substantial increase in the relative voting strength of property owners and business people.³⁹

In December, the city council adopted the Lord Mayor’s motion dividing the city into four specified wards which would each elect five aldermen. Wright supported an unsuccessful amendment seeking the establishment of an impartial electoral commission to determine the wards and boundaries.⁴⁰ The division was officially gazetted in May 1959, seven months before the elections. Wright believed that the change was “designed to secure our exclusion.” It meant that to win election, a candidate would require a quota of 16.7% of the votes, instead of 4.8% as previously.⁴¹

The ALP ran 44 candidates in the 1959 elections, 11 in each of the

four wards, virtually ensuring them at least the first three positions from each ward. Lord Mayor Jensen said the move, “was designed to reduce informal votes and avoid Labor supporters having to give preferences to the Civic Reform Party, by giving them to a full team of ALP candidates.”⁴² This time, the three anti-Labor parties—Civic Reform, Liberal and DLP—had combined forces under the one Civic Reform label, in a concerted effort to break Labor’s control of the council. However, Labor greatly strengthened its position, finishing with 13 aldermen to 7, while Jensen resoundingly beat his nearest opponent for Lord Mayor, by 33,000 votes.⁴³ The five-member CPA team led by Tom Wright in Fitzroy ward polled 2030 votes (almost 10% of the total) and five candidates led by Ron Maxwell in Gipps ward polled almost 8%.⁴⁴

At the declaration of the Lord Mayoral poll, Jensen paid tribute to Tom Wright, saying he had “conducted himself in a way which won the admiration of all, including those who strongly oppose his policies.”⁴⁵ And a successful Labor candidate, Alderman T Foster, while expressing his opposition to communist policy, said that Wright was “probably one of the best aldermen this city has seen for a long time.”⁴⁶ Speaking at the declaration of the council poll, Wright said:

I do not regard my defeat as a setback for my party. The only reason I was defeated and the Communist Party deprived of its only representative on the council, was the change in the election system to wards.⁴⁷

He also said that although there will be no communist aldermen on the council in the next three years, “we are confident that the future is with us. We will be represented again very soon.”⁴⁸ It actually took 25 years for communists to get back on the Sydney City Council, although not as CPA representatives.

The experience of municipal elections in the 1950s illustrates the readiness of the major parties—in this case, the ALP—to manipulate the voting system, and the boundaries, to suit their own ends. Through the

1950s and early 1960s, the government acted to change the rules whenever necessary, to ensure Labor's control of the Sydney City Council. After the Askin Liberal government's victory in mid-1965, it did likewise, resulting in Labor's defeat and the election of Liberal majorities in other councils. Then, after 1976, the Wran Labor government again altered the city council boundaries to include more working-class voters and denied employers the right to vote.⁴⁹ All too often, it seems, power takes priority over principle and governments keep passing legislation until they get the desired result.

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Ben Bartlett

Origins of the Workers Health Centre

Ben Bartlett has worked as an Occupational and Public Health Physician and in general practice. He joined the CPA in 1974 and was involved with the Health Workers Collective in Sydney. He is currently working with Aboriginal communities in Central Australia on their health development strategies.

THE hazards of work have been a focus of concern for centuries, and significant reforms have invariably been implemented as a consequence of workers organisation and action. The 19th century shops and factories style of legislation that applied in Australia until the early 1980s reflected the main focus of concern at that time, which was injury and death, particularly in the mining, construction and manufacturing industries.

However, by the 1960s militant worker action over hazardous work conditions was often managed through the inclusion of safety money in awards and an over-reliance on protective equipment which was both cumbersome and uncomfortable to wear. The pressure for maintaining high levels of

production and profits commonly resulted in safety equipment (such as machine safety guards) not being used because they slowed production, resulting in increased management pressure on workers.

The industrial environment in Sydney in the 1970s included widespread use of migrant labour for menial repetitive work that led to many overuse injuries or RSI (repetitive strain injury). These largely women workers were often poorly represented by their unions, if they were unionised at all. In the more established enterprises (railway workshops, shipyards, breweries, etc) there were well established shop floor organisations of workers with shop committees that had some real, though limited, power in determining work practices, but which often had little access to information about hidden hazards such as asbestos. By the late 1970s, computerisation of many workplaces saw white-collar workers experiencing an epidemic of overuse injuries, which were poorly recognised or understood.

The 1960s and 70s was an exciting time politically. Political movements were active in many sectors, and particularly focused on the Vietnam war, Aboriginal rights, and women's rights. The CPA was a leading force in these movements, and played an important role in mobilising sections of the labour movement around these issues. It was a time when many people became politicised, and many students and intellectuals joined the CPA. The Whitlam Labor government was elected on this wave of mass activism in 1972 and introduced major reforms in the health sector including Medibank,¹ and the community health program. However, some community groups had already set the pace to a significant qualitative extent.

The Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service, and the many other Aboriginal medical services [AMSs] around the country which followed were not a product of government reform, but of government neglect.

¹ Medibank was a universal health insurance scheme, which was rolled back by the Fraser government (1975-83). Medibank was broadly similar to Medicare, which was introduced by the Hawke government in 1983.

Indeed Redfern began in 1971 without any government support, and without any universal health insurance system to assist it. These Aboriginal health services operated with volunteers, and the commitment of community members to make a difference. A few years later the Leichhardt and Liverpool women's health centres were established, again independently from government, but with some government funds. The Meat Workers Union, led by George Seelaf, had established a union clinic in Melbourne in the 1960s, funded through the workers compensation system. This became incorporated into the Footscray Community Health Centre.

In the mid-1970s a group of mainly hospital based workers—nurses, doctors, maintenance staff, etc—formed the Health Workers Collective that produced a newsletter called, imaginatively, *The Health Worker*. It analysed the changes occurring in the health care system, as well as the nature of ill health in a capitalist society. Inevitably the nature and extent of workplace hazards was recognised in this process. The collective consisted of people with a wide range of political views—communists, anarchists, ALP activists, etc. Also at this time the Health Branch of the CPA was formed. The majority of the membership of this branch also belonged to the Left Tendency of the CPA, which attempted a contemporary analysis of Australian capitalism and organised to influence the direction of the CPA.

It was in this political environment that a number of us held some initial meetings to discuss how workers health issues could be better addressed. Some of us were involved with clinical medicine one way or another, and had observed the injuries and disease experienced by our working class patients and the difficulty they had in gaining support and recompense. Many of our health system colleagues saw injured workers as malingerers, and many doctors refused to see workers compensation cases at all. The legal system was another cause of stress for workers, especially those who had English as a second language.

These early discussions led to the proposition that a workers health

centre be established where progressive health professionals could both assist individual injured workers, and work with workplace activists to assist them in reforming work practices, and to change the system that oppressed them. A number of key staff at the Liverpool Women's Health Centre were keen to pursue the idea and provided invaluable practical support and resources to the project.

So, what did we do? We spent a year popularising the idea and gaining support.

1. With the help of the Liverpool Women's Health Centre we produced a leaflet that analysed the exploitative nature of work, how profits were the driving force, and how the health of workers was sacrificed to this end. This was circulated as widely as possible in an endeavour to stimulate wider interest.
2. We approached the industrial organiser of the CPA for support, and specifically for a list of CPA members in workplaces who we could contact. This was met with some interest and it was suggested that we should have some further meetings with CPA union leaders. However, these meetings never eventuated. Thus the official CPA involvement and support was minimal. However, we did develop a list of CPA workplace activists through the more tedious (but maybe politically more effective) route of word of mouth. We asked comrades who they knew, and before long we had contacted people in a wide range of workplaces, especially those with active shop committees.
3. At the same time we began contacting trade unions soliciting their support. Not surprisingly, positive responses were largely confined to left unions. The wharfies, BWIU and other SPA² unions were somewhat suspicious and responded by establishing their own Trade Union Clinic in the city. Other unions provided us with small donations. Whilst the

² SPA: Socialist Party of Australia, a pro-Moscow communist party that split from the CPA in 1970. After the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1991, the SPA changed its own name to "Communist Party of Australia", which is how it is known in 2003.

material support was fairly small, it did enable us to make a start, and put us in good standing with those unions as they had been consulted about our intentions.

4. We developed relationships with ethnic community groups such as the FILEF³, the Turkish Workers League and South American groups.
5. We then found premises in Lidcombe that had been used as a plumbers shop, and judging by the amount of TV parts in the ceiling, had been a TV repair shop before that. So we started to do the place up. It was extremely encouraging to us that militants from Tooheys Brewery, Homebush Abattoirs and Chullora Railway Workshop donated their labour to get the place in order.
6. Whilst all this was being done we developed links with worker-oriented health groups in Britain, Canada and the United States. Ironically, we were also able to access US National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety publications free of charge. This enabled us to develop a fairly comprehensive library on a wide range of workplace hazards, codes of practice, etc.

We had opposition from the local council who attempted to stop us proceeding with the centre on some zoning ground, but Tom Uren⁴ used his good office to smooth those waters and the centre opened in February 1977. We initially saw anybody who was game enough to walk through the doors. We made it known that we bulk billed Medibank so it was not long before a delegation from the local GPs visited complaining that we were undermining their practices, and accused us of advertising.

The services offered included medical services, physiotherapy, counselling, interpreters, workplace inspection and hazards information

3 FILEF: Federazione Italiana Lavoratori e Loro Famiglie (Federation of Italian Labourers and their families), associated with the Italian Communist Party, which had a significant presence in Australia. FILEF activists could be found in both the Communist Party and the Australian Labor Party.

4 Uren was leader of the left in the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, and worked sympathetically with the Communist Party for many years.

service. The centre produced leaflets on a range of hazards in a number of languages. I believe that Liverpool Women's Health Centre and the Worker's Health Centre were the first in NSW, at least, to produce multi-lingual health information, a practice that is now common place.

One of the reasons for the success of the centre, I believe, was that we didn't set it up just as a clinic. From the beginning we allocated human and other resources to providing information to workers—the library was reputedly one of the most comprehensive occupational health and safety information resources in Australia—and more importantly to groups of workers in workplaces. Through these relationships we became heavily involved with many workplace health and safety issues such as:

- Asbestos exposure at the Barraba & Baryulgil Mines, Garden Island Naval Dockyards, power stations, railway workshops, and many other workplaces. We worked quite closely with the AMWU, FEDFA, BLF, Teachers Federation and other unions on these issues. We advocated changes to exposure limits, and developed draft regulations reflecting these. This resulted in new asbestos exposure regulations in NSW reducing permitted exposure 20 fold.
- A similar process was pursued in regard to industrial noise.
- Brucellosis and Q Fever in abattoir workers.
- Overuse injuries in all sorts of industries, but particularly in white collar workers such as the Tax Office staff, and amongst South American, Turkish, Lebanese, and other non English speaking process line workers.
- Hazards experienced by teachers including asbestos in schools, laboratory hazards and general stress.
- Exposure to chemicals. A major focus of the centre's work was on the slow, insidious and difficult to diagnose effects of chemicals. Alpha Chemicals was a specific case that attracted enormous publicity and added to growing political pressure on governments to reform the system.

We were particularly concerned with the dissemination of information. Thus the production of multi-lingual leaflets, the *Work Hazards* magazine, and our involvement with the Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) and particular trade union schools. The centre was involved in the development and delivery of the first national Trade Union Training School specifically on health and safety at the Clyde Cameron College in Albury-Wodonga in 1979.

We were seen by the occupational health and safety establishment as a threat. They accused us of scaring workers, and being irresponsible. I remember an occasion at the Chullora Railway Workshops. The shop committee had organised meetings of workers in all of the workshops to both promote the centre and to discuss relevant health and safety issues. At the same time I was being educated through an exposure to these places, and was a bit overawed at the extent of the operations, machinery and hazards. We had been through most of the workshops and discussed various issues with the workers there—I think we had two workshops to go—when the railway security realised what was going on, and banned me from the premises. So the final two meetings of workers from the remaining workshops took place outside the gate. A few weeks later, some of the Chullora workers came into the centre with a story about some Health Department staff turning up to Chullora to discuss the problems of substance abuse with people, and were kicked out by security who thought it was the Workers Health Centre back again.

We were a mixed bunch—communists, anarchists, feminists, ALP supporters, and other assorted riff raff. We worked as a collective each receiving the same rate of pay—initially \$2/hour supplemented by either other work or the dole. Whilst this proved unsustainable in the long run there is no doubt that when the collective style of work worked well, it was the most exhilarating and productive experience. When it didn't it was bloody awful.

The centre helped shape a workers' health movement which took on national significance. Worker's health organisations of one sort or

another developed in Brisbane, Newcastle, Wollongong, Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle. For a while there was even a national coalition formed. This movement was firmly located within the labour movement.

In NSW, the expose of mercury poisoning at Alpha Chemicals was the straw that broke the system's back. The Williams Inquiry was set up by the state government, and out of that came new state legislation replacing the old Shops and Factories Act. It was not long before all state and territory governments had embraced this new style of legislation. The Victorian legislation was the most progressive, as it not only allowed for the role of health and safety committees as being integral to an improved and participative system, it gave power to workers' delegates to stop work where danger was recognised. This, of course, was pre-Kennett.⁵

The Hawke government was elected in 1983. This was the time of the Accord.⁶ Workplace organisation generally was being contained in the interests of the *social wage*. The establishment of the tripartite National Occupational Health & Safety Commission, also known as Worksafe Australia, was part of the corporatisation of workers health. Worksafe offered some funding to the centre but this was conditional. The most important restriction was on the centre's involvement in worker education—that was to be the sole responsibility of the NSW Labor Council. A split developed in the centre between those who wanted to resist the limitations, remain independent and maintain a priority focus on the shop floor and those who wanted to see the centre grow, be more directed by trade union officials and become economically more secure. In the end funding was accepted, but was stopped after a few years, and the

4 Jeff Kennett was the Liberal premier of Victoria, 1992-1999. His government was viciously anti-union

5 The Prices and Incomes Accord was an agreement (eventually a series of agreements) between the Labor government and ACTU, by which the unions agreed to restrain wages and industrial action, and the Labor Party agreed to support inflation-linked wage rises, to introduce certain welfare measures and to give unions representation on various committees. Many now see the Accord as having undermined trade unionism.

centre had to charge fees for all activities except workers access to the library, provided they did their own research. In retrospect, it was inevitable that the centre would be unable to maintain its workplace links given the decline of workplace organisation anyway, but there is little doubt that some key players wanted the activities of the centre curtailed in order to remove a perceived threat to the Labor government.

Today the centre provides high quality medical and rehabilitation services to workers, and has a small capacity to inspect workplaces, but this must be self-funded. It should be noted that workplace health and safety remains a major issue in many industries, especially in regard to exposure to chemicals and injury. The corporatisation of workers health has not resulted in a decline in workplace injury and illness, although there are better codes of practice, regulations and guidelines. Without workers active involvement what happens in the workplace will fall short of these standards.

Analysis

I sometimes wonder at the emphasis we placed on information. David Suzuki tells two stories about his experience in presenting scientific information to the Canadian public through the medium of television. The first related generally to his ideas when first going into that business. He said that he was aware that TV was a cesspool, but thought that his shows, because they were well produced and researched, would stand out like gems. He has since realised that when you're in a cesspool you look like a turd, just like everybody else. His second story relates to being stopped in the street by someone who said, "I really enjoyed your show the other week on vaginal cancers." Suzuki pointed out that he had never done a show on that topic, and the stranger replied, "Oh, maybe it was Quincy." So in a world where we are so overwhelmed with information, people may well have difficulty deciphering what is useful information and what is not.

Further, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that people's knowledge changes behaviour only when people are fairly empowered already. The success of the slip, slap, sloop and the quit smoking campaigns relate to their impact on the middle and ruling classes.

There is strong evidence that the health status of people of lower socio-economic class remains poor, and that they tend not to respond to the mass media campaigns of the health promoters. Maybe what is more important than just information for these people, is a change in societal power relationships that can come through people working and organising together on their shared problems. Maybe the role of places like the Workers Health Centre is about forging relationships between those who have access to relevant information, and those whose lives are caught in the contradictions between asserting one's right to a healthy work environment, and the possibility of facing the sack for being a trouble maker. With the amazing capacity of computers these days, we can analyse data like never before. But without that relationship, of what use is it?

The role of the CPA

I have already outlined the role of the CPA in the development of the Workers Health Centre. The party was the key organisation in the setting up of the centre. It was the CPA networks that made the relationships that developed possible. This illustrates a difference between the party as an official organisation and the party as a network of militants and activists. It was this latter network that we were able to tap into.

There was also an ideological difference between some CPA members and those of us involved with the centre. We worked on the premise that power is the key factor in workers health and that if workers were not actively involved in control of their workplace and even their health services, then their exposure to hazards was unlikely to stop. At a CPA District Committee meeting where an attempt was made to formally

gain CPA support, a strong view was put by some comrades that it was the responsibility of the state to provide safe and healthy work environments, and to deliver appropriate health services. However, this view was not generally held by the workers who helped build and use the centre.

The informal CPA network that was so important to the centre's success persists even though the CPA as an organisation does not. Whether such networks can replicate themselves without some formal organisation remains to be seen. It should also be noted that the CPA played a pivotal role generally in training cadres through party schools.

Drew Cottle

Forgotten foreign militants: The Chinese Seamen's Union in Australia, 1942-1946

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This chapter is dedicated to a wise teacher, Arthur Garlock Chang and was previously published in *work, organisation, struggle: Papers from the 2001 Labour History Conference*.

JAPAN'S victories throughout South East Asia in the first months of the Pacific War stranded nearly 2,000 Chinese seamen, along with hundreds of refugees from British Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies and other European colonies, in the port cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

The Chinese seafarers were crew members of British, Dutch and French cargo and passenger vessels which had found sanctuary in Australia from the Japanese military advance.¹ Most of the seamen came from China's southern provinces while others were from Singapore or different Indonesian ports. Many of the Cantonese went to sea to repay family debts owed to local landlords. Their system of employment through labour

contractors ensured that the bulk of their pay was sent to their family as an allotment after they had completed their period of service. A portion of their pay was spent on provisions provided by the shipping companies. The provisions were often inadequate and of poor quality. The remainder of their pay was spent on gambling or smoking opium aboard ship which was unofficially encouraged. Often the poorest of seafarers, the Chinese had exchanged one form of servitude for another.²

Apart from the officer class, the Chinese represented every naval occupation. The better educated were engineers, wireless operators and quartermasters. The majority worked as able seamen, stokers, firemen, donkeymen, greasers, carpenters, cooks and kitchen hands.³ Whatever their work the shipping companies instituted pay scales based on race. The Chinese competed with other Asian seamen for work and were paid considerably less than British, European and Australian seamen. The wages, working and living conditions of Asian seamen aboard passenger liners and cargo steamers not only upheld an indictment of the race theories of the shipping companies but, as importantly, secured considerable profits.⁴

Chinese mariners who worked on foreign ships were nominal members of the Chinese Seamen's Union (CSU). Founded in 1913, the CSU had been in the forefront of the nationalist struggle led by Dr Sun Yat Sen. It engaged in lengthy and successful strikes for better pay and conditions against foreign shipping companies involved in the China trade from 1917 to 1925. After the liquidation of many Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members from the Kuomintang (KMT) instigated by Chiang Kai Shek, militants in the CSU were also purged. Its leaders were KMT appointed officials without seafaring experience who worked closely with the foreign shipping companies in securing crews and maintaining labour discipline through the deployment of armed gangs.⁵ The CSU and all other Chinese unions made up the KMT's labour front. They were legally denied the right to strike by a KMT diktat issued on 5 October, 1932. As Japan's invasion of China accelerated the KMT's military forces retreated.

By early 1938 every port on the China coast, with the exception of Hong Kong, was under Japanese control. When war broke out in Europe in 1939 the KMT's seat of government had moved hundreds of miles inland to Chungking on the upper Yangtze to avoid capture and destruction by Japan. From its rural fastness, the KMT continued to claim authority over the working lives of the 37,667 members of the CSU as Japan consolidated its hold over China.⁶

Chinese seamen had no defensive organisation nor any industrial representation. They were at the mercy of foreign shipping companies, labour contractors, press gangs and a Nationalist government unable and unwilling to wage war against the Japanese invaders or to defend the Chinese people. Despite China's subjugation and their own material conditions the Chinese seamen were keen to struggle to end the oppression of both. Their youth (most were in their twenties) gave their conviction the possibility of fulfilment. War gave them the opportunity to be both patriots and trade unionists.

After their attack on Pearl Harbor the Japanese swept through colonial Southeast Asia wreaking havoc on European and American shipping in the region. Chinese crews manning these ships were beyond the repressive authority of the Nationalist government isolated in Chungking. In this fraught situation the opportunity to build a militant trade union for Chinese seamen free of the KMT labour front presented itself.

When more than 20 vessels of the Hong Kong, Butterworth Swire Yuill, the US Blue Funnel and Dutch shipping companies sought refuge from Japanese attack and seizure in Australia between December 1941 and February 1942 they were manned by Chinese seamen numbering nearly 2,000. The ships were commandeered by the Australian government to form a transport fleet to carry troops and supplies to war zones. The Chinese crews were in a quandary. Their contracts had been terminated.⁷ They were owed months in wages, their families would receive no allotments and they were stateless aliens without rights or

representation.

At Fremantle in January 1942, 500 Chinese seamen refused to work commandeered vessels. The Chinese mariners demanded their wages owed and would not return to sea at the existing low pay and bad working and living conditions in situations where their lives were at risk. Military guards attempted to herd them aboard the ships. Two unnamed seamen were killed in the confrontation.⁸ The dispute was resolved when the Western Australian Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) Branch Secretary, Joe Byrne, convinced the seamen to enlist in the Australian army. They formed the Seventh Labour Corps. Because of labour shortages they loaded ships with provisions and ammunition at Fremantle or were sent to Harvey, south of Perth, to grow food for the army.⁹

At Sydney Port where most of the commandeered vessels were berthed and where the largest number of Chinese seamen were concentrated, a more lasting solution to the problems of the seamen was achieved. After sit-down strikes by the Chinese crews of six ships ended in their arrest and gaoling, the leaders of the Chinese seamen, EV Elliott, federal secretary, and Barney Smith, Sydney branch secretary of the SUA, held an emergency meeting to resolve the issue.¹⁰ On the 22 January, 1942 in the rooms of the Chinese Youth League at 66 Dixon Street, Haymarket, 300 Chinese seamen established the Australian branch of the CSU and elected their union representatives with Elliott and Smith in attendance.¹¹

The president, secretary and treasurer of the branch, Fred Wong, William Jong and Stanley Wei were Chinese but not seamen. Wong, a retail greengrocer with Wei and Jong were the student sons of prominent Sydney Chinese merchant families and were the founders of the Chinese Youth League (CYL). Their relative economic independence, connections with Sydney's small Chinese community and amongst militant trade union leaders at Trades Hall and their acceptance by the Sydney KMT executive and the Chinese Consulate allowed these young men to organise effectively with the guidance of the SUA, Waterside Workers Federation

(WWF) and Communist Party of Australia (CPA) officials.¹²

The formal objectives of the Australian branch of the CSU were:

- (a) to support the interests of Chinese seamen in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas;
- (b) to distribute news from China;
- (c) to raise the standard of living and improve the conditions of Chinese sailors;
- (d) to open a reading room and supply sailors with literature;
- (e) to give such instruction and information to Chinese sailors as to enable them to prosecute the war against Japan and assist China in peaceful reconstruction.¹³

The founding of the union was based on a series of contradictions. All Chinese seamen were, by KMT decree, members of its union. Yet the most influential of the union's leaders in Australia were not seamen. Chungking did not recognise the CSU's Australian section until March 1943. It is unknown why the KMT waited over a year before recognition was given to the CSU in Australia. KMT Consular officials in Australia informally accepted the union believing it would save them, "a great deal of unnecessary work and facilitate matters relating to Chinese seamen in Australia."¹⁴ The CSU in Australia had no legal status as a registered union within the Arbitration system.

From the CSU's inception, Australian intelligence services questioned the legal existence of the union because of its ideological embrace of communism and its industrial militancy. It was believed that the union allowed Chinese crews to take advantage of the situation to "(a) obtain in Australia a haven of safety from the risks attendant on service at sea in wartime; (b) obtain comparatively easy and satisfactorily remunerative employment in Australia and (c) secure better conditions of service at sea."

For Australian intelligence such CSU objectives were tantamount to

subversion.¹⁵ Nevertheless, through its SUA guardianship the CSU was able to organise and wage successful industrial campaigns. While the Sydney KMT tacitly supported the formation of an Australian CSU branch, most Chinese seamen were sympathetic to the aims and record of the Chinese Communist Party and several of the union's activist leaders were both CCP and CPA members.¹⁶

From the early 1930s the CPA and different branches of the maritime unions opposed the Japanese invasion of China. In 1937 the Chinese crew deserted the British steamer, SS Silksworth, at anchor in Newcastle, in protest against the Japanese seizure of all major seaports in China. Communist and labour activists in the maritime and other unions gave sanctuary to the Chinese seamen. After their successful protest they returned to the ship only when they were promised disembarkation at Singapore.¹⁷ During the Port Kembla Pig Iron dispute Chinese seamen ashore in Sydney held a meeting and declared they would not return to their ship if the pig iron was loaded. The Chinese crew of the SS Nellore collected money for the striking wharfies. Fred Wong with other members of the Chinese Youth League organised the collection and distribution of truckloads of vegetables and fruit from Chinese market gardeners to the families of striking wharf labourers.¹⁸ Bonds of solidarity between Australian and Chinese workers, however tenuous, were forged in these struggles. In early 1942, when the stranded Chinese seamen resisted the attempts of the shipowners and the Australian government to force them into service, militant Australian trade union leaders and Communists came to their assistance.

The support the SUA offered the CSU was, nevertheless, fortuitous. In the aftermath of the 1936 Seamen's Strike the SUA was left "virtually leaderless and in confusion". Its members worked side-by-side with "licensed" non-unionists. The outbreak of war ended the "licensing" of seamen and by 1940 the shipping industry was under wartime control.¹⁹ Such a change in fortune allowed Elliott V. Elliott, the youngest SUA general secretary, to organise the seamen's union ship-by-ship. Elliott's

building of a militant rank-and-file base within the union coincided with the growing Commonwealth control of wartime shipping. Within the merchant service increasing numbers of seamen were killed or wounded because of Japanese torpedo attacks and mines in Australian waters. Crew shortages mounted, as did the numbers of ships commandeered. Fear of Japanese supremacy at sea compelled the Curtin Labor government to act decisively to the shipping crisis by establishing the Maritime Industry Commission (MIC). Its objective was “to secure during the present war the adequate and efficient manning of Australian merchant ships and the improvement and safeguarding of the conditions of all persons serving therein.” The MIC’s powers overrode existing industrial laws and statutes of the Commonwealth and State governments and “any award or determination of any industrial tribunal.” Its authority embraced all facets of maritime industrial relations. Ship owners were apprehensive about the MIC’s industrial and administrative control although they acceded to the government’s authority. Under the MIC, ship owners managed the ships which were under Federal “charter” and the maritime unions organised the supply of skilled labour.²¹

It was in the context of wartime necessity that Elliott and other leaders of the SUA and WWF fostered the development of the Chinese Seamen’s Union and, in the immediate post-war years, other Asian seamen’s unions.²² The skills of the Chinese crews were needed to work the commandeered merchant service. Because of maritime labour shortages the MIC accepted the creation of an Australian branch of the CSU for the war’s duration. Formally allied with the SUA the CSU rank and file campaigned vigorously on each ship to improve working and living conditions, for a standard 44-hour week, equal pay with SUA members and a war bonus. Each of these demands found expression in the MIC charter. In January, 1944 the 44 hour week, pay rises of 80 per cent equivalent to the SUA and a war bonus were granted to CSU members.²³ Elliott, Barney Smith and Bill Bird, the SUA officials who worked closely with the CSU officials in Sydney and Melbourne ports,

never attempted to control the CSU's activities. At the executive level, Australian maritime unions were committed to international working class solidarity. They offered support and guidance to the CSU whose leaders organised the skill and collective strength of rank and file seamen.²⁴

Aboard ship Chinese and Australian seamen did not work side by side. Chinese or Australian crews worked on separate ships. Such workplace separation allowed both the SUA and the CSU to commit themselves to united campaigns. The integration of Chinese and Australian seamen at work on the same ship was never considered by either union. In this way, the apparent harmony and unity of both unions was maintained. SUA literature made few references to the existence of the CSU and its activities. The SUA and CSU leaders believed that racial separation of their members was the only way their unions could operate effectively.

While the KMT government in early 1942 offered de facto recognition of the Australian CSU and the MIC allowed the union to function under its legal and industrial authority, the British-China Agreement of May, 1942 bolstered the CSU's legitimacy within Australia. It was a trade union breakthrough and a temporary blow to the racial division of labour aboard British ships. Uniformity of treatment and pay for British and Chinese seamen manning British ships was the essence of the Agreement despite the opposition of British ship owners.²⁵ The MIC's devolution of the supply of ship labour to the SUA created difficulties for the SUA in its relations with the relatively autonomous CSU. Because of the low wages and poor working and living conditions aboard foreign vessels, the Chinese seamen on arrival in an Australian port often refused to return to sea. In Sydney and Melbourne ports entire Chinese crews deserted. Australian security services believed their desertion was encouraged and assisted by the CSU and Communist Party organisers.²⁶

Once the Chinese seamen entered the Chinatowns of Sydney and Melbourne it seemed that only Stanley Wei or Harry Poon, the CSU officials, could locate them. The seamen found friendship, food, lodgings,

work and news from China through the offices of both the Chinese Youth League and the CSU. The union leadership campaigned against opium and gambling. Their effects on Chinese seamen were debilitating. In June 1944 Stanley Wei and a group of seamen armed with revolvers visited the Haymarket's Fan Tan clubs where shots were fired into the ceilings. Wei threatened the club owners with retribution if they continued to encourage seamen to lose their pay gambling. The clubs barred seamen from their premises.²⁷

Arthur Gar-Lock Chang left indentured labour to a Chinese shopkeeper in Tingha, NSW and travelled to Sydney in March, 1942 where he worked briefly for his relatives in a fruitshop then on the assembly line at Goodyear Tyres in Granville. Living in inner Sydney he joined the Chinese Youth League where he was drawn into its social activities and political discussions. Because of his patriotism and a fluency in English and Chinese, Chang was appointed assistant secretary of CSU's Sydney branch. Chang with Louis Wong, the CSU's NSW branch secretary from 1943, helped seamen find accommodation, obtain tax clearances, negotiate contracts, undertake medical checks and organise ship's crews.²⁸ Although nominally a maritime union the CSU acted as a labour supply organisation recognised by the MIC and bound by Manpower Directorate regulations. It maintained registers on all Chinese seamen in Australia, their occupations, their work contracts with various ships and their non-maritime work record. Many seamen never wanted to return to the wartime dangers at sea. They became labourers or market gardeners or married Australian women. In spite of these difficulties the CSU was able to crew ships and wage on-the-job struggles to improve the working lives of its members.²⁹

Records of the CSU's day-to-day activities are scant. Arthur Gar-Lock Chang holds several of the Sydney branch registers written in Chinese.³⁰ The Commonwealth account of the union is devoted to surveillance of its leading communist members. As one of the union's welfare officers, Chang observed the conditions under which his

compatriots worked aboard ship. In an interview Chang recalled the hardship and fear of death the Chinese seamen experienced. Many of them hoped to return to China after the war. Chang was one of the few union members who remained in Australia despite efforts by the Federal Labor government to deport him when the war ended. After nearly 50 years Chang is probably the only surviving CSU member in Australia who is able to describe the union's achievements.³¹ If too little is known about the workplace culture and the material lives of Chinese seamen other aspects of their union can be examined.

In walking distance of the wharves and the Darling Harbour Goods Yard the cultural setting of Chinatown in the Haymarket allowed the Chinese seamen to connect with the Chinese community and a wider Australian public.³² The CYL rooms became a meeting place for the seamen. Fred Wong, the retail greengrocer, president of both the CYL and the CSU, was the unofficial banker for the union. As stateless aliens and distrustful of banks the seamen kept their money in Wong's safe. He gained their trust by his commitment to their livelihood and by his honesty. Respected by the KMT grandees of the merchant class and popular with Chinatown's laundrymen, market gardeners, café owners, barbers and barrowmen, Wong was the chief organiser of Chinese opera performances hosted by the CYL and the CSU. The staging of Cantonese and Hainanese operas raised funds for Victory Loans and the resistance forces, war widows and orphans in China.³³

Many of the Chinese seamen who were accomplished musicians, singers and actors performed in the CYL-CSU operas. Their aim was twofold. The operas helped to unite the Chinese community in the war against Japan by raising funds for popular causes and they gave the seamen a sense of place and purpose in wartime Sydney. The CYL's political position on China and Australia drew a number of the seamen into the separate Chinese branches of the Communist Party in Sydney and Melbourne. Although the Party from its beginnings condemned the racism as a weapon of the capitalist class it maintained a form of racial

separatism in its branches. Where non-Anglo-Celtic workers were numerically dominant the Party established separate branches for them. In the 1930s and 1940s the Party had Greek, Yugoslav and Chinese branches. Several of these seamen returned to southern China to join communist-led guerilla forces in the civil war against the KMT. After the war Stanley Wei and William Jong travelled to Hong Kong and organised the Hong Kong Seamen's Union into a militant left-wing body.³⁴

By June 1943, the CSU had established branches in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The majority of its members were based in Sydney. During the war the CSU's radicalism gave the small Chinese community in Sydney optimism and confidence even if the union was only tolerated by the large merchants loyal to the KMT. As the sea lanes beyond Australia remained open to Japanese attack the manning of ships became unpredictable. The CSU found work for its members in factories, cafes, hotels or market gardens when the MIC did not require their labour. In April, 1943 the CSU organised 300 seamen to work as labourers in the construction of the Warragamba Dam, 80 kilometres southwest of Sydney. Following Manpower Directive instructions the CSU at Warragamba formed an autonomous work brigade for which William Jong acted as interpreter, adviser and secretary.³⁵ In July 1943 the entire membership of the CSU in Melbourne was transferred to a United States Army camp at Balimba on the Brisbane River. With the 200 CSU Brisbane members the seamen from Melbourne formed the "Chinese Camp". Their labour built landing barges for the United States invasion of the Philippines.³⁶

As the Japanese threat receded after the Battle of Guadalcanal, the commandeered ships of Australia's merchant service traversed the sea lanes more freely. Although fewer Chinese crews worked these ships, Chinese seamen were awarded wages to 80 per cent of SUA wages and war bonuses in December 1944, through the National Security (Chinese Seamen) Regulations.³⁷ These financial improvements were established after the Federal Attorney General, Dr. HV Evatt, ordered an inquiry into

the working and living conditions of Chinese seamen aboard ship. The inquiry found that Chinese seamen were ill-treated, assaulted by ship's officers, lacked rudimentary medical care, worked long, unscheduled hours and lived in conditions "designed for native crews". While ship owners resisted improving working and living conditions because of both the expense and the urgency to carry cargo during the war, they conceded to the demands for wage increases and bonuses and, where possible, a standard 44 hour week.³⁸

The exigencies of war had brought the CSU into existence. By the end of the war, organisation gave the Chinese seamen the strength to improve some of their conditions of work and the means to express their anti-imperialist resolve. The Japanese occupation of China and its seizure of the European colonial empires in Southeast Asia presented new possibilities for struggle for Chinese seamen in Australia. These possibilities ended with the Allied victory in the Pacific. As the MIC was dismantled the old conditions of work and racial division were reimposed aboard European and American ships. The conditions the CSU had secured in the war were lost. The CSU as a union was losing its meaning as hundreds of its members sought to return to China on the verge of civil war.

The final mobilisation of the disintegrating CSU was for the cause of Indonesian independence from Dutch imperialism. Shipping in the immediate post-war years was in chaos as Holland sought to re-establish its control of the Indonesian archipelago. When the Indonesian independence movement called upon the Australian labour movement for its support in resisting the return of Dutch colonial rule, Chinese and Indonesian seamen walked off Dutch chartered ships and Australian maritime unions declared Dutch ships black. Chinese seamen spearheaded demonstrations against the Dutch in Australia. When the Dutch authorities cast 60 Indonesian patients out of its Turrumurra TB clinic, Chinese seamen gave them food and beds in their union offices. As the boycott of Dutch shipping deepened the Chifley Labor government

attempted to deport Chinese seamen because of their militancy.³⁹ The CSU gave enormous financial support to the boycott's fighting fund. The CSU and the CYL raised most of the funds for the film, *Indonesia Calling*, a re-enactment of the boycott, directed by the Dutch anti-imperialist, Joris Ivens.⁴⁰ The Chinese seamen's refusal to man the Dutch ships inspired the refusal of Indian seamen transhipped by Britain to break the boycott. After the first boycott against Dutch shipping was broken in July, 1946 most Chinese seamen returned to a country about to sweep away the old order.

The work and achievements of the Chinese seamen is a forgotten episode in Australia labour history. Stranded at various Australian ports because of the lightning victories of Japan in the early months of the Pacific War, Chinese seafarers took a stand. They refused to work under the conditions which had obtained on foreign owned vessels and in the added dangers of war. They opposed Japanese militarism but they equally opposed their continued exploitation because of wartime necessity. The war offered them the rare opportunity to establish a militant union free of KMT coercion. After their mass refusal in early 1942 to return to work on foreign ships docked in Australian ports, SUA and WWF officials assisted the Chinese seamen to found an Australian branch of the Chinese seamen's union in Sydney's Chinatown.

The location of Chinatown to Sydney's wharves was of crucial cultural, social, economic and political significance to the CSU. It proved less so in Melbourne and Brisbane. Sydney's Chinatown was a haven for the Chinese seafarers. Individually, they rarely ventured far from it. For it was in Chinatown they could find lodgings, food, friendship and speak in their native tongue. Through their cultural performances with the CYL they kept alive in Sydney's Chinese community the need to oust the Japanese invaders from China and became part of that community temporarily. Nevertheless, they were separated from the class relations of Sydney's white social order by their confinement in Chinatown.

Chinese who were not seamen and who had strong links to the

WWF, the SUA and the CPA organised their union's affairs and maintained the CSU's members' sense of separation if not isolation. Chinese and Australian crews worked on separate ships. Never was there an attempt at integration. Perhaps the barriers of race and culture were too high for the CSU or SUA to surmount. The temporary residence of the Chinese seamen allowed their leaders and the Australian authorities to deploy their labour power on ships, dam construction and boat building collectively and separately during the war. In the immediate postwar period the CSU members rallied to the cause of Indonesian independence just as their labour power was no longer needed to work ships. When the first boycott against the Dutch ended in July 1946 workless Chinese seamen left Australia for a China in revolutionary change.

The Chinese Seamen's Union never threatened the Great White Walls of prejudice in Australia least of all amongst their Australian counterparts. Their proletarian patriotism ensured that they assisted the Australian war effort on terms acceptable to them as union members. The wartime unity the CSU forged with the SUA was always temporary and based on racial separation at the workplace. If their presence in Australia is forgotten, how they are to be remembered may prove equally vexatious to an Australian labour movement noted for its racial exclusionism.

References

- 1 Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union in Australia, Part 1, Series A 6122/47, Item 1849, National Archives of Australia and Brian Fitzpatrick and Rowan J. Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia, 1872-1972: A History*, Seamen's Union of Australia, Sydney, 1981, p.178.
- 2 Nym Wales, *The Chinese Labor Movement*, John Day, New York, 1945, pp.202-207. Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 9 December, 2000. Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 3, Series A 6122/47, Item 1848.

- 3 Lists of occupations with Chinese and European pay rates are found in *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union... Part 3*.
- 4 Lauri Talibi, *Keeping the Natives Under Control: Race Segregation and the Domestic Tensions of Empire, 1920-1939*, *International Labor and Working Class History*, No.44, Fall, 1993, p.64. Although Talibi's analysis is of British shipping companies' policies towards black seafarers working in the Atlantic trade, her general argument, with modification, could apply to Chinese seamen working on European ships during the interwar period. Further primary research is needed in this area.
- 5 Wales, *Chinese Labor*, pp.202-205.
- 6 Wales, *Chinese Labor*, p.206.
- 7 *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 1*.
- 8 Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *Seamen's Union*, p.178. There is no mention of the "fatal results to two Chinese seamen in the unfortunate incident at Freemantle" in the Fitzpatrick and Cahill study. For evidence see *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 3*. The names of the Chinese seamen killed by Australian soldiers are not cited in this file.
- 9 "Arthur Gar-Lock Chang" in Morag Loh and Judith Wintenz (eds.) *Dinki-Di: The Contributions of Chinese Immigrants and Australians of Chinese Descent to Australia's defence forces and war efforts, 1899-1988*, AGPS Press Publication, Canberra, 1989, pp.107-110. The military solution for the Chinese seamen is mentioned in *Fitzpatrick and Cahill, Seamen's Union*, p.178.
- 10 *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 1*.
- 11 *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 3*
- 12 The author offers a biographical sketch of Fred Wong in *The Hummer*, Vol.3, No.4, Winter, 2000, pp.1-13. William Jong (Ngok Bew Jong) and Stanley Wei (Bo Tac Wei) were born in Canton. They held Certificates of Exemption arranged by their merchant fathers in Sydney which allowed them to travel to China and freely return to Australia. Wei who was born in 1912 was the "Chief Organiser" and general secretary of the union. He had worked as a teacher and journalist in Canton during the 1930s. Jong, born in 1917, received a classical education in China and attended high school in Sydney. From 1938 he had worked as a compositor on the *Chinese Times*, the KMT's Sydney newspaper. Wong, Wei and Jong were considered by Australian intelligence to be "well educated, speakers of good English, familiar with Australian law, influential amongst the Chinese and active communists". See *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 4*.
- 13 A copy of the union's rules and objectives translated from the Chinese are found in *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 3*.
- 14 *Employee Organisations: Chinese Seamen's Union...Part 4*.

- 15 China—National Security Regulations, Chinese Seamen, Series A 1838, Item 494/5/1/1, National Archives of Australia.
- 16 Australian intelligence believed that Stanley Wei, Harry Poon and William Jong were both CPA and CCP members. See Bo Tac Wei aka Stanley Wei, Series A 6119, Item 409, National Archives of Australia.
- 17 Sino-Japanese dispute—Chinese view of SS Silksworth, Series A 1606, D 41/1/1, National Archives of Australia and Vic Bird, SS Silksworth Dispute of 1937: A Memoir, Melbourne May Day Committee, 1991.
- 18 Rupert Lockwood, *War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig-Iron Dispute*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1987, p.207. Fred Wong's efforts are cited in *The Hummer*, Vol.3, No.4, Winter, 2000, pp.5-6.
- 19 Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *Seamen's Union*, pp.115-135.
- 21 Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *Seamen's Union*, pp.136-139.
- 22 Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia and the struggle for Indonesian independence, 1942-49*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, pp.168-171.
- 23 China—National Security Regulations—Chinese Seamen, Series A 1838, Item 494/5/1/1, National Archives of Australia and E.V. Elliott, *Merchant Seamen in the War*, Worker Print, Sydney, 1944, p.16.
- 24 Australian intelligence saw the “leading Communists”, William Bird, Barney Smith and J.B. Miles as “instructors” of the “communist leaders” of the CSU. See Chinese/Bew WJN (William Jong), Series SP 11/2, Item 3540754, National Archives of Australia.
- 25 A copy of the Agreement is located in Chinese Seamen's Union, Seamen's Union of Australia, E 183/26/38, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, The Australian National University.
- 26 China—National Security Regulations—Chinese Seamen, Series A 1838, Item 494/5/1/1.
- 27 Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 9 December, 2000. Stanley Wei's political influence over the Chinese seamen in Sydney is assessed by Australian intelligence and its informers in Po Tac Wei aka Stanley Wei, Series A 6119, Item 409.
- 28 Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 6 September, 1999. The intelligence profile of Chang in this period is found in Arthur Locke, Series A 6119/5, Item 410, National Archives of Australia.
- 29 China—National Security Regulations—Chinese Seamen, Series A 1838, Item 494/5/1/1.
- 30 The registers were shown to the author at a Chinese restaurant in the Haymarket, 19 May, 2000.

- 31 Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 17 July, 2000.
- 32 An imaginative exploration of the social meaning of a similar cultural setting of Chinatown is offered in Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco 1850-1943*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1999. Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, State Library of NSW Press, Sydney, 1997, examines some of the Chen themes in her study of Sydney's Chinese community.
- 33 Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 5 October, 1999. See also Fifty-Five Years of the Chinese Youth League, *The Chinese Herald*, 19 September, 1994. (Translated by Too Pang Fan) Dr Shirley Fitzgerald gave this reference to the author.
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- 37 The Regulations are located in China—National Security Regulations—Chinese Seamen, Series A 1838, Item 494/5/1/1.
- 38 Extracts from the inquiry are found in Stanley Wei's security file. See Po Tac Wei aka Stanley Wei, Series A 6119, Item 409.
- 39 Lockwood, *Black Armada*, pp.125-134 and pp.168-171.
- 40 Interview with Arthur Gar-Lock Chang, Forestville, NSW, 10 December, 2000.