

UNITED



By Peter McMahon

UNITED

A History of the Federated Municipal and Shire
Council Employees Union of Australia,
New South Wales Division

Peter McMahon



Union's Emblem for 50 Years

UNITED

A History of the
New South Wales Division
of the
Federated Municipal and Shire
Council Employees Union of Australia

OVER

100 Years

1903 to 2003

By The Honourable Peter McMahon, AM



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Sydney

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Foreword

As our great Union has reached its centenary year, it is with pride that we can record the achievements and the battles of the past one hundred years. The achievements on behalf of members have been outstanding, setting standards not only with our own industries but within the trade union movement generally.

We have been the leaders in a number of campaigns bettering the conditions of workers throughout the decades, while achieving shorter working hours, leave entitlements and, just recently, paid maternity leave.

Right from the very beginning, the leadership of the Union has ensured that the interests of members came first. The many officials, staff, and, most importantly, delegates that have served the Union during the last one hundred years are too numerous to list, but each and every one of them will no doubt be able to relate their part in many of the exploits detailed within this book, and it is enough to say that their efforts and dedication have made our great Union what it is today.

I wish to pay tribute to The Honourable Peter McMahon AM, a former General Secretary of the Union, for compiling this history, a task which took considerable time and effort. Peter has an appreciation of the people and issues that formed the nucleus of this publication, so that his ability to capture the most significant moments was essential in the editorial processes.

The MEU grew in stature because of its ability to respond to the needs of members through its development of delegate structures, regional branches and the strategic location of country offices and officials. These initiatives, coupled with a will to confront politically both our allies and the conservatives, has ensured that we are at the forefront of the trade union movement.

Reaching our century brings an era to an end. The year 2003 will see the birth of a new amalgamated union trading as the United Services Union (USU). The merger between the Federated Municipal & Shire Council Employees' Union (MEU) and the Federated Clerks' Union (FCU) will see the formation of the USU and hopefully I, as its first elected General Secretary, can lay the same solid foundations to ensure its future as did Jim Tyrrell and those Sydney City Council workers in 1903.

Brian Harris

Introduction and Acknowledgments

This history provides an insight into the development and achievements of an industry-based union in New South Wales which has unique characteristics as compared to unions organised on trade or specialised professional lines. At the time the Union commenced in 1903, NSW was gradually recovering from the great depression of the 1890s, which did not make it easy to become established nor achieve its first Award.

While over the years the Union developed extensive membership coverage of employees in wages, salaried and professional classifications, its members worked for many different employers throughout NSW. In 1922 alone, there were 320 local government authorities. Council employees' coverage and membership extended to abattoirs, water supply, sewage and waste management bodies, planning organisations, noxious weed authorities, farm produce market organisations, cemetery trusts, electricity distribution, transmission and generating authorities and others.

The MEU developed a wide coverage, ranging from block boys and labourers through to general managers and chief engineers. It established itself as the principal Union in local government and the electricity industry, which was an industry that expanded from its original local government roots. Not only did the Union cater for the multitude of classifications of members, but also had to deal with over 600 separate and distinct employers whose numbers of employees ranged from three to over four thousand. This was a truly unique and industry-wide Union. The list of classifications is so great that it is impossible to note them all, but to give some idea of the diversity of classification covered, they have ranged from labourers to general managers, carters to cashiers, garbage employees to professional staff including architects, truck drivers to salaried and administrative staff, beach and pool staff to building surveyors, ordinance and other inspectors to planning officers, engine drivers to engineers, and a wide range of supervisory staff covered in the multitude of classifications embraced over the years in thousands of awards and agreements.

The Union's growth and expansion in its formative years was outstanding, and the objective of continually seeking to cover members transferred to newly created employing authorities, as well as to obtain Award coverage for new classifications brought about by mechanisation, computerisation and technological advances, or changes in community needs, did not diminish over the years. The Union's constitutional mandate has provided wide coverage, of which the Union has taken full advantage.

In researching for this book one finds new faith in the strength and endeavours of many of those who have been associated with the Union over the years, because it is apparent that through their vitality, energy and resourcefulness the Union achieved so much in numerical strength, coverage and leadership. The Union has been active in both industrial and political spheres of influence, which resulted in many improvements to conditions pertaining directly to employment and far beyond to social and national issues.

The Union consistently supported the retention and extension of the NSW conciliation and arbitration systems, which brought benefits to members. This was explained in the General Secretary's Report, adopted at the 1929 Annual Conference, which stated:

I am strongly of the opinion that unless this system of arbitration is maintained, and such a system being capable of giving to the workers of the State their just due, this State will continuously be involved in industrial turmoil, and we cannot expect to hold the reputation that we now enjoy, that is, that we have never been forced to adopt any other way in settlement of our troubles than by legalised methods.

That policy was reiterated at many Annual Conferences before and after 1929 and, with few exceptions, members' claims were supported. However, the Union often sought to restrict strike activity or prolonged industrial bans, so that issues could be processed by conciliation, negotiation or arbitration through appropriate industrial tribunals.

While it may be considered moderate in an industrial sense, the Union was recognised as militant when there was need for major industrial action to pursue members' claims, grievances, or other major objectives including seeking legislative changes from Governments. Many employment conditions operative in 2003 may be taken for granted, but, as is detailed, it has only been by past Union activity that they were achieved from what were very poor conditions, particularly at the start of and during the early part of the Twentieth Century.

Politically, the Union's policy in the early years was to the moderate left and centre, and in later years to the centre or centre right (see Chapter 5). Political policy has generally been to maintain solidarity with the ruling ALP body, seeing splinter groups to the extreme right or left as destabilising, and destroying the support necessary to maintain or achieve Labor in Government. Nevertheless, at times the Union has been at odds with those controlling the party machine.

In compiling one hundred years of history, one must be selective. The Union has been involved in several million disputes over this period, some singular issues and some collective, some solved by correspondence and/or by negotiation, others involving major and lengthy strikes or workplace industrial bans. While even the minor ones were of major importance to individuals at the time, it is not possible to detail all disputes, but rather use examples knowing how they fitted into the culture and community standards at the time. Issues ranged from fodder allowance and annual leave for horses, improving camping facilities, to appointment of senior managerial staff, and fixation of wages and salaries for staff and executive officers. Many of these movements at different times involved up to thirty thousand members. There are many issues that could be expanded, not least of which are the Union's activities in the massive structural changes occurring in local government, with their impact on membership numbers, towards the end of the Twentieth Century, gradually recovering in the new century.


The Union has been through turbulent periods economically and politically – the Great Depression of the 1930s, two World Wars and periods of recession – while the membership has had to adapt to many changes in the way wages were determined and Awards and Agreements structured. Also, from time to time, there have been fluctuations in financing for local government, legislative changes affecting employment, and, in later years, management changes, including corporatisation of various employing bodies. Despite changes, membership expanded in the early years but began to decline from 1928 and did not recover to the previous levels for twenty years. It then continued to grow over

the ensuing years until the 1990s, when new industrial laws and restructuring or downsizing by employers resulted in another diminution of electricity industry. However, to trace all those factors would require a separate study.

This book attempts, in an even handed way, to trace the Union's achievements over one hundred years, attempting to make it concise and readable rather than providing lengthy discourses on the finer details of negotiations and/or disputations. It is a history of the Union as a trade union registered in New South Wales, distinct from its role as a branch of the Federal Union, an organisation registered under Commonwealth Acts, which from time to time had members in Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia (effectively, Broken Hill). The Union played a major part in the formation and development of that Federation and the subsequent integration of State and Federal affairs would require separate substantial research, requiring a history of each of the State branches of the Federal Union.

Brian Harris is to be complimented by all readers because it was his initiative and foresight in pursuing the project that enabled it to be begun and completed in time for the Union's centenary year. During the time available to compile this history much reliance has been placed on the Union records made available to me. These were particularly valuable during the earlier years, as the Union's activities were more detailed, no doubt to encourage membership, whereas later the Union's diversification of activities and substantially wider coverage mitigated against many activities being so well documented.

Union staff, facilitated by Bruce Turpin, who also provided valuable assistance, were very helpful in obtaining information and casting light on issues which occurred in later years. Staff of the NSW Industrial Registry, Sydney City Council archives, Industrial Relations Commission of NSW Library and NSW Parliament House Library were most helpful. Mrs Margaret Beach worked tirelessly to produce the manuscript, and without her dedication the book would not have been completed. Neale Towart compiled the Index, and appreciation is extended to Associate Professor Michael Hogan, who gave valuable assistance when editing the manuscript.



Peter McMahon
16 July 2003

Abbreviations

ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ALP	Australian Labor Party, New South Wales Branch
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BPS	Bunnerong Power Station
City Council	Municipal Council of Sydney to 1948, then the Council of the City of Sydney
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
EC of NSW	Electricity Commission of New South Wales
ECCUDO	Electricity Commission Combined Unions Delegates' Organisation
Federation	Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia
GS	General Secretary
IA Reports	NSW Industrial Arbitration Reports
IC	Industrial Commission of NSW, or Industrial Relations Commission of NSW
IG	NSW Industrial Gazette
IRC	Industrial Relations Commission of NSW
LGA	Local Government Association of NSW
LGSA	Local Government and Shires' Associations
LGSB	Local Government Superannuation Board
LGOB	Local Government Association Officers' Branch (to 1968) and became Local Government Officers' Branch (from 1969)
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly of NSW
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council of NSW
MP	Member of Parliament
NSW	New South Wales
OBU	One Big Union
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PLL	Political Labor League
PUSOAB	Public Utilities Salaries Officers' Association Branch
SCC	Sydney County Council
SB	Sydney Branch, became Central Branch, then reverted again to Sydney Branch
SOA	Salaried Officers' Association
The Union	The Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union in Australia, New South Wales Division (or as previously titled)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
THB	Town Hall Branch
UAP	United Australia Party

1

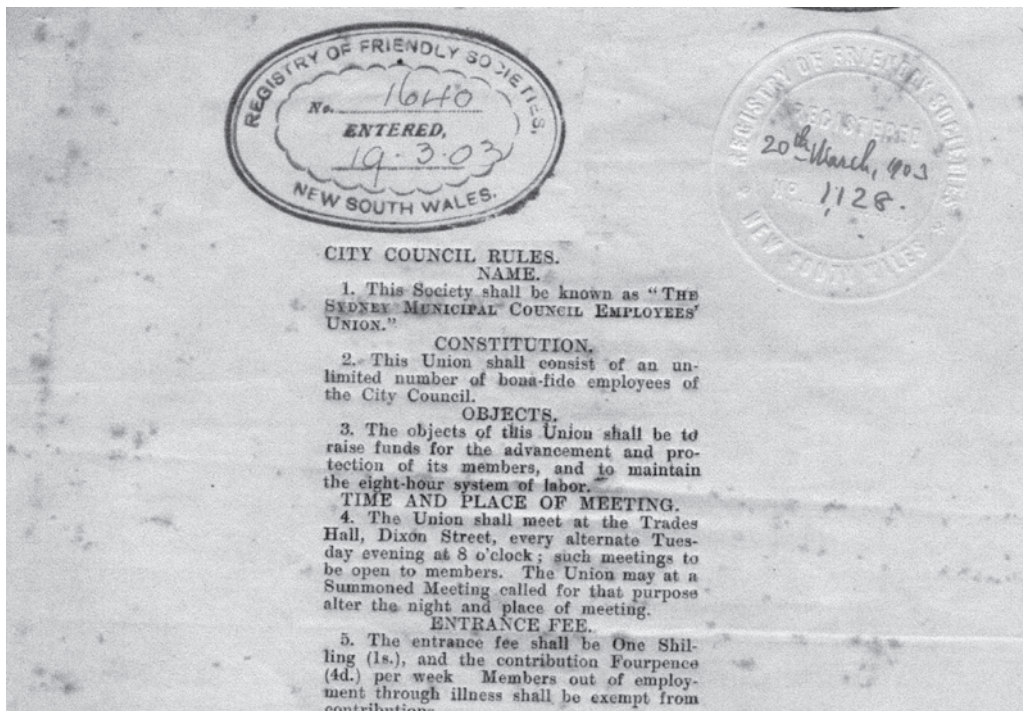
Constitution and Rules

This Union was formed by a small group of wage employees of the City Council meeting in a Sydney Hotel, apparently close to the Sydney Town Hall, deciding to band together and hold a formal meeting on 10 February 1903. It was reported that:

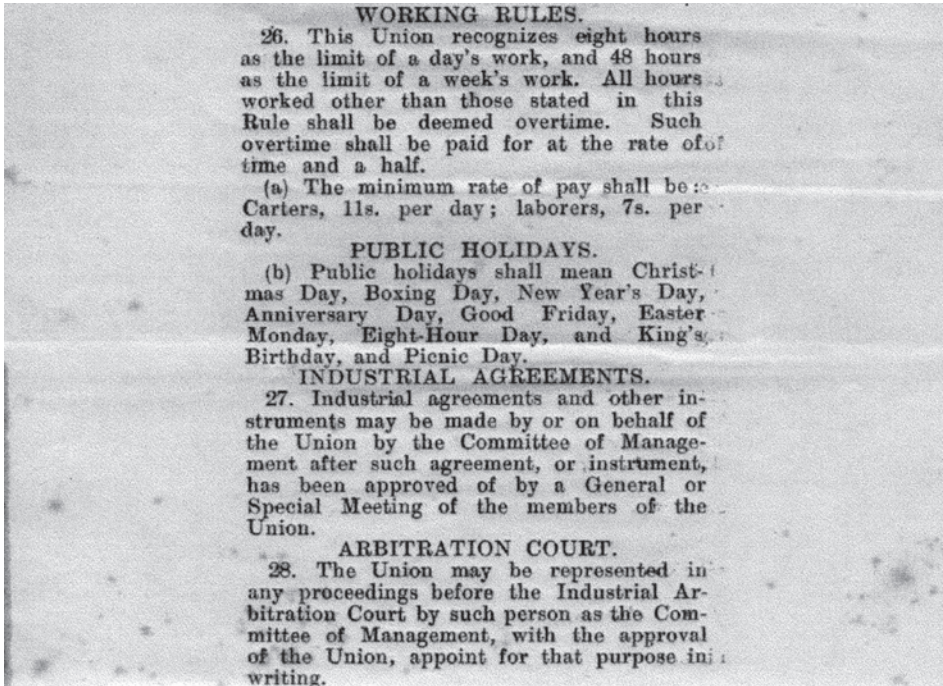
A well attended meeting of employees of the City County Council, was held at the Trades Hall on Tuesday evening. Mr. A. Kelly, M. L. A. delivered an address on the advantages to be derived by the formation of a Trade Union. He referred at some length to the grievances under which the employees laboured and also spoke of the benefits, which would accrue from the formation of a sick, and accident fund. Speeches were also made by members of the organising committee of the Labor Council, and a motion affirming the desirability of a Union of the Council's employees was carried.¹

Andrew Kelly, formerly a wharf labourer and President of the Trades and Labor Council (1889), was a publican, an Alderman on the City Council, and a Labor MP for the inner-city constituency of Sydney-Denison.

In registering the Union on 20 March 1903 the following Rules were included



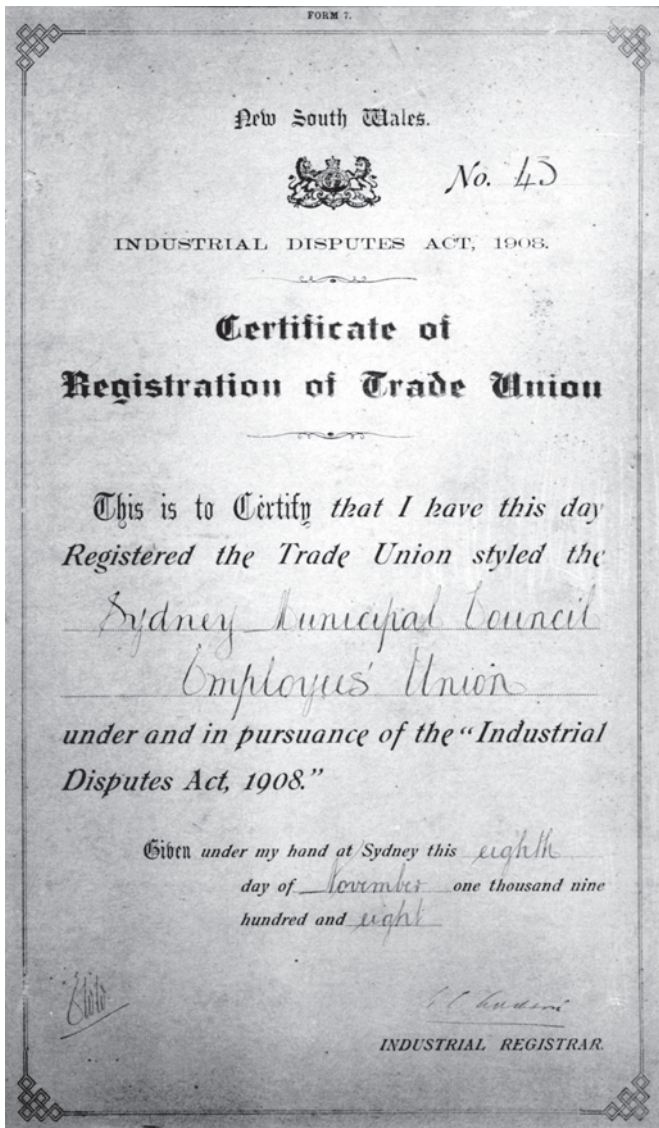
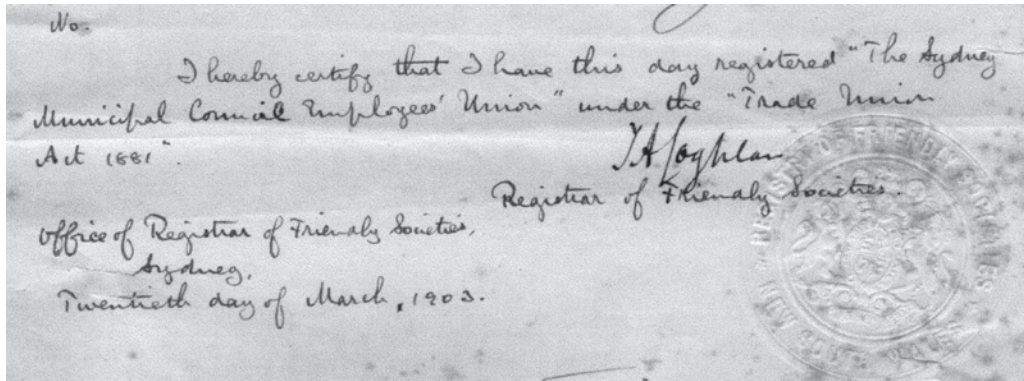
Other rules provided:-



The Rules were submitted by:-

Arthur Stannoy
Walter George Read
John Edward Sadler
James J Dappell
Samuel Black
Stephen McGuire
James Murphy

Registration effected on 20 March 1903 by The Registrar of Friendly Societies




**Further Certificate
of Re-registration
of the Trade Union,
1908**

Source: Bound
Collection from NSW
Registry titled
"Industrial Disputes Act
1908 Certificates of
Registration of Industrial
Unions 1-150."

Re-registration as an Industrial Union with State Wide Coverage, 1913

New South Wales.



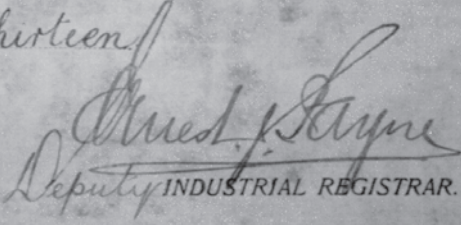
No. 23

INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION ACT, 1912.

CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION.

This is to Certify that on the *twenty seventh*
 day of *November* 1913, the Trade Union
 styled the "*Municipal and Shire Council*
Employees' Union of New South Wales"
 was duly registered as an Industrial Union of
 Employees, in pursuance of the "Industrial
 Arbitration Act, 1912," under the style of
 "*Municipal and Shire Council Employees'*
Union of New South Wales"

Given under my hand at Sydney this *twenty seventh*
 day of *November* one thousand nine
 hundred and *thirteen*


 Deputy INDUSTRIAL REGISTRAR.

Following application to the Registrar of Friendly Societies, the Union was registered under the Trade Union Act 1881, on 20 March 1903, with the title the “Sydney Municipal Council Employees’ Union”. (see pages 1 to 3) The constitution limited membership to employees of that Council.² On 20 April 1910, the title was changed to the “Municipal Employees’ Union of New South Wales” and the constitution extended to embrace employees of other metropolitan Councils.³ On 20 November 1913, the title was again changed to embrace country Councils, becoming the “Municipal and Shire Council Employees’ Union of New South Wales” and the constitution was expanded to enable enrolment of employees of metropolitan and country municipal and shire Councils and employees of contractors to such Councils.⁴ Registration was also effected as an Industrial Union of Employees under the new 1912 Industrial Arbitration Act. There was another title change on 11 July 1917 to accord with the name of the Federally-registered union and it became the “Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees’ Union of Australia (New South Wales Branch)”.⁵ This title remained unchanged until 2003, except for “Branch” being changed to “Division” in 1949.⁶ Following implementation of the Industrial Relations Act 1991, the Union was again registered in 1994 as an “Industrial Organisation of Employees”, retaining the title it had from 1917.

The Union had been closely involved with electricity since formation but with the separation, and anticipated extension, of electricity Councils from general purpose Councils, the constitution’s rule was expanded in 1934 to provide future coverage of:

Employees of Commissions, Boards or Trusts controlling services formerly controlled by Municipal, Shire or County Councils, and employees of contractors to such Councils, Commissions, Boards or Trusts, provided that such employees, prior to the constitution of the said Commission, Boards or Trusts, were members of this Union or eligible to become members thereof, together with such other persons, whether employed in the industry or not, as have been appointed officers of this union and admitted as members thereof.

The constitution rule as it exists in 2003 provides basically the same eligibility for coverage as that prescribed in 1945, some 58 years before, which is:

- (1) The Union shall consist of an unlimited number of persons who are:
 - (a) Bone fide employees of:
 - (i) Municipal, Shire and County Councils;
 - (ii) Any contractor to any such Council;
 - (iii) Any body, whether personal or corporate or otherwise, and howsoever styled, carrying out social functions of a civic character on behalf of or by arrangement with any such Council;
 - (iv) Any body, whether personal or corporate or otherwise, and howsoever styled, controlling, in whole or in part, services formerly controlled by a Municipal, Shire or County Council; and
 - (v) Any contractor to any such body, and who have been admitted as members of the Union.

Provided, in the latter two cases, that such employees prior to the constitution or establishment of such body were members of this Union or eligible to become members thereof;

(b) Employees of Waste Planning and Management Boards and their successors; Employees of Australian Health Management Group Pty. Ltd. and their successors;

(c) Persons upon whom life membership of the Union has been conferred in accordance with these rules;

(d) Persons who while being members of the Union, retire from the industry and from work upon the ground of ill-health or of having reached retiring age, and whose membership has not been terminated pursuant to these rules;

(e) Persons, whether employed in the industry or not, who have been elected or appointed officers of the Union, and who have been admitted as members of the Union.

Annual Conference is the supreme governing body of the Union, making policy and determining management issues. At first it comprised the Executive and officers but, with the establishment of Branches in 1914, Conference was expanded to include delegates from Branches. Representation from Branches varied over the years depending upon their numerical strengths and rule changes. In 1928, Conference comprised 48 delegates representing 32 Branches. In 1953, there were 89 delegates representing 54 Branches, and in 1978 (after 75 years of existence) there were 138 delegates representing 78 Branches. Following amalgamation of Branches from 1995, 13 Branches had up to 21 delegates each, then, from 1999, Branch membership was again restructured and at the 2001 Conference representation was from five to 19 delegates, totalling 132, together with 17 Executive members (see Table IV).⁷

Composition of Annual Conferences over the years has ensured adequate representation on behalf of both country and metropolitan membership. Conference met half yearly until 1913, annually until 2001, when Conference determined that future Conferences be held biennially, and that each alternate year a "Council in Conference Session" would be held, comprising the Executive and Branch Presidents and Secretaries representing their respective Branches with voting rights proportionate to Branch membership.

Decision making between Annual Conferences was vested in the Union's Executive which, on registration, comprised the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, General Secretary and six Executive members. The Executive was increased to eight in 1917 and then to ten in 1953, the extra two members were elected by Annual Conference from country areas divided into Northern Zone Branches and the Southern Zone Branches. In 1957 the rules were changed to have Zone Executive Members elected by the total membership. The next change was not until 1993, when Branches were amalgamated into larger branch structures comprising firstly 13 and then 11 Branches from 1999,

nine of whom were entitled to one Executive Member, with the Sydney and Metropolitan Salaried Officers' Branches entitled to two. The system of electing the Executive was also changed to provide that Executive members were elected collegially by the Branch Committee of Management instead of by the membership generally. Branch Committee of Management members continued to be elected by members of their respective Branches.

The General Secretary (GS) has always been a member of the Executive and was first required to be elected at a general meeting each six months. With the formation of Branches in 1913, the GS was elected each twelve months at the Annual Conference until 1918 when, once elected, a GS held office without a retirement age but from 1963, retirement was required at 65 years of age, until 1992 when that rule was deleted. However, from 1967, the GSs have been elected either triennially or each four years, at the same time as general Union elections are held.

From 1903, elections were being held for the Executive and officers by ballot at general meetings each six months. Ten years later this was changed to being elected by Annual Conference until 1917, after which elections were conducted each twelve months by postal ballot. That system continued up until 1967, when elections began to be held triennially, and from 1982 each four years. Elections were conducted by the Union's General Returning Officer until 1967, after which they were conducted through the General Returning Officer by the State Electoral Office and subsequently by the Commonwealth Electoral Office.

From 1978, because of rule changes to the Federally-registered Union under Commonwealth industrial regulations, officials were also elected to hold office in the MEU Federal Branch by ballot conducted by the Australian Electoral Office. Such practice continued until 1993 when the Union became a NSW Branch of the ASU (see Chapter 4). Ballots conducted from 1996 under the Commonwealth Workplace Relations Act provide that those elected are also elected to office under the NSW Industrial Relations Act.

Direct action

From 1917 to 1993 members were constrained from taking direct industrial action, as prescribed in the 1917 rule:




The Union shall not engage in or actively participate in any industrial disturbance unless such action shall have been endorsed by a Specially Convened General Meeting of the whole Union, or if in the opinion of the Executive the circumstances are so urgent as to preclude the calling together of a Special General Meeting, by a postal ballot of the whole of the members of the Union.

That rule was changed in 1949, providing:

Neither the Union nor any of its members shall take part in, aid or abet, an illegal strike, nor shall the Union or any of its members, during the currency of any strike, do any act or thing to induce or compel any person refrain from handling or dealing with any article or commodity in the course of transit thereof, or in the process of the manufacture, sale, supply or use thereof.

These rules did not preclude members from taking industrial action, including bans, limitations or strikes, but emphasised the Union's policy of pursuing issues through conciliation or arbitration. The rule was never invoked against individual members. Other rules changed or inserted over the years were considered appropriate to meet the exigencies at those times.

1994 Registration as an Industrial Organisation

No. Ee 5
 NEW SOUTH WALES
Industrial Relations Act 1991 Section 420
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF AN INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION OF EMPLOYEES
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
on 4 January 1994
Federated Municipal And Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia, New South Wales Division
was duly registered as an Industrial Organisation of Employees under the Industrial Relations Act 1991.

Dated: 4 January 1994
 Industrial Registrar

2

Union/Branch Structure

Although in 1903 there was only one Branch, covering members in the City Council, with the enrolment of members in other Councils, Branches were established in both the metropolitan and country areas. In 1913, there were 35 Branches, growing to 76 by 1916. The 28 in the Sydney metropolitan area were: Ashfield, Balmain, Burwood, Canterbury, Camperdown, Drummoyne, Glebe, Ku-ring-gai, Leichhardt, Lane Cove, Lidcombe, Manly, Mosman, Marrickville, North Sydney, Paddington, Parramatta, Randwick, Redfern, Sans Souci, Strathfield, St. Peters, Woollahra, Waverley, Waverley Cemetery, Willoughby, Watsons Bay and Waterloo. The 48 country Branches were: Armidale, Albury, Hume, Bathurst, Bega, Bombala, Blackheath, Ballina, Bingara, Barraba, Coolamon, Cootamundra, Coonamble, Condobolin, Cooma, Cobar, Dubbo, Forbes, Goulburn, Gilgandra, Grenfell, Gunnedah, Guyra, Gunning, Gloucester, Inverell, Katoomba, Lithgow, Linburn (via Mudgee), Lockhart, Lismore, Manilla, Maitland, Moree, Mudgee, Newcastle, Narrandera, Orange, Tumut, Tamworth, Temora, Urana, Wagga Wagga, Warialda, Walcha, Walgett, Wellington and Yass. Some of the Branches extended cover to adjoining areas, as exemplified by Lismore in 1916, which had meetings at Ballina, Bangalow, Byron Bay, Noughtons Gap and Casino centres. Branches were entitled to have delegates attend Annual Conferences, but in the early years many were not represented owing to the cost to Branches and the time required to travel to and from Sydney.

Delegates at the 1914 Annual Conference



FRONT ROW (reading left to right)—P. A. Hugo (Forbes), J. Brooks (Lithgow), J. Coulton (Yass), J. B. Lally (Newcastle), J. Ticehurst (Grenfell).
MIDDLE ROW—J. Hughes (Inverell), J. Maroc (City), Wm. McLean (City), H. Martin (Vice-President), Jas. Tyrrell (President), T. H. Thrower, M.L.A., Geo. Ashton (General Secretary), Thos. Murphy (City), J. Dunne (Burwood).
BACK ROW—G. Stone (City), E. J. Mitchell, Thos. Allinson (Newcastle), S. M. Hay (Dubbo), J. Moore (City), H. Garth (Goulburn), A. Kolb (Albury), Thos. Howard (City), A. Ray (Tamworth), G. J. Brownhill (Katoomba), J. Hanney (City).

Source: *The Counsellor*, January 1915 p.5

The 1916 Conference elected five country Vice-Presidents with the power to act on behalf of the Executive in their respective areas. The areas and locations of the Vice-Presidents were South (Albury), South Coast (Bega), North (Newcastle), North West (Walcha), and West (Bathurst), but such positions were only continued for a few years. By 1918, representation at Annual Conference comprised thirty-two country delegates, eight city delegates, four from the Town Hall Branch, and ten Executive and Officers.¹ It was a credit to those who enrolled members and established those country Branch structures, for it was not until 1916 that Conference resolved to advertise for a Country Organiser on £6 [\$12] a week (the General Secretary received only £4 [\$8] and the President £6 [\$12]).

Many Branch Secretaries, before becoming Council employees, had been gold diggers, shearers, tank sinkers, or road contractors, while many had long associations with their former respective unions and been active in local political affairs. Many Branches and individual members were active in Labor Party affairs and promoted country Eight-Hour Day demonstrations, competing for the most spectacular display.

Delegates at the 1925 Annual Conference



Source: *The Councillor*, December 1925 p.3

By 1927, most metropolitan Branch members had been placed in the Sydney Branch, which was under the control of the Union Executive, with the General Secretary as Branch Secretary. There were then 54 country Branches and three metropolitan wages Branches which stood alone (Manly/Warringah, Parramatta and Sutherland) and two salaried Branches.

Over the years, Branch Secretaries have been the ones to whom members looked first for assistance. They had considerable local autonomy to deal with issues which, if not resolved, were referred to Head Office or an Organiser on their next visit. Branch or Committee of Management meetings were held monthly, if not quarterly, and Branches in early years held popular social evenings which were used to promote Union and political activities.

Whilst some Branches had large attendances, close contact was not always possible in the formative years. One Organiser, urging better attendances at Wagga Wagga, stated:

Mr Thomson, Branch Secretary, was not in the industry, but he has never missed a meeting even though he has at times to walk a distance of ten miles to attend, and attend he does irrespective of the weather.²

Another activist, Jim Muldoon, although not in the industry, served as Branch Secretary of the Lismore Branch for 46 years from 1933 to 1979.³

In the formative years, even up to World War II, light refreshments, and something to wash it down, were served after Branch meetings, and there was invariably a toast to “The King”, “Head Office” or “The Union” and “Officers of the Local Branch”, with singing of “Auld Lang Syne” and “God Save the King” to conclude proceedings.

To keep closer contact with the membership, as well as Organisers visiting each country area twice a year, Regional Meetings were commenced in 1965. These were first held in four country areas and gradually by 1981 were held at eight locations. Meetings were very popular and well attended, involving discussion of industrial issues and guest speakers addressing members on subjects such as superannuation, health and safety, and workers’ compensation. Following restructuring to larger Branches in 1993, Branch Committees of Management, comprising representatives from Councils within the Branch area, subsumed the need for Regional Meetings.

In 1919, the Newcastle Branch was the second largest in NSW and, through persistence at many Annual Conferences, its first full time Branch Secretary was appointed in 1938. Charlie R. Krempin was appointed and held office until he resigned due to ill health in 1953, having been a delegate to Conference for at least 48 years and an Executive member for over 20 years.⁴ Full time secretaries

Some of the Delegates at the 2001 Annual Conference



Source: Municipal Employees Union

continued to be appointed for that Branch, but it was not until 17 years later that full time Branch Secretaries were appointed for salaried Branches whose membership had increased substantially (see Table II).

After nearly fifty years of existence there were 80 Branches, 69 in country areas with a total of 8,401 wage members and 8,875 members in the metropolitan area comprising: Central (Sydney area), 7,834; Manly Warringah, 349; Parramatta, 326; Sutherland, 44; and St. George District, 322. President J Foyle at the Union's 75th Anniversary Dinner commented: "This Union's structure provides one of the most representative Annual Conferences in New South Wales".

Growth of Salaried and Professional Membership

Salaried membership commenced in 1914 when, following a visit by officers from Melbourne City Council to play City Council employees in a cricket match, it was decided to form an "Association of Officers of the City Council" to promote good fellowship and continued fraternal exchange of social visits between the cities. The first action of an industrial nature occurred on 28 July 1915 when the Management Committee received a letter from junior clerks, asking the Association take action on their behalf to ensure they could also apply for positions in advance of their own grade, after it had been found necessary to recruit 4th year clerks from outside the Service. The Association won the round after making representations in support of the clerks. The Town Clerk agreed to permit junior clerks to apply for the positions, and thus the Association had become a force in the industrial field and showed another side to the purely social aspects that had previously been in evidence.⁵

In 1916, an organisation known as "The Professional Officers' Association" was intending to apply for a Wages Board, and requested professional officers of the City Council to join with them in their application. However, on advice from the Town Clerk, and recognising that more benefits would flow to members by being in a registered trade union, on 29 June 1916 the Management Committee of the MEU recommended to a general meeting that they seek incorporation as a separate Branch of the Union, and on 10 August 1916 the Town Hall Branch was established.⁶

In 1916 it was also resolved all members of the former Association on active military service would be recognised as members of the Union, and that any member who was an Administrative Officer of the City Council would not be bound by resolutions of mass meetings, thus encouraging senior officers as members but protecting them in their managerial positions. An Award claim was formulated in 1916, and by June 1917 an Award had been made with agreement of the Wages Board, which was accepted, it being stated that such Award would not have been sanctioned by the Arbitration Court should the claim have been pursued by arbitration. An approach to join in a Federal Award claim with Tasmanian and Victorian Councils was rejected, and claims continued to be pursued under NSW industrial legislation.⁷ The Branch extended its coverage in 1935, when, following enactment of the Gas and Electricity Act 1935, employees of the City Council's Electricity Department were transferred to the Sydney County Council.⁸ The Local Government Officers' Branch (LGOB) was established in 1920, and by 1923, twenty years into the Union's existence, salaried membership totalled 704 out of 8,130, or 8.66%.

Other salaried Branches were established over the years: Newcastle City Council Salaried Officers in 1935; St George County Council Salaried Officers in 1937; Newcastle Abattoir Salaried Officers in 1944; the Senior Officers Association in 1949; Shortland County Council in 1958; and the County Council Electricity Undertakings in 1980 (see Table II). After 50 years, membership of Salaried Branches, which had gradually been established over the years, had increased to 2,907, comprising:

Local Government Association Officers	841
Town Hall (later PUSOB)	1,506
Senior Officers' Association	92
Newcastle Town Hall	276
Newcastle Abattoir	71
St. George County Council	116

The reason for the creation of the Senior Officers' Association Branch was interesting because there were, in 1949, an increasing number of salaried staff whose salaries could not be adjusted through the current conciliation and arbitration processes because of restrictive industrial legislation, and separate representation was required for them. So the Branch was formed to cater for their special needs.

Difficulties emerged with the LGOB Committee of Management, which in 1945 proposed to take action to transfer its membership to the Local Government Clerks' Association NSW. The issue was over the Union being unsuccessful in obtaining a war loading and long service leave standards in the general salaried Awards. Action was withheld pending further conferences with officials, which extended over two years, and in 1947 the Branch withdrew its proposal to secede (see Chapter 3).⁹

In 1954, the LGOB Committee of Management strongly opposed the Executive's decision that administration of the Branch and recruitment be handled by a full-time Head Office official. This had first been proposed in 1926 when the Executive instructed the General Secretary to negotiate to control the Branch from Head Office.¹⁰ It took 28 years before it eventuated. No doubt, if it had been achieved earlier, the Branch would have grown substantially, instead of being stagnant, only increasing membership by 250 over 20 years (see Table II). Even though membership had nearly trebled from 1954 to 1957, some members on the LGOB Committee of Management were resentful of Head Office and sought to place a notice of motion on the agenda paper for the 1957 Branch Annual Meeting for the membership to secede and form a separate Union. The Union Executive directed the proposed motion not be circulated as it was considered subversive and an act of disloyalty.¹¹ Eventually the issue faded away and Branch membership went from strength to strength (see Table II).

In 1951, Annual Conference approved the conduct of negotiations between all salaried Branches with a view to constituting a salaried section. In 1952, to publicise the ability of the Town Hall Branch to cover employees in the newly formed Electricity Commission of NSW (EC of NSW), the name was changed to the Public Utilities Salaried Officers' Association Branch. Conferences were held in 1953 between representatives of all salaried Branches who unanimously agreed such a Section be set up, to which the Executive agreed, so that a Salaried and Professional Officers' Section was set up in 1954 with Rex R. P. Wood as Secretary.¹² The six salaried Branches in the Section had a total membership of 3,463, representing 16% of the total membership of 20,183 (see Tables I and II).

Also contributing to the growth was the decision in 1959 to take the administration of the LGOB from its honorary secretaryship to Head Office and appoint a full time Branch Secretary. This contributed to the growth of salaried and professional membership which, together with later appointments of full-time salaried Branch Secretaries and salaried Organisers resulted in salaried and professional membership peaking at 16,102 in 1989, which was 40% of the total membership of 40,413 (see Tables I & II). By the time of Wood's retirement in 1965, Salaried Branches were well established and the Section was discontinued, although the first full time Industrial Officer was appointed. However, in 2001, a Salaried Section was again established, called the "Salaried Officers' Advisory Committee" (SOAC), comprising salaried members from Sydney Metropolitan and Country Councils. Its function was to improve communications and awareness of issues particularly affecting salaried officers throughout NSW and is administered by the Metropolitan Manager.

New Branch Structure Implemented

To conform to changes to industrial regulations in the 1990s, the Union reviewed its structure and consulted members about proposed changes. From 1993, the Branch structure was substantially changed, with 88 country Branches being absorbed into 13 larger and broader based Branches, which were: Central West, Murray, Newcastle, New England, Northern, North Western, Riverina, Southern, and Sydney Branches, (retained with country members transferred to their respective regional branch areas and former metropolitan Branch members being absorbed), and an Electricity Distribution Employees' Branch (comprising former salaried and wage members of Electricity Distribution authorities) along with the LGOB, the Public Utilities Salaried Officers' Association (PUSOA), and the Salaried Officers' Association (SOA).¹³

In 1999 there was a further change, reducing the number of Branches to eleven. Two new Branches were formed. The first was a "Metropolitan Salaried Officers' Branch" to which members of the SOA, the PUSOA, and generally LGOB Sydney Metropolitan and surrounding areas members and Wollongong City Council's salaried members were transferred. Other country members of the former LGOB were transferred to respective country Branches covering their Council's areas.¹⁴ The other new "Energy and Utilities Branch" covered members of the former Electricity Distribution Employees' Branch and other electricity and water utilities. Executive sub-committees were also reduced from ten to three, forming major committees for Finance, Asset Management, and Policy/Strategic Development.¹⁵

From 2001, three Regional Managers (see Table VI) were appointed to manage Union affairs in their allocated areas and assist honorary Branch Secretaries under the direction of the General Secretary. Branches were to make recommendations through their Committee of Management to the General Secretary for submission to the Executive, or issues could be raised by their Executive member, or a Branch could submit motions directly to Conference. A further Manager was appointed to assist the General Secretary in the administration and running of the Union's affairs. In 2001, Annual Conference decided that Conferences should be held biennially, comprising Executive members and Branches, the number of delegates depending upon Branch membership. Additionally, each alternate year from 2002 a "Conference in Council" Session was to be held, at which Branch Presidents and Secretaries represented their Branches with voting rights proportionate to their membership.

MEU Executive in Office March 2003

Back Row: Martin Wynne (Bogan Council - North Western Branch), Ken Johnson (Wollongong City Council - Metropolitan Salaried Officers' Branch), Harry Pittman (Evans Council - Central West Branch), Wayne Donohue (Balranald Council - Riverina Branch), Phil Moody (Liverpool City Council - Sydney Branch), Phil Bowering (Sutherland Shire Council - Southern Branch). **Centre Row:** Chris Gorman (Kempsey Council - Northern Branch), Martha Salinas (Fairfield City Council - Metropolitan Salaried Officers' Branch), Tony Dean (Moree Council - New England Branch), Craig Wilson (Kogarah Council - Sydney Branch), Ray Bourke (Corowa Council - Murray Branch), Tom Baker (Wyong Shire Council - Newcastle Branch), Mark Gill (Pacific Power - Energy Branch). **Front Row:** Brian Harris General Secretary, Stephen Birney President (Tweed Council - Northern Branch), Elizabeth Cumming Treasurer (Inverell Council - New England Branch).
Insert: John Mackay Vice President (Dungog Council - Newcastle Branch).

Source: Municipal Employees Union

Broken Hill Council Membership

Eugene Patrick (Paddy) O'Neill, born in 1876, witnessed the violent and bitter strikes that had taken place in Broken Hill in the 1890s and 1900s. In 1908 he had been at the forefront of mining disputes as the Branch Secretary of the powerful Amalgamated Miners' Federation before joining Broken Hill City Council in 1913 as a sanitary carter, where he formed the wage employees into a union, becoming its full time secretary.¹⁶ In 1921, he requested that his members be eligible to join the MEU Federal Union. He was advised to form a Branch, which he did, and in 1924 sought representation of the Branch at Federal Conference. This was rejected by Conference, members not being given the status of a State Branch, but attached to the Victorian Branch.¹⁷

However, from 1925 he attended Federal Conference representing Broken Hill members, but without a vote. By this time he had also organised membership for clerks and library staff whose salaries were operative under Industrial Agreements made under the NSW Industrial System, although some salaried officers were members of the LGOB.¹⁸ It was another eight years before Broken Hill members were formed into a South Australian Branch of the MEU Federal structure. Thus from 1933 for the next sixty years they were represented and had a vote at Federal Conference.¹⁹

As the full time Secretary, O'Neill was able to devote time to bringing unions together. His united front underwent a gruelling test in 1919-20, when for 20 months Broken Hill was again plunged into a bitter industrial feud. After the companies finally capitulated to the united front that the unions had for once put up, it was realised there was good sense in what Paddy O'Neill had been demanding for years. All the Broken Hill unions now saw they must unite to speak with one voice. On 23 January 1923, the Barrier Industrial Council, comprising twenty unions, was officially formed and Paddy

Paddy O'Neill



Source: Municipal Employees Union

O'Neill was elected President.²⁰ In retiring from the position in 1948 he gave up his title as the “uncrowned King of Broken Hill”, a title richly deserved over a quarter of a century. He died in May 1953 at 77 years of age, two days after receiving a special decoration from the Pope. His photograph in the Union Office has the tribute to Paddy O'Neill, “whose ability, courage, vision and integrity made all Australians mourn his passing and revere his memory”.

In the 1980s, a dispute arose between the Union and the Broken Hill Town Employees' Union, who had enrolled a section of the MEU membership. The issue was finally resolved, with members being returned, and the total membership continued to be an affiliate of the Federation until 1993. The members then became a separate Broken Hill Council Municipal Union serviced by the Union but not being members thereof. However, Council's supervisory staff were members of the Riverina Branch of the Union. In 2001, for the first time in its history, the Union directly affiliated with the Barrier Industrial Council on the basis of its Broken Hill membership.²¹

3

Membership/Assets

Great credit is due to the activities of early officials, Executive and delegates enrolling members, firstly in the City Council, then expanding membership to suburban and country Councils. The Union membership grew from 35 on registration in 1903 to 6,400 by 1918, with growth averaging 400 a year. Membership continued to increase by an average of 850 a year until 1927 when it peaked at 14,052 (see Table I).

Some innovative ideas were introduced over this period. In 1905, the entrance fee of 1/- [10¢] was refunded if a person was not accepted to membership. A trophy costing £1.10 [\$2.10] or equivalent cash was given to the member who enrolled the greatest number of members in each twelve months.¹ In 1911, block boys employed by City Council (see Chapter 9) were admitted but only had to pay half fees of 3d [2.5¢] per fortnight. Fees in 1914 were 12/- [\$1.20].

From 1926, a yearly badge was issued to those who paid the annual subscription in the first quarter. The badge was displayed on their watch chain or coat lapel.² A new badge design commenced in 1949 and became a perpetual badge in 1954, with a clip to be inserted after paying each yearly subscription. This design also became the Union's emblem until the centenary in 2003.

1930 Badge



1954 Badge



Source: *Emblems of Unity*, G.J. Smith p. 182 Source: *Emblems of Unity*, G.J. Smith p. 186

Preference for unionists

Preference for unionists was introduced into City Council hiring policy in 1916. Six years later it was rescinded with the strengthening of Civic Reform representation in 1922, only to be reinstated by a Labor-controlled Council in 1925. Following a deputation from officers of the Town Hall Branch to the Town Clerk in 1918, pointing out that some applicants for vacant positions were not members, the Town Clerk gave a direction that all appointees must be Union members.³ In 1919, on the recommendation of Alderman H. Lambert, Chairman of the City Council Finance Committee, the Council resolved that all employees were required to be financial Union members or leave Council's

employ.⁴ Preference for unionists was written in as an Award provision in 1927, and remained policy for well over fifty years.⁵

In 1917, the Shire Councils' Wages Award was varied to include preference in the following terms: "Other things being equal as between persons offering their labour at the same time, preference shall be given to members of the Municipal and Shire Council Employees Union of N.S.W."⁶ By 1919, most general Awards provided preference, excluding returned servicemen who may have been entitled to rights under the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Employment Act.⁷

As improved conditions of employment and over-award payments were achieved with individual Councils, they were included in Industrial Agreements, and it was ensured they applied only to financial members. As early as 1938, one example of this trend was Botany Council giving one week's additional annual leave only to those who were financial members. The Greater Newcastle Council resolved that all employees must become Union members. The Sydney County Council also agreed in 1952 that all employees were to be members of the Union.⁸ The Union took advantage of legislation in 1950 enabling provisions for absolute preference to unionists to be included in awards and pursued the ability to introduce compulsory unionism.

Expanding membership

Following the membership peak at 14,052 in 1927, the Depression years saw membership fall to 7,826 in 1931, and then gradually increase to over 14,000 by 1948. Membership peaked at 42,139 in 1988, but then declined during the 1990s due to economic difficulties, restructuring, and changes to industrial relations legislation. However the new century has seen membership increasing again to 28,475 (see Table I).

A further setback to membership was averted in 1945 when the LGOB proposed seceding from the Union and joining the Local Government Clerk's Association. The Union Executive pointed out that the discontent was not due to failure on the Union's part to achieve a war loading in general Awards, nor to achieve long service leave, but was due to National Security (Economic Organisation) Regulations and decisions of the Industrial Commission of NSW. Following discussions, the Executive refused to allow such transfers and directed the LGOB to cease any further attempt to transfer members. The secession proposal faded away in 1947, after long service leave was achieved from 7 May 1946 in the Clerical, Assistant Engineers', Draftsmen's and Overseers' Awards.⁹

Always looking for new fields to expand membership, in the early 1940s the Union negotiated salaries and conditions for playground supervisors employed by the Sydney University Settlement or Kindergarten Union of NSW who were subsidised by the City Council.¹⁰ However it was not until 1949 that the first Award was obtained by arbitration before the Industrial Commission.

The Union also protected its membership, and enrolled further employees, in new organisations as they were formed, such as the State Planning Authority, Electricity Commission of NSW, Waverley-Woollahra Refuse Processing Plant, Regional Waste Boards, Timbertown, (a tourist attraction near Wauchope), the Sydney Farm Produce Markets Authority (subsequently privatised in 2002 to become the Sydney Markets Limited Company) and the Government Employees Hospital-Medical Club (subsequently incorporated in the Australian Health

Management Group). The Union always obtained new Award classifications for members when new functions were introduced to cover local government's or other authority's expanding services, which also contributed to increasing membership over the years.

Union membership was made easier by Councils agreeing to deduct Union contributions from members' wages/salaries thus obviating fees having to be collected quarterly or yearly, and for any commissions to be paid to delegates. The LGOB in 1954 cancelled all commissions for collectors, establishing instead "local contacts" to liaise with members. By 1983 there were 123 Councils deducting subscriptions.

Union membership again peaked in 1988, at 42,139 (see Table I). Salaried and professional membership had also grown from one salaried branch, the Town Hall Branch in 1916, to four Branches by 1938 and seven by 1959 (see Chapter 2 and Table II).

In 1954, the Salaried and Professional Section was set up, with two staff being employed, while the PUSOA and LGO Branch records and recruiting were taken over by Head Office. This was also enhanced by the subsequent employment of full time salaried Branch Secretaries and Organisers dedicated to dealing with salaries and professional issues. These changes greatly increased the totality of membership.

Membership declined in the 1990s due to the NSW Coalition Government's industrial relations legislation (abolishing provisions for compulsory unionism, changing the Award system, introducing enterprise bargaining and expanding individual contracts), as well as downsizing by many employers and general economic constraints. The Executive embarked on a campaign to cover 4,000 home day-carers in 2001, and with a changed Union structure membership increased (see Table I).

Union assets

Members of the Union have concurrently held dual membership, being also members of the Federal MEU and, after 1993, the MEU NSW Branch of the ASU. However, assets reside with the Union, and a comparison of balance sheets over 84 years show how assets have increased. In 1919, net assets were £1,908 [\$3,816] being cash or levies held by Head Office or Branches. After 50 years of existence, these had accumulated to £29,145 [\$58,290] After 75 years of existence in 1978, net assets were £1,074,342 [\$2,148,684].¹¹

After 100 years, total assets were over twelve and a half million dollars, which included property at Level 7/321 Pitt Street, Sydney, 86 Lawson Street, Newcastle, 2-3-5/100 Market Street, Wollongong, and the Aquatic Palms Resort, Hastings River Drive, Port Macquarie and 1/157 Gordon Street, Port Macquarie. Those assets are owned in a Deed of Agreement between the Union and the ASU, but the MEU has a contractual arrangement through the NSW State Branch affiliated with the Federally-registered ASU to whom capitation fees are paid. Brian Harris is simultaneously General Secretary of the Union and Branch Secretary of the MEU NSW Branch of the ASU.