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Industrial Affiliations

The Federal Union

An historic step was taken at the September 1915 Annual Conference when, following an address by two representatives from the Victorian Branch of the Municipal Employees' Association of Australia, which had been registered on 30 August 1910, it was decided: "That we elect four delegates to attend the Federal Conference in Hobart in February 1916 to amend the present constitution of the Federal Union so as to make it acceptable to our members for their adoption". Jim Tyrrell, reporting on the 1916 Federal Conference outcome, stated:

Both the Victorian and the Tasmanian delegates displayed a spirit of sweet reasonableness and readiness to meet the N.S.W. delegates in their efforts to secure the amendments of the constitution necessary to allow them to join the Federation. He was absolutely satisfied with the result of the Conference, stating N.S.W. had gained everything they had asked for. The name and constitution of the Federation had been changed to practically what our own was today. State Branches under the new rules would make their own rules for their own government as at present and could make industrial or other agreements covering their own members or could approach Wages Boards or other tribunals as they desired.

All that the branch would be required to pay into the Federation would be 1/- [10 cents] per year for each financial member. The representation to Conference would be: States with over 100 and less than 1,000 members would send two delegates to Conference; States with over 1,000 and less than 2,000 would send three and States with over 2,000 would send four – the maximum number of delegates for any one State. As NSW had the most members her interests were well protected under this franchise.

The money raised by the Federation would be spent on organising, and appearing in cases before the Federal Arbitration Court when that body obtained jurisdiction to deal with the claims of municipal employees.¹

Tyrrell pointed out to the Executive and members that it would be only a short time (following agreement by the State Premiers) before "the State Arbitration laws would pass away and their powers be handed over to the Federal Court; and then we would be compelled to turn to that Court for the settlement of our difficulties". Following this report the Executive recommended to the 1916 Annual Conference that the Union join the Federation – which resolution was adopted. However the prediction of the demise of State industrial laws never eventuated.

Delegates at the historic Federal Conference held in Hobart 28 February 1916

Back Row:—R. Patterson, Hobart, Tas.; J. McElwer, Launceston, Tas.; J. Tyrrell, N.S.W.; W. McLean, N.S.W.; C. Barnes, N.S.W.; J. B. Lalley, N.S.W.
 Front Row.—J. Haines (Victoria), Vice-President; J. Keating (Victoria), Secretary; W. Barry (Victoria), President; W. H. Gray (Victoria), Treasurer; J. B. Bock (Launceston Tas.), Vice-President.

Source: *The Counsellor*, April 1916 p.7

Three unions opposed the Union's application for Federal registration. Agreement was reached with the Australian Workers' Union and Plumbers' Union, but the Electrical Trades Union still proceeded with its objections. However the Federal Union, with the new title of the "Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia", was registered Federally on 15 March 1917 as an organisation covering employees in "Municipal and Shire Councils, Municipal Trusts, Water Works and similar industries" which was an extension of the cover first registered in 1910, applying only to the municipal industry.

At the 1917 Federal Conference it was resolved that Tyrrell "in view of his knowledge and experience of arbitration courts be invited (at the expense of the Federation) to assist the Federal Secretary in steering the plaint through the court". Federal logs of claims were served on Councils, including those in NSW, but the Union lent itself to those logs primarily on the basis of supporting the creation of an interstate dispute, one that was necessary to have Federal Awards made. The Union, however, did not actively seek to have members covered exclusively by Federal Awards as its ability to obtain superior conditions, wages and salaries for members within the NSW jurisdiction and from NSW Government legislation made it desirable to retain State Awards and Agreements. One specific instance was in 1925 when the Union advised the Federation that, with the advent of a Labor Government in NSW, a 44-hour working week was to be introduced, and it was resolved the Federation would write to the Local Government and Shires' Associations, advising that NSW Councils were to be withdrawn from the Federal log of claims.

Representation at Federal Conference from 1919 was: four from NSW, two from Victoria, along with one from Launceston and one from Hobart. Over the years, with Launceston and Hobart combining to form the Tasmanian Branch, and with Broken Hill becoming the South Australian Branch, representation became: four from NSW and Victoria, and one each from Tasmanian and South Australia. That representation changed proportionately over subsequent years.

Due to Australian Federal and NSW State industrial laws, the Union has in effect been two separate bodies, one the State Registered Union, and one that is affiliated as the NSW Division (subsequently Branch) of the Federal body. The Union has had four members who occupied the position of Federal Secretary for over one third of its 100-year history, namely T. J. Moroney (1928-1938); T. C. Winter (1947-1963); S. Griffith (1964-1970); and B. T. McCarney (1981-1987).

General Secretaries and other officers have at different times been elected as Federal Presidents and to other Federal positions, and the Union was very influential in Federal affairs over a long period of time. The last meeting of the MEU Federal Council was held on 30 June 1993, and from 1 July 1993 the Federal MEU joined with the Federated Clerks' Union of Australia and the Australian Municipal, Transport, Energy, Water, Ports, Community, Information and Services Union to become a new Federal Union, the "Australian Municipal, Administrative Clerical and Services Union" (the ASU) which was registered in 1993 under the Commonwealth Industrial Relations Act 1988. As a Branch within the ASU, the Union is affiliated with the Federal Union, which is represented in NSW at its Sydney office by Greg McLean, who has been an Assistant National Secretary since 1997, having been previously employed by the Union from 1979 as an Organiser, Industrial Officer, and Branch Secretary.

However, the Union retained its registration as a NSW Trade Union, an Industrial Union of Employees, and an Industrial Organisation of Employees under various changes to NSW legislation (see Chapter 1). The Union has thus maintained its own entity over 100 years, retaining its assets and membership separate from the NSW Branch, which is affiliated to the Federal organisation.

Labor Council of New South Wales

The NSW Trades and Labor Council had its first meeting on 25 May 1871, to which six unions out of a possible fifteen in Sydney sent delegates. The Council was of great assistance to unions but the depression of the 1890s seriously affected the Council and it actually went out of existence from 1894 to 1899. It was reformed in 1900 as the Sydney Labor Council and became the Labor Council of NSW in 1909.² The Union affiliated with the Sydney Labor Council in April 1903, delegates being paid 1/- [10 cents] for attendance at each meeting.³ By 1915, the Union was the eighth largest affiliate out of a total of 96 affiliated unions, and in 2002 was still one of the major unions, ranking seventh out of 70 affiliates.

One of the early issues taken up by the Union was in 1914, opposing Labor Council support for the principle that Wages Boards be constituted on craft lines. A meeting with seven other unions was organised to form: "A permanent Committee to advocate industrial unionism as against craft unionism and to safeguard the interests of industrial unionism generally". Tyrrell was elected President, and a deputation met the Minister for Labor and Industry requesting the Act be left as it was so that

Industry Boards could continue or the Act be amended to reconstitute Boards so that industrial unions could obtain Awards for the whole of their industry. As a result, the proposed legislation was shelved.⁴ This Labor Council policy caused the Union to disaffiliate during 1915.⁵ The Union maintained its campaign against craft unionism and welcomed the Lang Labor Government's initiative in replacing the Arbitration Court with the Industrial Commission of NSW, particularly the Conciliation Committee system, the operations of which the union fully supported.⁶

In 1918, leadership of Labor Council changed, and Communist influence began when Jock Garden from the Sail Makers' Union became Secretary, continuing until 1938. He was a founding member of the Communist Party (CPA) in 1920, but was expelled in 1926 and rejoined the Labor Party. When the Labor Council supported a proposal for unions to become "One Big Union" (OBU) the Union's journal, *The Counsellor*, was used effectively to counter the proposal and mobilised other unions to use their journals to attack OBU propaganda. A ballot was held within the Union in 1919, which resulted in an overwhelming vote against the proposal (1,244 votes to 383), and the Union continued rejecting OBU proposals. Because the Labor Council was using its resources to support the OBU, and also in protest against Council's policy of not supporting arbitration, the Union again withdrew affiliation in 1921.⁷ The Labor Council's generally revolutionary left wing political stance earned it the popular title of the "Trades Hall Reds" during this time. The Union re-affiliated in 1922-3, and then disaffiliated for four years from 1924, due to, amongst other issues, Council's stance of trying to keep control of the ALP from the parliamentarians.⁸ This was part of the Union's support for the parliamentary leadership of Jack Lang that is discussed in the next chapter. Lang gained sufficient support from the Miners' Federation and moderate unions such as the Printers' and the MEU to take control of the 1923 ALP Conference and Executive.⁹ During this period, the Labor Council and the ALP were on a collision course.

In 1925, Tyrrell, who was on the ALP Executive, gave notice of motion that the ALP should refuse affiliation to any union affiliated with the Labor Council while that body remained affiliated with the Third International.¹⁰ However, this motion lapsed, as it would have affected the voting at ALP Conferences. In 1930, the Executive received a report of:

A brutal attack on our President and Delegates to L.C. by the Communist element and resolved not to send Delegates until the L.C. of NSW refused to have Communists as delegates and considered Communist elements not in the best interest of the workers.¹¹

Nevertheless, the Union continued its affiliation, although in 1932 it refused to send two delegates to a Council meeting that was designed to support the formation of Socialisation Units in each union, pointing out to the Labor Council that such a request should come through the ALP.¹²

In return for the Union's opposition, Communists and their associates continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s to seek control of the Union, primarily through the Sydney Branch.¹³ In 1936, at the time Communists gained control of the Seamen's, Miners' and Australian Railway Unions, there were concerted attacks on the Union. In particular this affected Sydney Branch meetings. If inroads had been made there, they would have been followed by infiltration of country Branches. Members'

attention was drawn to these campaigns in a long 1936 article in *The Counsellor*, entitled “Communists and The Union”:

It was inevitable that the Municipal Employees’ Union should be made a target for these attacks. Various Communist papers have sought from time to time to ridicule the Union. Insulting comments are published about the officials, the executives, and the rank and file members. Defeatists, pacifists and reactionaries are some of the pet terms applied indiscriminately. Many of these Red Rags are not printed, as is the *Red Leader*, but are run off by hand duplication machines. All communications must be addressed to a box at the Haymarket Post Office. For fear of prosecutions arising out of their scurrilous attacks they omit the names of editors or publishers.

On checking up with members of other unions, one is struck by the complete similarity of tactics adopted at the Union meetings. The control of the Sydney Branch is the first important objective as far as this Union is concerned, and the campaign has been under way for some time. This campaign is being conducted along lines well established in other places.

First a nucleus of speakers has been got together, and these apostles of disruption meet regularly away from the job and scheme their schemes. When they hear of a man who is thought to be disaffected they see that he is approached with promises of powerful assistance. If he looks like being a good relentless hater who will roll up on demand and vote with the team he is roped in.

At the Central Branch meetings the units of the team sit apart from one another, pretending not to be in league, anxiously looking around counting heads and locating likely supporters. As soon as possible after the meeting is under way the Lord High Chief mouthpiece gets to his feet shouting importantly, “Comrade Chair!” He always has a sheaf of prepared notes, he always speaks in a tone of pontifical authority, he always promises not to speak for long and he always breaks his promise. Experienced members sit back with a sigh, resigned to a tedious period of boredom. They feel like schoolboys being lectured by a dull and humourless master on a hot day when they can see through the windows the cool inviting waters of the creek. They nearly all vow never to put up with such an ordeal again, which is probably what the speaker wants.¹⁴

That compelling article in *The Counsellor* in 1936 against the election of Communists was debated hotly at a Central Branch meeting, but the sentiments of the writer and the article were endorsed. In 1938, when a suspected Communist was elected President of the Labor Council, a Communist elected Vice-President, and three Communists had a majority on its five-member Disputes Committee, the Union again disaffiliated and did not re-affiliate until 1941.¹⁵ The General Secretary reported to the 1941 Annual Conference that:

Having regard to the effect of the war upon the industrial movement, and in view of the need for complete unity between the political and industrial wings of the Labor Movement, with the outstanding possibility of a Labor Government being elected to the Government of New South Wales at the forthcoming election, this Union affiliated with the Trades and Labor Council and, the affiliation being only temporary in character, appointed as delegates members who had the confidence of the members at the last annual election of officers of the Union.¹⁶

From 1941 affiliation has been continuous, and the Union has been active in Council affairs, seeking support for its campaigns particularly over many issues involving State Governments. During periods of affiliation many officers and executive members have held Executive positions both on the Council and on the 2KY Radio Station Wireless Committee. Country Branches were also encouraged to directly affiliate with local Trades and Labor Councils, following a new rule in 1919 empowering Branches to do so, subject to Executive approval.

5

Political Allegiances

The Union has always been politically affiliated, and in 1913 a rule was registered to encourage political activity in labour politics:

So long as the Union is affiliated with the Political Labor League, arrangements shall be made for members to become members or branches of the Political Labour League. The exercise of privileges of such membership shall be at the discretion of the members of the Union. Head Office and Country Branches shall arrange with local leagues as regard members within their jurisdiction.

Members were encouraged to join ALP branches, and particularly in the Sydney City and Sydney Metropolitan Council areas they had an impact on who were preselected for aldermanic positions (including some members of their own Union) and many gained employment through such connections. In the political area, the Union's policy under Jim Tyrrell was often a moderate left line, particularly in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, while after World War II it was either centre or centre right in the ALP political arena.

Whilst separate affiliation with the ALP is required, there was a clear link between the Union's political leanings at that and the Labor Council of NSW levels. They are intrinsically linked, because control of the Union by a faction industrially has a direct influence on the factional balance in the ALP. Unlike its relationship with the Labor Council, from which the Union disaffiliated a number of times, affiliation with the ALP has been continuous over 100 years. The Union maintained large delegations at ALP Conferences, and many officials and members were on the party's Executive and policy committees. There have been many splits within the party over those years but Annual Conferences of the Union mainly reaffirmed affiliation with the official NSW ALP organisation. This occasionally meant, especially during the 1930s, being at odds with the Federal ALP. As early as 1918, arrangements were made for members to become members of their local Labor branches, and the Union certainly had considerable membership in inner-city Labor branches. This enabled members to influence ALP preselection ballots, particularly in aldermanic preselection, which frequently led to the appointment of supporters to Council staff, strengthening the Union's influence.

High on the agenda was support for Labor candidates to be elected to the City Council, from whom many industrial gains were achieved for members. These elected Aldermen, even when not in a majority, were often successful in having Council agree to wage increases for members prior to the establishment of Wages Boards and during suspension of Wages Board operations in World War I. Similar relationships between Union membership of local ALP branches and influence over elected Councils can be noticed in other inner-city areas which have had their own local Councils, such as Glebe, Annandale or Redfern.

Tyrrell organised Labor campaigns for City Council elections, becoming campaign director, as did his successor Reg Triggs. Tyrrell attended rallies and stood as a candidate in 1915 City Council elections, only narrowly being defeated by a small margin in a record poll.¹ As campaign directors, they exerted considerable influence with ALP aldermen over industrial matters and that close liaison ensured support for ALP policies.²

Triggs also regularly attended City Council ALP aldermanic Caucus meetings as a representative of the party. To prevent Aldermen dealing with issues raised by members independently, it was again emphasised that only industrial issues raised by the Union could be considered by Caucus.³ An example of that influence was in 1940 when the Union insisted the ALP obtain pledges, before officially endorsing ALP candidates for Glebe Council elections, that selected candidates would reinstate five employees dismissed by an Administrator. Upon these assurances being given, donations were then made to their election campaign.⁴

Political Funding

Up until 1940, campaign donations to the Labor Party and individual candidates were paid from general funds. Following advice from the Industrial Registrar in 1940 a political fund had to be established for that purpose, and the following rule registered which continued for many years:

A political fund may be established which shall be maintained by voluntary contributions, and such fund shall be used for the furtherance of political objects. Any payments for the furtherance of such objects shall be made out of this fund. Contributions to this fund shall not be a condition of admission to membership of this Union. A member who does not contribute to this fund shall not be excluded from any benefits of the Union or placed under any disability or at any disadvantage as compared with other members of the Union by reason of his failure to so contribute.⁵

Union funds were used to support Federal, State and local government ALP election campaigns as well as contributing to individual ALP candidates' campaigns. Members also contributed individually and collectively, and in 1921 members were asked to purchase ALP-organised souvenir bonds, which cost from 5/- [50 cents] to £1 [\$2], a fairly large sum in those days. In 1930, members were asked to contribute 1/- [10 cents] to provide additional funds for City Council election campaigns, and in 1940 a separate political fund was set up under the Union's rules. This 1/- [10 cents] per year contribution was not shown separately in the annual subscription notices, although during the 1970s, following complaints by a few who did not wish to pay the levy, the annual subscription notices were altered to show it as a separate optional amount but included in the total payable. An overwhelming proportion of members continued to pay the full amount.

In addition to contributing financially on nearly every election campaign over the one hundred years, officials, organisers and many members took leave to assist, their wages being paid by the Union. Many Branch officials were active politically in their areas and attended ALP conferences as delegates from their area. In the City Council and in many metropolitan, particularly inner-city, Councils, election of Labor-controlled Councils resulted in enhanced employment opportunities for supporters and improved wages and conditions of employment.

Eight/Six Hour Labor Day Committee

The Union affiliated with the Eight-Hour Labor Day Committee from 1903, and actively supported the Committee's activities. In 1905, those who marched in the procession were given a bronze medal by the Committee.⁶ Apart from the Labor Day march, members were involved in sports days, held at Clifton Gardens, the venue of the Union's picnic for many years, and Labor Day dinners, which were grand affairs. The Union promoted the campaign in country areas, and by 1915 many Branches were participating in processions in their local areas.

Bathurst 8 Hour Day Display 1919



Source: *The Counsellor*, March 1919 p.1

By 1921, Union rules provided that the Annual General Meeting, or Annual Conference, was to commence on the Tuesday after the Monday Eight-Hour Day Holiday in October to encourage and enable country delegates to participate in the Sydney activities. The Union also strongly promoted the annual art union, which provided very substantial prizes given that the cost of a ticket was only 1/- [10 cents]. In 1930, it became the Six-Hour Day Committee and its art union was publicised as "The oldest established lottery in the Commonwealth", and in 1950 first prize was a home valued at £4,000 [\$8,000].⁷

The Centenary Dinner of the movement was held in 1955 when Gavin Sutherland, the MEU President, was also President of the Labor Day Committee. His father, 99-years old Bill Sutherland, was present, having been a foundation member of the Labor Party and an active trade unionist with the Seamen's and Clothing Trade Unions. The Union enlisted the support of the Sydney County Council and Sydney City Council to provide floats over the years. Premier J. J. Cahill MLA pointed out at the Dinner that in 1855, when Labor Day began, NSW was little better than a struggling outpost of civilisation. Union delegates continued to be very pro-active on the Committee, supporting Labor Day throughout the following fifty years of the Union history.

Eight Hour & Labor
DIAMOND JUBILEE
Demonstration and Sports,
Monday, 4th October, 1915.

GRAND ART UNION
PRIZES value £4000
(Under sanction of the Attorney-General)
 Drawn October 30, 1915.

1st Prize value £850, 2nd Prize value £450
3rd Prize value £300, and 107 other Valuable Prizes.

The First Prize last year was won by Mr. M. M. Whitt, Sydney, N.S.W., for the most rest outlay of ONE SHILLING.

Get a Ticket and have a chance for 1915.
Results of Drawing will be advertised in daily metropolitan papers on Monday, November 1, 1915. To any person forwarding stamped addressed envelope, a list of the results will be posted. Tickets may be had from Agents in all towns, or direct from—



Trades Hall, Sydney JOHN W. DOYLE, Secretary, Eight Hour Committee.

8 Hour Day Notice 1915

Source: *The Counsellor*, July 1915 p.1

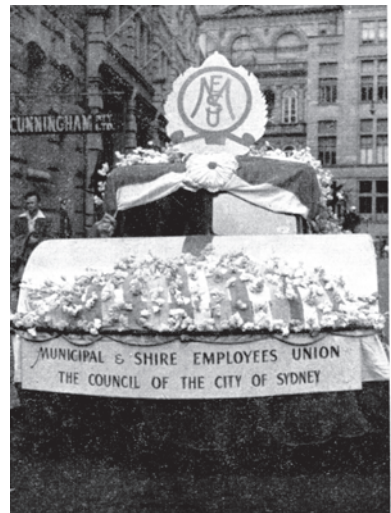
Union's 6 Hour Day Display for 1938 Procession

Source: *The Counsellor*, October 1938 p.5



Union's contingent behind the float in the Sydney 6 Hour Day Parade Centenary year 1955

Source: *The Counsellor*, December 1955 p.1



World War I Conscription

The Union was in the forefront of the campaign from 1916 opposing the proposal to conscript men between 21 and 45 years of age for overseas service in World War I. It joined with the Political Labor League (the formal title of the Labor Party at that time), and with the Labor Council in their campaigns, and urged Council to join with other States to consolidate opposition.⁸

Even though it was opposed to conscription, prominence was given to members who had volunteered for war service, with their photographs and details much publicised in *The Counsellor*. Members were encouraged to support the war effort. The story of the two Ashton boys who volunteered for war service was well publicised in the September 1915 *Counsellor* as follows, under the heading of “Two of our Boys.”

Sergeant George Robert Ashton and Private Henry Thomas Ashton, the two sons of Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Ashton of Woollahra, Sydney. Mr. G. C. Ashton is, of course, the general secretary of the Union.

Sergeant Ashton is 20 years of age and Private Ashton 18 years old. Before leaving to do their duty, they were entertained (with several of their comrades) at their parents’ home, and were presented with wristlet watches and money belts.

Sergeant Ashton was only 19-years old when war first started, and was one of the first to enlist and served at Rabaul for over nine months, where he was wounded. He was then home only a fortnight when he and his brother heard the cry of their fellow-heroes of the Dardanelles, and left to answer their call.



**MEU Volunteers
World War I, 1915**

Source: *The Counsellor*,
September 1915 p.3

SERGEANT G. R. and PRIVATE H. T. ASHTON

As the issue developed, the Union was violently opposed to Prime Minister W. M. Hughes' decision to by-pass the labour movement's opposition by holding a referendum. The Union's Executive condemned the Eight-Hour Day Committee's decision to hold a banquet in his honour in 1916 and refused to attend. The Union also called for Hughes to be expelled from the PLL and endorsed the PLL Executive's subsequent decision expelling him and other party members who supported the "Yes" campaign. The Labor Council agreed with the Union's request to withdraw credentials from delegates who were pro-conscription.⁹

It was resolved to oppose the proposed referendum as it was against the mandate of the labour movement, and the Executive placed notices in the daily press directing Sydney Branch members to stop work for 24 hours and join the Labor Council's anti conscription rally in the Sydney Domain on 4 October 1916, which was a huge success with 200,000 people attending. In 1917, the services of the President and two Organisers were lent to the "No Conscription Committee" and toured country areas enlisting support. Wages were paid to members who took leave from local Councils to assist the campaign. £100 [\$200] was donated by the Executive to the Committee, while members of Central Branch decided to pay a weekly levy until polling day, and country Branches were active in financing and supporting the campaign.¹⁰

NO - CONSCRIPTION

Members of Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees Union of Australia attention is drawn to the resolution adopted by the Federal Council ;—

“That this Conference re-affirms its determination to oppose any movement to re-introduce Conscription; and it be a request to Branches in the various States to take whatever steps they deem fit to prevent the manhood of Australia being Conscripted.”

Authorised by JAMES TYRRELL,
56 Q. V. Markets, Sydney.

**Union Notice
Opposing
Conscription
December, 1917**

Source: *The Counsellor*,
December 1917 p. 8

Tyrrell castigated the daily press campaign of support for a "Yes" vote. He pointed out that electoral rolls had been closed within a few hours of the announcement that a poll would be held, thus disfranchising up to 60,000 voters. He also condemned the decision to hold polling on a Thursday, rather than the usual voting day of a Saturday, pointing out this inconvenienced voters by them having to take time off work in order to vote. In extolling the result of a resounding 57% "No" vote in NSW on 20 December 1917, the margin being 118,000, he described it as the "Greatest fight any community ever put up for freedom".¹¹

This campaign put the Union in direct opposition both to Prime Minister Hughes' Commonwealth Labor Government and to Premier William Holman's NSW Labor Government. Both Governments split on the issue, leading Hughes and Holman to change sides to lead conservative Nationalist Governments against what was left of the Labor Party. Behind the issue of conscription was the more fundamental question of whether Labor Members of Parliament were to be accountable to the extra-parliamentary organisation – that is, mainly the trade union movement – for their conduct in Government. The Union in 1916-17 was firmly of the opinion that the union movement should direct the MPs.

Support for Lang

The principle established by the Labor Party split over conscription – the sovereignty of the union movement – was to result in chaos within the Labor Party by the early 1920s. In 1919, the Union Executive had refused to take part in a Conference organised by a bogus splinter group and expressed confidence in the current Executive.¹² In 1923, with Communists seeking to infiltrate the ALP, the Union's Executive remained solidly behind the ALP Executive's decision that no member of the ALP could belong to any other political party, and a motion seeking to overturn that decision was defeated at a Sydney Branch Meeting.¹³ Tyrrell reported to the 1924 Annual Conference that such influence was not supportive of getting unity into the party or helping to get a Labor Government elected. Conference supported the Executive and Sydney Branch stand.¹⁴

These decisions reflected an extended battle for control over the Party by, on the right the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), and on the left the newly formed Communist Party. Moderate unions and most MPs were caught in the middle. After the defeat of an ineffectual NSW Labor Government at elections in 1922, the Party threatened to implode. Out of the mess, in 1923, John Thomas Lang was elected Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party. Not only did he want to repel the Communist challenge, especially evident in the Labor Council, but he was equally determined to forestall the advance of the AWU, associated with blatant corruption and vote rigging in the Party under John Bailey's machine. Moreover, Lang saw that no Labor Government could hope to survive in NSW unless the parliamentary wing had some autonomy.

Lang's solution was to put together a coalition of moderate and anti-Communist industrial unions to support him. His main ally in the beginning was the Miners' Federation, led by Albert Willis. Although the Miners' Federation was hardly a moderate union in the 1920s, its leaders feared infiltration by the Communists and so were amenable to Lang's offers of industrial legislation to protect miners if he was elected to Government. In the 1920s, the MEU's Jim Tyrrell helped organise delegates from moderate unions to support Lang and his Miners' Federation friends, J. M. Baddeley and Willis, to gain control of the ALP Executive, resulting in Willis being elected President.¹⁵

The alliance of the Union with Lang must have caused some distress for members employed by the City Council in the Town Hall and Sydney Branches, because the decision involved a rejection of the Australian Workers' Union which controlled the City of Sydney political machine in the early 1920s. The AWU had moved into the City after the conscription crisis, supplanting the Waterside Workers' Federation that had controlled most preselections prior to that. The AWU's William Lambert was an Alderman in the City Council from 1921 till 1924, becoming Lord Mayor in 1920-1. He was

also the Federal MP for West Sydney from 1921 till 1928. Politically, Lambert owned the City, and many MEU members employed by the City Council were part of his machine. The issue was resolved in 1928, when Lambert was expelled from the Party by Lang's supporters, dying soon after. A Lang machine took over the City, installing John Beasley as the MP for West Sydney and the local boss.

It made obvious sense for the MEU to support Lang in the 1920s, since conservative Governments both federally (under Prime Minister Bruce) and in NSW (under Premier Fuller) were intent on crippling the trade union movement and winding back the advances provided by the arbitration system in previous years. Only a strong Labor Government could offer effective resistance. The Union also had an interest, noted in the previous chapter, in blocking the institutionalising of craft unionism. Part of the price for this support was that the Sydney daily press labelled all Lang's supporters, including Tyrrell, as "reds". This was no more true of the MEU than it was of Lang. Both were firmly anti-Communist.

In 1927 Lang precipitated a further split in the NSW ALP, and Jim Tyrrell supported Federal intervention in NSW affairs, pending a further State Conference to have the issues determined. He wrote to the Federal President before the ALP Federal Conference in May:

Dear Mr. Hannon,

In reference to the dispute in New South Wales, the split has become so acute that I am of the opinion the only way that the matter can be overcome and the Party welded together again is by the Federal Authorities taking control of the Movement in New South Wales, that is both the original Executive controlled by Carey and Conroy, and the Executive controlled by Seale, and convening a fresh Conference on a representative basis to be agreed upon.

If the Federal Conference decided to endorse the Carey section only, it would not in any way minimise the split, as the "Labor Daily" and Mr. Lang backing the Seale Party would still have a big percentage of the supporters of the Movement, and on the other hand if the Conference endorse the Seale Conference it will not bring the Parliamentary Party or the Carey followers behind the Seale people. I am forced to the conclusion the only possible good that can be done towards solidarity is another conference controlled by yourselves.

Yours faithfully,
(Sgd.) James Tyrrell.¹⁶

Tyrrell became a member of Lang's Inner Group which asserted influence within the party in support of Lang and he took up a position of support for Seale, who was the NSW party President, and a radical leader of the Waterside Workers' Federation.

There was controversy amongst the union's membership as to which ALP faction the Union should support, and accordingly a ballot was held, as reported in *The Counsellor*:

The Central Executive, realising there was little or no hope of the warring sections being brought together, decided to take a plebiscite vote of all members of the Union, to determine which section of the movement the Union should affiliate with. The question asked members was whether they were in favour of the Union affiliating with the Conroy-Bird executive or the Seale-Bird executive. The ballot closed on the 25th of June, 1927, and the Returning Officers, Mr. Chas. Hackett, has announced the result as follows:

In favour of Seale-Bird Executive	3,119
In favour of Conroy-Carey Executive	<u>842</u>
Majority in favour of Seale-Bird Executive	<u>2,277</u>

It is not generally known to what extent the Executive want to secure unity in the movement irrespective of overtures we made to the parties in dispute in Sydney. The General Secretary, acting under instructions from the Executive, put the position before the President of the Federal Executive of the A.L.P., with a request for intervention, prior to the dispute extending, that is, before the Easter Conference, and again prior to the Federal Conference held at Canberra. We publish hereunder copies of the communications forwarded to Mr. J. F. Hannon, Federal President.

It is a great pity the advice offered was not acted upon as there is no doubt if the Federal Executive had intervened early in the dispute, the regrettable split may have been avoided and Mr. Lang would now be leading to the poll a united Labor Party with every hope of success.¹⁷

Following the plebiscite, the Union reiterated its continued support of the Lang ALP, Tyrrell in 1927 stating:

In the past the officers and members of this Union have always taken an active part in connection with Federal, State and Municipal elections and have in no small way been responsible for the success at the Polls of selected Labour candidates and as a result our members, in conjunction with other workers in the State, have greatly benefited by Labour administration, particularly by the legislative enactments of the Lang Government. It is particularly necessary at the present time that all our efforts are concentrated on securing a return of the Lang Labour Government and Labour control in the City Council.

General Secretary Tyrrell had been a key member of Lang's support team since 1923. Along with Lang, he helped found the *Labor Daily* (see page 36) and maintained an interest in Lang's media outlets until the 1940s. By the 1930s, Lang's lieutenants were spoken of within the Party as the Inner Group, with a reputation for ruthlessness in quelling dissent in the Party, controlling preselections, and enforcing a "dictatorship" of Lang within the Party. Tyrrell had come a long way from his role in supporting trade union control over an earlier "dictatorial" Labor Premier, William Holman, over conscription in 1916. He was rewarded with a seat in the Legislative Council soon after Lang's election to Government in 1925. He had a central position in the Inner Group as Managing Director of the *Labor Daily* in the explosive years of 1931-33. He remained loyal to Lang until about 1940.

Affiliation was maintained with the Lang organisation during major splits in the ALP in the 1920s and 1930s. Eventually, Lang was replaced as Parliamentary Leader by William McKell in 1939 – a decision that was initially accepted by Lang. By that time, Lang had lost virtually all support within the union movement – left, right and centre. Tyrrell still remained one of the few members of the original Inner Group still supporting Lang (Willis and Garden had become disenchanted earlier in the 1930s). Many members of the MEU believed that Tyrrell should dissociate the Union from Lang. As Hagan and Turner reported:

The Municipal Employees' Union – of which T. J. Tyrrell, one of Lang's oldest supporters, was Secretary – battled out a motion moved by W. Evans condemning the Inner Group, and police were called in to break up the brawl.¹⁸

In 1940, in protest at the capture of the ALP State Executive by the Hughes-Evans faction which was sympathetic to the Communist Party, Lang once again split from the official ALP, founding his own "ALP (Non-Communist)". Subsequently, the Executive rejected a motion for the Union to disaffiliate from the Official Party, and instead resolved to hold a plebiscite of the membership. Both sides of the argument were given extensive coverage in *The Counsellor*, the preamble stating:

The various sections of the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales have by their action negated the unity, which was expected to be the outcome of the Unity Conference of the party of last year. The members of the Union are genuinely perturbed at the loss of hope that Labor would approach the electors at the next general elections as a solid and well-organised body. The Executive of the Union, to obtain an expression of opinion from the members as a whole, has decided to take a plebiscite ballot on the question of the Union's affiliation with either section of the Australian Labor Party. The questions to be presented to members were:

The Union affiliating with the Australian Labor Party (Non-Communist);
The Union retaining its affiliation with the present Australian Labor Party.

The result was overwhelmingly in favour of Lang's ALP (Non-Communist), being 2,563 as against 1,136 to retain affiliation with the existing ALP led in Parliament by McKell.¹⁹ Despite this result, affiliation was continued with the Official ALP although financial assistance was given to some individuals standing for election as ALP (Non-Communist) candidates, and some country Branches disaffiliated with their local branch of the Official ALP.²⁰

Lang's experiment with his new party was only short lived at that stage. The Union Executive supported the formation of a provisional ALP Executive on which there was representation from members of the NSW Legislative Assembly proportionate to their affiliation to each side, and, when the ALP sought a card vote on the question of unity, the Executive voted to support unifying the party with immunity to Members of Parliament of either section of the party, which result was achieved.²¹ After Federal intervention in the NSW ALP resulted in the dismissal of the Hughes-Evans Executive in August 1940, the Langites rejoined McKell so that the ALP was able to win the State Election in May 1941 as a fairly united party. When Lang again split from the official ALP in 1943 to form his Lang Labor Party, most of his former supporters, including the MEU Executive, refused to follow him, although a number of the Union's members continued to give him their personal support.

The Labor Daily

The labour movement had long nourished a dream of producing a daily newspaper to publicise trade union and working class views, to correct misrepresentations in other daily newspapers and to promote issues in support of the election of Labor Governments. Earlier journals, like *The Worker*, *The Australian Workman*, or *The Australian Worker*, had been funded by the Labor Council or wealthy unions like the AWU, but had always struggled to survive even as monthlies or quarterlies. In 1922, Jack Lang saw an opportunity to bring the dream to reality. Investing a considerable sum of his own savings, he amalgamated two failing publications, *Labor News* and *The Daily Mail*, and installed a management team of his supporters.

The Union took out one hundred shares in 1924, and Tyrrell was a Director for some sixteen years from that time, and Managing Director in 1931-2. Even though the paper reached a peak circulation of 60,000, it had difficulties over the years, and a levy of 10/- [\$1] was imposed on members in 1924 to support it. In 1928, although the paper had contributed to the successful election of a State Labor Government in 1925 and Labor candidates being elected to Local Councils, members were not supporting the levy and at the 1928 Annual Conference it was pointed out: “Unless the paper is supported whole-heartedly by members it cannot expect to be able to compete with the great morning dailies which have been in existence for many years.”²²

In 1927, a member successfully challenged the levy, and an appeal was lodged to go before the Chief Industrial Commissioner but was not pursued. In 1933, the Union lifted all penalties against members who had not paid the levies. Up until that time, they were regarded as unfinancial members if they had not paid the levy.

One of the battles in the late 1930s to replace Lang as Parliamentary Leader of the ALP involved trying to break his control over the *Labor Daily* and radio station 2KY. When the Labor Council was successful in this in 1937-8, the newspaper soon had to cease publication through lack of support. Lang simply established another journal to propagate his political views – *The Century* (1938-76). The MEU was still with Lang at that stage. Jim Tyrrell became one of the founding directors of the new paper.

Communism and the 1950s ALP Split

Following ALP policy from the mid 1940s forbidding members associating with the Communist Party or fellow traveller groups, a rule was inserted reaffirming such policy:

The Union may affiliate with a body established for the protection and promotion of the cause of Labor in the geographical territory of the Union by decision of the Executive and upon such terms and in such manner as the Executive by its decision prescribes.

The Communist Party or a body allied or associated with the Communist Party or a group of individuals allied or associated with the Communist Party shall be deemed to be not a body established for the protection and promotion of the cause of Labor.²³

The Union then tended towards a centre-right political stance which was further emphasised in 1950 when a new rule limiting those eligible for election embodied the Union's strong anti-Communist stance.

A member shall not be eligible for election as a member of the Executive who is a member of the Communist Party or who is a Communist, or who is allied or associated with the Communist Party, or who is one of a group of individuals allied or associated with the Communist Party.

For the purposes of this sub-rule the expression "a body allied or associated with the Communist Party", and the expression "a group of individuals allied or associated with the Communist Party", mean a body or group of individuals declared by Conference or by the Executive or by the Australian Labor Party (including a State Branch thereof) to be a body or group allied or associated with the Communist Party.²⁴

These Rules relating to the Communist Party existed for 44 years until deleted in 1993 to conform to the New South Wales Industrial Relations Act 1991.

The threat of Communist domination in the union movement led the NSW ALP in 1945 to approve the formation of Industrial Groups within the Party to contest trade union elections against Communists. By 1950, the success of these Industrial Groups in a number of important industrial unions had led to the domination of the State Executive of the ALP by Groupers or their sympathisers. Most leading figures in the NSW Labor Party, including the controllers of the City Council political machine and officials of the MEU, were moderate supporters of the Groupers, without being committed to the more radical anti-left agenda of Melbourne's B. A. Santamaria. This situation changed in the early 1950s, when the Santamaria forces started to push the Party in directions which Labor Premiers like James McGirr and J. J. Cahill found uncomfortable. The issue came to a head in 1954, when Federal Leader, Dr H. V. Evatt, denounced the Groupers and Santamaria. The Victorian ALP split disastrously in 1954-5, resulting in the formation of what eventually became the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

In NSW, after 1954, enormous efforts were made to prevent a Victorian-style split in the NSW ALP. The NSW State Executive divided into two groups, the Santamaria supporters led by J. T. Kane, Assistant Secretary of the NSW ALP, and the other led by the more moderate Secretary, W. R. Colbourne, who had formerly been a supporter of the Groupers. At the same time, the more militant industrial unions formed the "Steering Committee", along with a number of moderate unions led by the Australian Workers' Union. The MEU aligned with the left and moderates to defeat the Kane Groupers who were forced out of the Party in 1958. The Colbourne Executive maintained an ideological balance, and successfully kept the ALP and Parliamentary Party as a cohesive group in NSW, maintaining Government as against the debacle in adjoining States of Victoria and Queensland, where the split within the ALP had cost Labor government. The Kane group went on to form the Democratic Labor Party in NSW later in 1958. The MEU aligned itself strongly with the Colbourne Executive, which formed the basis of what later became the dominant "NSW Right" faction of the Labor Party. While

the Federal MEU was more closely tied in with the Federal Executive, dominated in the late 1950s by the Left's Joe Chamberlain from Western Australia, the NSW MEU maintained its support of the moderate right wing NSW Labor machine and Government.

Factional struggles within the ALP were reflected inside the Union. When the General Secretary's position became vacant in 1942, there were five candidates, only one of whom represented a serious challenge from the left, but the result of the ballot was overwhelmingly for Reg Triggs (see Chapter 6).

In 1969, the Executive resolved that the ballot for General Secretary should not be conducted by the Union's Returning Officer but should be conducted by the Electoral Commissioner for NSW. The left, and their candidate R. W. Thorburn, had made application to the Industrial Commission of NSW claiming that the rule, which provided a General Secretary on election held office until 65 years of age, should be declared void, that the term of the holder of that office should be for three years, and also that the rule limiting distribution of documents should be declared void. The application before Sheehy J. was decided on 10 September 1969 in which His Honour stated that:

I can see no reason for referring the matters on any part of them to the Commission in Court Session, nor does it appear to me that either application has any statutory basis. I conclude therefore that I have no jurisdiction to proceed to hear them and I order they be struck out.

The matters were taken on appeal to the Commission in Court Session where the three judges, President Beattie J, Cook J. and Sheldon J. on 7 October 1969 gave judgement that the Court did not have power to alter the said rules of the Union, and went on to uphold Sheehy J.'s conclusions, dismissing the appeal.

Due to the legal action, the original dates for the ballot were extended by the Electoral Commissioner and closed on 22 October 1969. The precis of activities of candidates was submitted to the Union and circulated, and in addition each candidate put out their own publicity. Thorburn's newsletters, titled *Sweep*, demand better administration, better leadership and a better deal within the MEU.

The result of the ballot showed:	P. McMahon	9,413 votes
	R. W. Thorburn	2,368 votes

Union ballots after that election continued to be conducted by the Electoral Commission of NSW.

6 General Secretaries

The General Secretary occupies a special place in the Union's rules, being in effect the Executive Officer, having overall responsibility for the administration and effective functioning of the Union in all spheres of operation. This involves initiating and implementing policies, as well as representing and overseeing negotiations in industrial and related matters. By understanding the periods during which each General Secretary held office, and the different challenges they faced, one can readily appreciate how issues progressed during the years of their respective stewardships.

Martin Hannon (1903-1904)

He commenced work as a labourer with City Council in 1870, and was one of the seven men who signed the application for the Union's registration (see page 2). He became General Secretary in 1903 for some eighteen months, but continued working for Council since the position was only honorary.¹

P. Perry (1905-1906)

He began work in 1901 with City Council as a clerk-assets, and in 1905, when elected honorary General Secretary, received £13 [\$26] per half year to cover his expenses.²

George Ashton (1906-1918)

He was closely associated with the Operative Stonemasons' Society until joining the Union in 1903, when he became actively involved and was elected General Secretary in 1906.³ He continued to work in the City Council since the position was honorary until 1911, receiving £20 [\$40] per annum. In 1910, when applications were invited for a full time General Secretary, 23 were received, 17 of whom belonged to other unions, while two were not members of any Union. The Executive selected five to go to a ballot, one from the Federated Engine Drivers' Union (that was Martin Hannon, the first General Secretary), two from the United Labourers' Union, one from the Broken Hill Union, and George Ashton from the MEU.⁴ The ballot was held at the half-yearly meeting in January 1911 and Ashton was elected, following which he resigned from Council, taking up full time duties at a salary of £3.10. 0. [\$7] per week.⁵

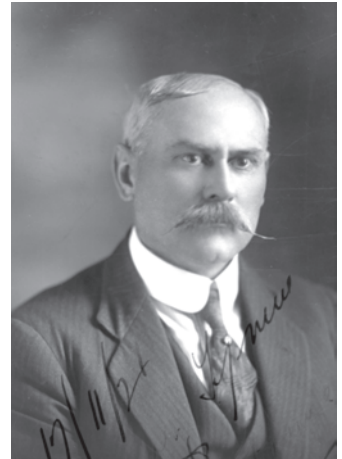
Ashton represented the Union on the Country Municipal and Shire Council Wages Board and was constantly taking up issues with Councils to have grievances redressed. He also played a conspicuous part in building the Union's membership from the original 35 in 1903 to over 6,400 by 1918 (see Table 1). After a long illness, he died in 1918 at the age of 59, survived by a widow and grown-up family. He was buried in the Anglican Section of Waverley Cemetery, the Executive providing expenses for his funeral.⁶



George Ashton
Source: Municipal
Employees Union

Thomas James (Jim) Tyrrell (1918-1942)

Tyrrell commenced work in 1894 at fourteen years of age as a labourer in the City Council.⁷ In his own words: “He first became a unionist whilst working on a public holiday in the cleansing department when he overheard a little girl passing by ask ‘are those men convicts?’”⁸ He was President from 1905 to 1918, working closely with George Ashton, first in an honorary capacity until 1911, and after resigning from City Council in 1911 he became the full-time paid President. Together they were responsible for expanding the Union’s membership to cover Council employees throughout suburban and country areas. He became General Secretary in 1918 following Ashton’s death, and the position of President then reverted to an honorary one. The General Secretary at that time was paid £500 [\$1,000] per year, the President 5/- [50 cents] per meeting, and the Treasurer £15 [\$30] per year. This was an improvement from 1905, when the General Secretary received £26 [\$52] per year, the President £2 [\$4] per year and the Treasurer £3 [\$6] per year.⁹



Jim Tyrrell

Source: Municipal Employees Union

Tyrrell was physically a big man and a strong advocate for workers’ rights. He spoke quickly and in staccato tones, and a journalist at the time remarked that he “spoke in shorthand”. President Kaine referred to his integrity, likeable personality, shrewd mentality and broad tolerance. T. Molloy from the Town Hall Branch stated it was solely Tyrrell who brought white-collar workers into the Union.¹⁰ He represented employees in their appeals to Councils and Courts, and his advocacy resulted in substantial improvements to Award wages and conditions of employment, setting a standard for the future.

He integrated his industrial and political activities and fostered the election of Labor aldermen in local government. He became an Executive member of the ALP in 1916 and Vice-President in 1922, which position he held for some years. He was also a delegate to Federal ALP Conference and campaign director for the ALP in 1925, which campaign resulted in the successful election of the Lang State Labor Government. In association with J.T. Lang and A.C. Willis, *The Labor Daily* newspaper was launched to propagate Labor causes industrially and politically, and he served on its Board from 1922, becoming Managing Director during 1931, serving until 1938.¹¹ He was also a Director of Labor Motor Funerals. He was one of the strongest supporters of Lang’s leadership in the Labor Party, serving as a central figure in Lang’s Inner Group.

In 1925 he was nominated for the Legislative Council of NSW by the Lang Government, becoming The Honourable T.J. Tyrrell MLC, which position he held until his death in 1942, being re-elected in 1933 for a nine-year term. He was a member of the Local Government Superannuation Board from 1927.¹²

He was active in the Federation of the Union, becoming Federal President from 1921 until 1942, and was heavily involved in preparing and advocating Federal Award claims, as well as claims for NSW Awards.

After his death, among the many tributes throughout the community for his fine work, the then President J. Kaine summed him up thus:

His funeral cortege bore eloquent testimony to his qualities as a man and friend. The world in which he moved brought him honour and respect for his wisdom, achievements and integrity, coupled with a likeable personality, a shrewd mentality and a broad tolerance. These attributes gained for him success in all his ventures.

All his dealings bore the flavour of fairness, which marked him for the sportsman he was. Ever ready to enlist in a good cause, he evinced a pleasurable pride without boast in all he achieved. Possessed of a remarkably generous nature, his humane acts were countless and brightened many a gloomy countenance.¹³

In 1944, a Jim Tyrrell Memorial Fund was initiated, chaired by the Lord Mayor with President Kaine as the deputy chairman, to provide a simple headstone on his grave and to donate a bed to a public hospital.¹⁴

Reginald Arthur (Reg) Triggs AASA (1942-1969)

Triggs had applied for a clerical position with the City Council, and Tyrrell selected him from the applicants to become an indentured clerk with the Union in 1920.¹⁵ In 1924, Annual Conference created a position of Assistant General Secretary and he was appointed in 1925, subsequently completing his Accountancy Degree.¹⁶ In 1943, following Tyrrell's death, he was elected General Secretary by 3,782 votes against the combined total of 579 received by the other six candidates.

He acquired a great knowledge of Union administration, tactics and strategy under his mentor and predecessor Tyrrell, with whom he had worked for 22 years. In 1939, A.R. Bluett, Secretary of the Local Government and Shires' Associations, who had known Triggs for nineteen years, acknowledged his ability, referring to his "old head on young shoulders". Attesting to his advocacy it was stated in 1954 that:

He was a skilful negotiator, is a firm believer in the principles of conciliation and the very high standard, both as regards wage and salary levels and conditions of employment, of our New South Wales Awards attests to his success in the employment of such methods".¹⁷

In another tribute to his service it was stated:

... he is a master in the art of negotiation – always has a complete understanding of his subject. His advocacy is always built on solid foundations, so that when the word picture is painted, his points are clear to all. But, above all, to allies and opponents alike, Reg Trigg's word has always been his bond.¹⁸

He ensured NSW had a permanent position in Federal Union affairs, being Senior Vice-President from 1945 and Federal President for ten years from 1959.¹⁹ He successfully combined Union and ALP politics, being a member of the NSW State Executive from 1944 to 1969. He was ALP campaign



Reg Triggs

Source: Municipal Employees Union

director for City Council aldermanic elections over the years, and attended aldermanic Caucus meetings, putting him in a unique position to further Union members' interests in City Council affairs. He served as a Councillor on the Sydney County Council from 1950 for six years and for varying terms to 1969, including election as Chairman in 1953 and in two subsequent years, which gave him another forum to protect and enhance member's interests.²⁰

He was a delegate to the Labor Council, and was elected by Council to the ACTU Executive in 1941 and 1942. As part of this role he made a number of national radio broadcasts in 1942, 1943 and 1944, advocating the cause of trade unions during the war years and arguing the need for a new social order stating:

You cannot plan a New Social Order, plan for Socialism, or make plans to achieve better industrial conditions, once your armies are overthrown and the triumphant barbarian enemy sweeps away your institutions and your democratic machinery of Government by force of arms overnight. By a New Social Order we mean the abolition of slums and the abolition of long queues outside public hospitals where aged workers struggle feebly to secure medical attention.²¹

He also attended the International Labor Organisation Conference in Geneva in 1956 as a representative on the Civil Engineering and Public Works Committee.²²

The daily press made bitter attacks on Triggs when he was elected Chairman of the Sydney County Council in 1953, and on reviewing his successful term in office, one issue of protecting members interest was highlighted when, according to *The Counsellor*:

... the Sydney Press, reported Councillor Henson, had alleged that it was the intention of the New South Wales Government to absorb the Sydney County Council in the Electricity Commission of New South Wales. Reg Trigg as Chairman approached the Government and obtained an unequivocal denial of the truth of the allegations attributed to Councillor Henson. "The last thing that concerns some people when they rush to the newspapers is the means of livelihood of others", commented Reg at the time. The year was highly successful in every way. It was characterised by good industrial relations throughout the service and by the growth of good will.²³

He closely monitored and promoted superannuation matters on behalf of members. Following Jim Tyrrell's death he was appointed to the vacancy, becoming one of three members of the Local Government Superannuation Board and serving from 1934 to 1969. Reg Triggs was the Union's longest serving General Secretary, retiring in 1969 at 65 years of age, having given a lifetime of nearly fifty years service to the Union.

Peter McMahon AM (1969-1982)

Born in Wagga Wagga in 1931, McMahon spent his early years in Ladysmith until he was eight, when, following his father's death, he had to move to Sydney. On commencing employment as a clerk with the Sydney County Council in 1948, he joined the Union, becoming a Union delegate and a member of the Committee of Management, a position he continued to occupy after being transferred to the Electricity Commission of NSW in 1952. In 1954 he started employment with the Union, and in 1959 was appointed Branch Secretary of two Branches, the Public Utilities Salaries Officers' Association Branch and the Local Government Officers' Branch. He became Assistant General Secretary in 1963 and, following Triggs retirement in 1969, was elected General Secretary by 9,413 votes to the left faction's candidate, R.W. Thorburn, who received 2,368 votes.



Peter McMahon

Source: Municipal Employees Union

The ACTU in 1960 selected him as the Australian trade unionist to visit Britain and Europe for six months as an Imperial Relations Trust Bursar. In this position he gained immeasurable insights into local government, international trade unionism and politics in the countries he visited.

He acknowledges he was always conscious of the advice and tactics of Reg Triggs (with whom he worked for 15 years), as well as the advocacy of Rex Wood. Also influential were the policies and stands taken by Terrence Winter, a former Town Hall Branch Secretary and subsequently Federal Secretary, whose politics were moderate left and who was recognised for his astuteness and tenacity of purpose when pursuing issues and policy on behalf of members.

He became Federal President of the Union in 1970, a position he held until 1982, and was a leading figure in NSW unionism and politics, combining both aspects to advance the interests of the Union and trade unionism generally. He became a member of the ALP State Executive in 1969, then a member of the newly formed ALP Administrative Committee from 1971 to 1982. He also served on three ALP committees allied to the Union's interests – Chairman of the Local Government Policy Committee, and Secretary of the Local Government Administration Committee and the Industrial Committee.

His interest in Labor Council affairs commenced as a delegate in 1954, becoming Chairman of the Public Utilities Service Group of Unions in 1958, elected Executive member in 1960 and Vice-President in 1974. When elected President in 1975 at 43 years of age he was the youngest President in the history of the Council. He retired in 1982. For those 7 years he was also Chairman of Directors of Radio Station 2KY.

In 1973, he became an Honourable Member of the Legislative Council of NSW, where he forcefully entered debates on local government, industrial issues, workers' compensation, local government superannuation, local government boundaries, and other matters essentially in the interests of Union members. He decided not to renominate when the Legislative Council was restructured in 1981.

He had a strong interest in ACTU affairs, brought about by his close association with Albert Monk, President of the ACTU, Terry Winter, and Jim Kenny, Secretary of the Labor Council. He

attended and spoke at ACTU bi-annual Congresses, and addressed ACTU Conferences on equal rights for women, automation and technology. In 1979, he was nominated for Vice-President of the ACTU and, although he had support across the spectrum including the moderate left, the position of Junior Vice-President went to the left by 449 to 443 votes.²⁴

Like his predecessors he served as a member of the Local Government Superannuation Board from 1976 to 1982, seeking to advance superannuation issues on behalf of members.

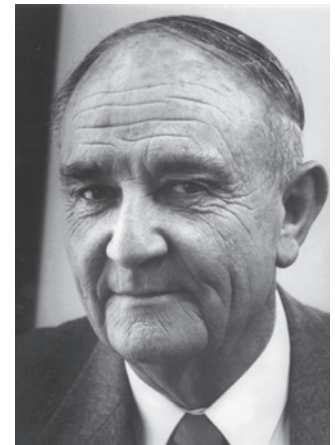
He was appointed a member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1982 for services to trade unionism and the community. He resigned as General Secretary in the same year on being appointed to the Industrial Commission of New South Wales, becoming “The Honourable Deputy President Peter McMahon AM”.



Joseph William (Joe) Cahill OAM (1982-1989)

Joe Cahill was born in 1924 at the Native Rose Hotel Chippendale, where his father was the licensee. He was educated at St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, and following his schooling enlisted in the AIF during the Second World War and saw action with the 55/53 Infantry Battalion in New Guinea from 1942 to 1946, gaining the rank of Sergeant.²⁵

After the war he worked in various clerical positions, joining the Union on commencing service in the Electricity Commission of NSW in 1953, following which he was appointed to the Union in 1963 to act as Secretary of the Public Utilities Salaries Officers' Association Branch. In 1964 he became Assistant Industrial Officer, Industrial Officer in 1965, and Assistant General Secretary in 1970, as well as Branch Secretary of the Senior Officers' Association Branch, a position held from 1969. He was elected unopposed as General Secretary in 1982.



Joe Cahill

Source: Municipal
Employees Union

He was a kindly man, a conscientious advocate for members and successful in Award negotiations and representations to Councils on many issues. He was active in local ALP politics and was an Alderman on Concord Council from 1962 to 1968. He was a member of the ALP Administration Committee for seven years until 1989.²⁶

In 1973, he was appointed to the State Government's Superannuation Advisory Committee and in 1982 to the Local Government Superannuation Board, and in 1985 to the new Public Authorities Superannuation Board.²⁷

In 1988, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the trade union movement and the community. He retired at the age of 65 in 1989. President G. Smith, in paying tribute to him, said: “Joe Cahill has four institutions his life has revolved around; they are his family, the Municipal Employees' Union, the Church and the Australian Labor Party. Anything else was secondary to him”.

John Joseph (Jack) Merchant (1989-1998)

Jack Merchant was born at home, 17 Albion Lane, Surry Hills, in 1929, and began employment as an apprentice boot-maker, a trade he followed until 1951. In that year he joined the Sydney County Council as a fitters' labourer at Bunnerong Power Station, subsequently becoming a Union Delegate for the MEU, and then an Executive Member from 1963.

He was appointed an Organiser in 1965, an Industrial Officer in 1982, and Assistant General Secretary in 1987. He was elected unopposed as General Secretary in 1989. In the 1990s he implemented structural changes and introduced new technology in the Union.²⁸ He was also at the forefront of award restructuring for the industry.

He was a delegate to the Labor Council for many years and was on the ALP Administrative Committee for nine years until 1998. During his time the superannuation scheme devolved to independent industry-funded entities and he was a member of the Board. He resigned as General Secretary in 1998.



Jack Merchant

Source: Municipal Employees Union

Brian William Harris (1998 –)

Brian Harris was born in 1946 at Kiama and grew up in the small farming community at Jamberoo on the NSW South Coast. He left school at the age of 14 to work in rural industry, and at 18 started working at the Port Kembla Steel Works.

He joined the Union in 1966 on commencing employment as a plant operator with Holroyd Municipal Council, where he became the Union Delegate. The members in that Council were covered by the Parramatta Branch, and he was elected honorary Branch Secretary in 1973 and a Union Organiser in 1978, resigning in 1989.

He again began employment with the Union in 1991 as Industrial Officer/Organiser at the Newcastle Office, becoming the first regionally-based Industrial Officer.²⁹ In this position he was involved in transforming a classification system to a skilled-based Local Government State Award which covered most Councils in NSW. He became Acting Assistant General Secretary in 1997, was confirmed in the position by the Executive in 1998, and elected General Secretary in 1999.



Brian Harris

Source: Municipal Employees Union

He has overseen major changes to the Union's structure, and established the Union in new headquarters in Pitt Street, Sydney. Facing the challenge of legislative and other industrial changes, he has proceeded with Award restructuring changes of a magnitude never before envisaged in the Union's long history. As he stated in 1998:

The words we use today are really foreign to a lot of our members. Some members have difficulty understanding issues such as progression rules, national competency standards and assessments.

He also observed:

I have some concerns that the trade union movement fell into a bit of a trap with the (Hawke Government) Wages Accord. We got ourselves into a situation where we were prepared to trade conditions for money, and I don't think it helped our image. We have to be credible, and to be credible we have to provide for the needs of our members. Some basic things we have to provide are job security, maintenance of living standards and job satisfaction.

Speaking of the merger in 1982 between the City Council and South Sydney Council, he commented:

We had to develop new Awards to cover the combined groups. It was a period in my career that showed me the Union was much bigger than the issues I covered in Holroyd Council. It gave me an opportunity to look at every aspect of what was required of an official organiser from negotiating through to developing Awards.³⁰

Although, unlike previous General Secretaries, he has not sought major political or industrial positions, he has vigorously implemented Union campaigns to achieve specific goals. His reorganisation of the Union's staffing and structure benefited the Union's advancement into the 21st Century. He has strongly supported women having a more direct say in the Union's affairs, and has been responsible for employing more women in Union positions than previously. His pleasant disposition has not detracted from his determination to stand firm and promote members' interests, even in the face of overwhelming odds in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to anti-union trends and legislation. Under his leadership the Union's assets exceeded twelve and a half million dollars at the time of the Union's centenary. He has been the driving force in achieving the merger with the NSW Clerks' Union (see Chapter 20).

7

Presidents

Thomas James (Jim) Tyrrell (1905-1918)

He began in an honorary capacity but, because of the huge workload involved in expanding the Union and servicing members, the position of President became a full time paid position for Jim Tyrrell in 1911. He represented members at their appeals with the City Council, negotiated Awards for that service, and subsequently Awards for suburban and country Councils, and was actively engaged in political affairs. As was the tradition in that period, men of all occupations wore hats, and at an Executive meeting in 1912 he was obliged to request all Executive members to remove their hats during such meetings.¹ When he became General Secretary in 1918, the President's position again became an honorary one, which continued into future years. For further details of his career see Chapter 6.

John Kaine (1918-1952)

He was born in 1883 in Kent Street near the Sydney Town Hall, and in 1914 commenced employment with City Council as a carter, subsequently becoming a stableman (in charge of horses). In 1921, he became a sanitary inspector in the City Council's Health Department and was promoted through the salaried positions of Pure Food and Meat Inspector to Senior Health Inspector. He was held in great esteem by Council, which granted him a gratuity of £300 [\$600] on retirement in 1948, in addition to his entitlements.²

He joined the Political Labor League in 1902, and became an Executive member of the ALP in 1927. He was very active in local affairs, becoming President and Secretary of Dulwich Hill Branch and Vice President of Maroubra Branch. He was a tireless worker for the successful election of Labor candidates to the City Council. He was a delegate to the Labor Council, and strongly supported its political agenda for legislation for workers' compensation, widows' pensions, and child endowment. He was one of the Union's Auditors before becoming President, a position in which he served for 34 years, also serving as Federal President. At his farewell function in 1952 he recalled:

Roy Hendy, the Town Clerk, has been in the Council's services for 46 years. I've been in it for nearly 40 years, but I did not think when I joined that, at the age of 69 years I would still be in it. Forty years ago, a doctor told me, for the 2/6 [25 cents] fee charged in those days – not to ride my bicycle or I would drop dead with heart trouble, but I poured his medicine down the sink and kept riding my bike. Here I am. (Laughter.)



John Kaine
Source: Municipal
Employees Union

He recounted many Union experiences of the past, referring to the fact that when he joined the staff of the City Council, a member had to keep a horse and cart in addition to himself and his dependents – all on £3/12/- [\$7.20] a week! ³He died in 1964, having been President for one third of the Union's hundred-year history and been granted Life Membership in 1951.

Jack Kaine's Commemorative Life Membership Certificate



Source: Municipal Employees Union

Gavin Hamilton Sutherland (1952-1967)

He was born in 1893 in Gloucester Road in the Rocks area of Sydney, a very working class area where he received his grounding in Labor politics. His father was Vice-President of the Seamen's Union, goaled for fourteen days with 400 other seamen during his term of office following a strike. Gavin joined the Labor Party in 1909 and attended his first PLL Conference in 1911, and continued to do so for the next 58 years. He became Secretary of the PLL West Sydney Federal Electorate Council in 1915 and the following year moved endorsement of the PLL Executive's decision to expel W. M. Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, over his support for conscription, an issue which had deeply divided the party. He was elected to the PLL Executive in 1917, a position he held for many years. He was a delegate to the Labor Federal Executive in 1918, 1919 and 1920, and attended the Interstate Conference in Perth, when the party name was changed to the Australian Labor Party. His strong stand for unionism never faltered all his life, and he recalled at his retirement in 1967 that:

I was a foundation member of the Letter Carriers' and Postal Workers' Union, got caught up in the 1917 strike, refused to load scab bags on the scab trains and I never went back to the Commonwealth Public Service. The postal workers could not make me a life member because there was no provision in their rules, but they made me an honorary organiser.

After the strike he was employed at Cockatoo Docks in Sydney where he was, for a short time, Vice President of the Federal Ironworkers' Association. He then joined the Australian Workers' Union, becoming an Officer of that Union from 1918 to 1925.

He was first employed as a messenger in the City Council at 16 years of age, but resigned after eighteen months. He rejoined Council as a labourer in 1925, becoming a Union delegate and was transferred to the Sydney County Council in 1936, subsequently being appointed a clerk. He refused to work overtime during all his career, as he considered by so doing it deprived other people of work.

Before becoming President he was Trustee and Vice-President and became an Honourable Member of the Legislative Council in NSW for fourteen years from 1956 where he was ALP Party Whip from 1961. He was a delegate to Labor Council for thirty years, as well as to many ACTU Congresses, and for twenty years was an Executive member of the Labor Day Committee. He died in 1970 at the age of seventy-seven.⁴

Edward (Eddie) Wright (1967-1973)

Eddie was employed in the Cleansing and Markets Department of the City Council, progressing from delegate to an Executive member, then to Vice-President in 1965, before becoming President in 1967. He was a delegate to the Labor Council and ALP Annual Conferences and, after retiring from the Presidency, continued to attend Union Executive meetings as a Trustee. He was a member of the Labor Council's 2KY Wireless Committee for 26 years.

Jack Foyle epitomised him on his retirement in 1973 saying: "His honesty and fairness, coupled with his wonderful knowledge of the Trade Union movement in NSW, helped to guide this Union to a standing in the Trade Union movement second to none".

John Joseph (Jack) Foyle (1973-1986)

He was born in 1920, and started employment in the City Council in 1945 as a market attendant, before transferring to the Cold Stores in 1960. When the Sydney Farm Produce Market Authority was formed, taking over Council's Market Department and Cold Storage Areas, he was transferred to Flemington where he became an Overseer. He also became a Board Member of the Authority in 1978.

His progress in the Union commenced in 1951 when he was elected, after an exhaustive ballot, as delegate at the Market Department, and in the following year he was elected to the Executive, becoming Vice-President from 1970 for three years, then President. He was a delegate to the Labor Council from 1953, and attended ALP Conferences for over thirty years. He also was a delegate to the Union's Federal Council, becoming Federal Vice-President in 1979 and Federal President from 1982. He was President for thirteen years, during which time with his rather gentle demeanour he fulfilled his duties in a most sincere manner.⁵

Geoffrey Hamilton (Geoff) Smith (1986-1995)

Geoff was born in Moree and first started work in the industry in 1967 in the Sydney County Council at the Pymont Transport Depot. He was then employed as a labourer with Wyong Shire Council in 1974, progressing to become a Senior Ganger. Shortly after joining Wyong Council he became a Union delegate in 1975, then Secretary and subsequently President of Gosford/Wyong Branch. During this period he became a Union Trustee prior to becoming President. He was a delegate to Annual Conferences and ALP Conferences for many years. He recalls that whilst a delegate to Federal Council he organised a barbecue on the Central Coast for interstate delegates which healed a

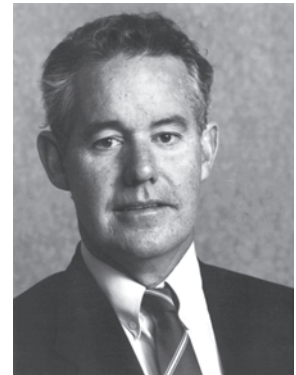
rift that had developed between interstate delegates. He was a strong advocate of establishing closer liaison with members at the workplace level.

George Leonard Humphries JP (1995-1999)

He was born in 1949 at Richmond NSW, and was a Storemen and Packers Union delegate for ten years prior to commencing employment in local government with Blacktown Municipal Council in 1978. In 1980 he became an MEU delegate and was elected to the Executive in 1987, becoming President in 1995. He represented the Union on the Federal Body during the 1990s. He joined the ALP in 1974, and held a number of branch positions and was a delegate to NSW ALP Conference from 1990 to 1998. During his term, he supported changes to the Union's structure, which involved the establishment of Regional Offices.

Stephen John (Steve) Birney (1999 -)

He was born in 1955, and raised in the village of Mooball in the Tweed Valley in north-eastern NSW. Upon leaving school at fifteen years of age he had numerous jobs, including five years in the sand mining industry before commencing as a plant operator with Tweed Shire Council in 1979. He became a Union delegate, as well as being elected to various Branch positions including that of Secretary of Tweed Branch and then Northern Branch Secretary in 1994, representing that Branch on the Executive before becoming Union President. Security in employment combined with safe working practices were some of his priorities for members. In representing members in negotiations his stated position was: "united we bargain, divided we beg".



**Steve Birney
President in the
Centenary Year**

Source: Municipal
Employees Union

8

Organising over the Years

For over 80 years, Organisers were required to spend considerable time away from their families visiting country areas. They were required to canvass and endeavour to enrol new members, to be aware and advise on the various Awards applicable to the multiplicity of classifications in local government, and advise on workers' compensation, safety and many other issues. They also had to be knowledgeable on political issues, and able to advise how legislation at various Government levels impacted on unions' and employees' industrial rights.

The expanded Union constitution (see Chapter 1), enabling enrolment of members throughout country areas, required the two honorary Union officers to traverse the State until 1911. Leave of absence from the City Council was obtained for the President and Secretary for a month at a time to enable them to organise throughout country and metropolitan areas. In 1915, President Ashton reported:

That he visited Tamworth, Manilla, and Barraba last month. He succeeded in forming branches at the latter two places, all the men present joining the Union. Matters are very smooth at Tamworth, the men, on the whole, stating that the Councils are treating them well and are observing the Award. He also visited Goulburn, Wagga, and Albury on the southern line, reports that the Union position along this line is very satisfactory. He also visited Ballina, Lismore, Alstonville, and Grafton in connection with the Wages Board that is hearing evidence in connection with our claim on behalf of the employees of contractors to the Municipal and Shire Councils. He considers that his visit in this quarter will have a very good effect. The labour movement is not very strong on the rivers, and in consequence employees do not display much enthusiasm in connection with Union matters. However, we have some very good workers amongst our members in this part, who can be relied upon to keep the flag flying if they obtain a little assistance from the Central Executive. Two of the branches required re-organising, and the others were fairly flourishing. In the course of his trip he added over 40 new members. Also, by the appointment of delegates, he arranged matters so that the branches can carry on business for at least two years without a further visit.

Late in 1915, a temporary Organiser was appointed for the metropolitan area. In 1917, a permanent Country Organiser, P. J. (Paddy) Ross, was appointed, followed by, in 1921, a permanent Metropolitan Organiser.

Modes of Travel

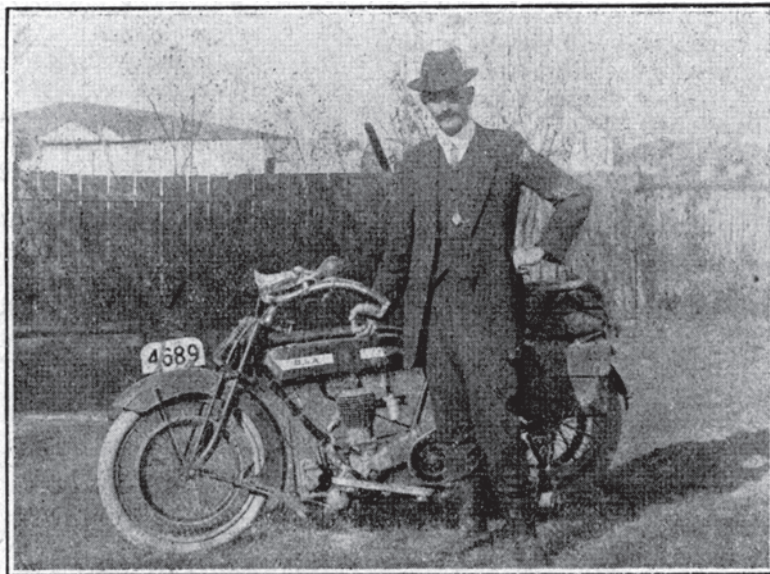
Early modes of travel were primitive. At first, bicycles enabled Organisers to get around the metropolitan area. A typical reaction to this was the comment of one Organiser when he was pleased to get a motor

bike: “The old push bike was only slavery”. Not that motor bikes were the complete answer to all problems. In 1919, the Lismore Branch Secretary advised that Organiser Paddy Ross had “tramped eight miles in the mud visiting a gang in Nimbin, impossible to get his motor bike there”. Another Organiser stated: “I have had to learn to ride a motor cycle in order to get a licence, and all I knew about a motor cycle was to make roads for them to run along”. Paddy Ross recounted this story of his experience:

For some years I used a BSA motor cycle to get around the country. In those days there were very few bridges or culverts. I found it necessary to carry a long, strong leather belt which I would run through the front forks of the bike, partially undress, strap the belt as short as possible, run my head through the strap, lift the front of the bike up and lead it through the water.

The magneto was very low and, of course, this had to be kept out of the water. A wet magneto meant a “stay of proceedings,” as the judges say. I have frequently been stranded in the bush with a small tent-fly and a rug as a house and bedding for a few days.¹

Paddy Ross with Motor cycle, 1918



Source: *The Counsellor*, August, 1918

Areas to be covered were immense. For example, in Cessnock alone, Organiser J. Flanagan reported in 1916:

On arrival at Cessnock, I found the sanitary inspector a real good fellow who put me wise where I could find the men, and told me it would take four days at least in a motor car to get round the shire. Then the odds would be against me finding them all. However, I took a risk with the nearest gang, which totalled 13. The men knew nothing whatever about me and were surprised at my visit. We had a good

talk over Union matters and they decided that if the rest joined they would. They also told me it would be madness for me to travel the shire looking for the others. I suggested they give me names and addresses of the various gangers, comprising 80 men, and I would write them to tell their men to call a meeting for any Saturday afternoon and I would again visit Cessnock and make them all members.²

Another way of getting around was described by J. Flanagan in 1920:

The engineer at Drummoyne, Mr. Lamrock, is an all-round sport to his fingertips. On my visit he drove me in his sulky all over Drummoyne and Five Dock, and went to no end of trouble to assist me in enrolling new members and collecting arrears; he believes in every man joining the union; he recognises the benefits the men are deriving through our efforts. Wish every suburban engineer were of the same opinion. I offer him my heartiest thanks for his kindness and assistance.³

A thorough investigation into the cost of a motor car compared with a motor bike was conducted in 1921. Although the conclusion was that it would cost more, it was also found that time would not be lost with frequent breakdowns and repairs. Subsequently, a second hand motor car was purchased, and similar vehicles continued to be purchased for the next thirty years. In 1941, due to the petrol rationing in force during World War II, Organisers had to visit country and metropolitan areas by public transport until eventually gas producer units were fitted to the cars to supplement limited petrol resources.⁴

Health difficulties

The Barraba Branch Secretary reported on conditions in his area in 1919, when the Organiser visited:

P. J. Ross, better known as the “Voice in the Wilderness,” arrived at Bingara on Saturday, July 5th. Unfortunately, the reed shaken with the wind arrived at Bingara at a period when the town was enveloped with the ‘flu’, and Ross was kindly informed by the local sergeant that gatherings of the character desired by Ross were prohibited. However, a number of members of the Bingara branch had been informed that the industrial reed would present himself at 7.30 on this particular evening, and in response a few members and returned soldiers turned up at the old meeting place, and Ross, who is used to inhaling the fresh air of the mother of ducks and the backblock billabongs, expanded his chest and delivered his address in the open air and the blithering cold.⁵

Conditions were not much better in Sydney. In 1922, the City Council’s Health Officer, Dr. Purdy, reported to the Council that:

During the month of February the mortality rate of 7.46 per 1000 of population per annum was 6 per cent below the average of the previous five years – “probably the lowest record for the month ever known in Sydney. How satisfactory the reduction of the death rate has been, is realised and emphasised by the fact that the

deaths have been below the average in all age groups except 65 years and over,” the report continues.

An even more remarkable reduction, and one which, could it continue, “would give Sydney an enviable reputation throughout the whole world”, it is pointed out, is that in the infantile mortality rate.

Dealing with plague, Dr. Purdy records that while there was an unfortunate case of human infection only recently, the last authentic case of an infected rat being found in the city area was on February 22, 1922. Since 23 September 1921, 31,419 rats had been killed in the city and 17,930 in the suburbs.

Organising and Recruiting

Metropolitan Organiser J. Flanagan commented in 1915 on difficulties in encouraging membership:

You meet some hard cases in your travels. One of the Shire hands around Tamworth asked me how long the Union had been in existence and I told him 15 years. He went very sore on me for not calling on him earlier, stating that, if it took me 15 years to find him, he'll take the same time to consider about joining. I told him the Shire Clerk sent me to him and that altered matters, I think he will be one of our new recruits next month.

Reluctant members were dealt with in different ways. At Pearl Street Depot of the City Council in May 1916, members refused to work with three non-unionists. Two joined up, and immediately the Organiser and Ganger told the third employee he should report to the Town Hall to ascertain his position as he could not hold the jobs to be done because of his stubbornness. He returned the next day and the Organiser joined him up.

Conditions were described by P. Ross in 1921: “Sanitary men in many country depots have no shelter for dining or even taking a bath tub to wash prior to returning to their homes to safeguard their dependants’ health”. Camping conditions were extremely poor; tents were provided but few other comforts, and on-the-job conditions were not much better. There were many casual workers, and Councils were constantly refusing to pay them for public holidays and also denying permanent employees a full week’s pay in such weeks. The issues were constantly being taken up by Organisers, and the General Secretary wrote to Waverley, Drummoyne and Rockdale in 1915 in connection with the non-payment of daily hands for Eight-Hour Day:

It has been reported to the Union that your Council did not pay some of its employees for Eight-hour Day. I would draw your attention to the provisions of the Award of July 7, 1915, covering the men referred to, which provides that employees with two months’ continuous service are to be paid for that day and other public holidays mentioned.⁶

A typical Organiser's report by Paddy Ross from Tenterfield in 1927 can be found in *The Counsellor*:

Dear Editor, - Since my last report I have visited Junee, Cootamundra, Forbes, Parkes, Grenfell, Cumnock, Orange, Millthorpe, Kyogle, Bathurst, Blayney, Sofala, Hill End, Mudgee, Gulgong, Werris Creek, Tamworth, Wollombi, Dorrigo, Brookland, Coramba, Glenreach, South Grafton, Maclean, Woodburn, Coraki, Lismore, Broadwater, Ballina, Wardell, Alstonville, Byron Bay, Rosebank, Clunes, Nimbin, Casino, Mallanganbee, Drake and Tenterfield. A large number of new members have been enrolled and over £100 in contributions and capitation fees, and "Labor Daily" levies have been collected. At Junee all employees joined up. At Cootamundra I interviewed all the men on the Council and new men agreed to enrol with the Secretary, Mr. J. Bailey. I also had a word with several in arrears, and if they fail to pay up, action will be taken. I addressed well attended meetings at Parkes and Forbes, and advised three men at Parkes to appeal to the Council in writing with reference to dismissal, as two of the men no doubt were victimised. At Grenfell very few were engaged. I interviewed the municipal members, but was unable to wait until Saturday to hold a meeting. I interviewed a large gang at Cumnock, and found all members financial, but was not receiving extra pay for spawling, which they wished to refer to the Council. I also interviewed nearly all men on the shire of Lyndhurst, and they appointed a representative, who I think will have a full enrolment. These employees desire fortnightly pay days, and I advised them how to secure same. I addressed a good meeting at Orange, where everything was OK, the members desiring to form a branch in the near future. Blayney has only two men engaged – both members. Bathurst Branch is in a good position with the Secretary. I picked up three members who paid levy on Turon Shire. I addressed a good meeting at Mudgee and settled differences between members, and the new award was well discussed. At Werris Creek I held a meeting during lunch hour, and J. P. Hollard was elected representative, also Bede Marr will collect, as there is a big staff on the Peel Shire we should have a good enrolment. At Tamworth there are a few in arrears, and I fear the only remedy is legal proceedings. I have recommended same as those defaulters have been reaping the benefits of the Union and paying nothing. Mr. J. Cooksley has proved an energetic Secretary. I am visiting Nundle on return trip, and will address a meeting at Gunnedah 3 pm, Tamworth 8 pm, July 30th. I had an interview with a big gang at Brookland and explained matters concerning the award, as four men were not receiving the camping allowance. I interviewed the Clerk, and he preferred to seek Secretary Shire Association's opinion. I have no doubt the matter will be adjusted. At Coramba, Mr. W. Shaw was appointed representative to collect on that end. South Grafton, Mr. O. Windsor has matters well in hand, and I am dealing with a complaint from sanitary employees. Grafton, Mr. Larney is carrying on the good work, but the municipal Council have reduced hands. There are 40 men at Baryugil. I will visit this branch tomorrow. At Maclean, C. Niperess is doing good work, and

is a good battler. Woodburn, I interviewed a big gang at the quarry where W. McKee is representative. Some four men were not paid for Xmas holidays. I called at the shire office, but the clerk was absent. I have written him on the matter, also re engine driver's pay. At Lismore I had a busy time, as many were in arrears. I addressed a good meeting, and had election of officers; Mr. T. Slatery, Lismore, was elected Secretary (members of Lismore Branch kindly note this), and Mr. J. Harman was elected president, also delegate to Annual Conference. I audited the branch books, and found a good credit balance. I addressed the meeting at Alstonville and J. Kenny re-elected representative. The members were appealing for fortnightly pay days. At Ballina J. Mullins, was re-elected representative; retrenchment is expected and a lot to go off. At Byron Bay I addressed a good meeting and Mr. Hunter was again endorsed as representative, and is an energetic worker. Another picnic will be held on Eight-Hour Day, and it is hoped will be as successful as the one last year. On Tarania Shire, J. Grennan and D. W. Bills were elected representatives and on Lismore Council, Messrs. P. Bolan, Alex Lang and C. Hall, were appointed delegates. I interviewed Mr. Murray, engineer, re payment for rates of trenchers, quarrymen and concrete, kerb and gutter finishers and he agreed to adjust same; also the quarrymen were to get travelling time one way from the crusher and agreed to get water laid on at the earliest opportunity; also first aid kits will be provided in the quarry and depot. I cannot speak too highly of the courtesy extended me by the engineer and must say there is a fine calibre of unionists in the Lismore Branch (all round). I addressed a meeting at Casino, and find Mr. A. McDonald with everything in order, he is an able Secretary. I interviewed one man who had an A.W.U. ticket and he agreed to join our Union. At Kyogle, A. G. Bursle will act as representative. I interviewed the quarrymen, and they agreed to join up there. I addressed a good meeting at Mallanganee and they formed a branch entitled Kyogle Branch, of the Union. Mr. Bryan Kennedy was elected Branch Secretary and O. Bell President. Bryan Kennedy is a good battler for the cause – I must sincerely thank him for his courtesy on my visit. This branch should reach 50 members. At Tenterfield all men I met are joining up and many are already enrolled. Mr. Greg Howard will collect here and should get 40 members shortly. I now visit Baryugil, Coffs Harbour, Macksville, Kempsey, Guyra, en route to Sydney.⁷

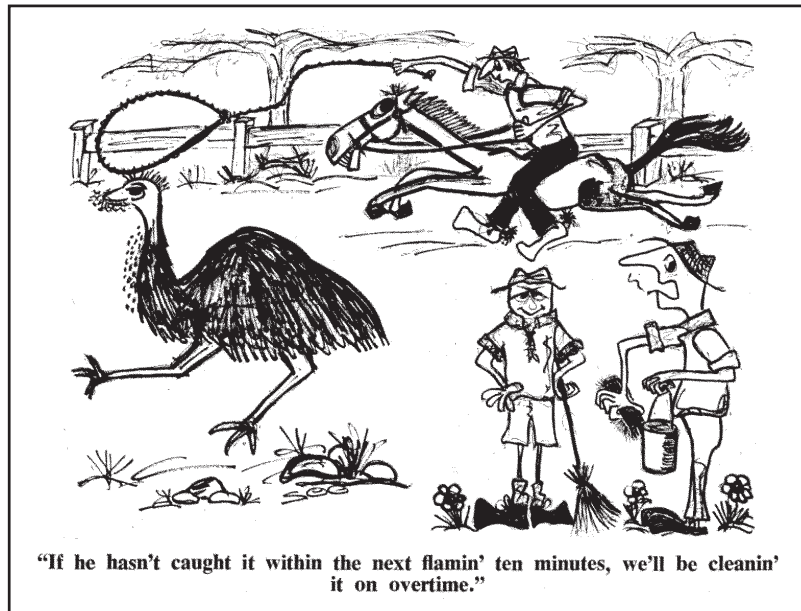
In 1925, the Local Government Association Officers' Branch employed a person to organise and recruit members on the basis of receiving £1 [\$2] for each member enrolled.⁸

In 1939, country visits were put on a sound footing, with itineraries being set for each Organiser to visit each area regularly, and Organisers to do each area by rotation. These itineraries were generally three weeks' duration away from Sydney, but the Western Division of the State took more than four weeks. Branch meetings were held on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and Saturdays and Sundays, allowing time for Organisers to revisit areas the following week to take up issues with Councils.

Minor Difficulties

One bush story is that in 1971 a road gang from Quirindi was spraying, when an inquisitive emu put its head through the fence on the side of the road and was “unintentionally” sprayed. When the gang got back to the Depot, the Engineer was waiting impatiently and told the gang that the emu was a pet and the owner had rung Council to complain. He ordered the men back out to clean the animal. However, at least they were paid overtime for catching and cleaning the emu!

Catching and cleaning emu



Source: *Quirindi Advocate* 1971

Organising still had its problems in the 1970s. When Organiser Barrie Evans was along the back road between Ivanhoe and Hillston, his vehicle slid down into the gutter after going across a grid, due to the wet and slippery conditions. He was there in the car for half a day before a four-wheeled drive vehicle came along and the driver agreed to take him into Ivanhoe. When he arrived there, the garage mechanic said he would go out and get the car after the rain stopped. When booking into a hotel he discovered he only had \$1.50. The publican had met travellers with only \$1.50 before, and was not too keen to accommodate him. However, the Overseer, after promising the publican a number of things, got him a bed, and the General Secretary forwarded some money to him two days later. His washing had not been done for a week, so he got the room lady to wash and iron the shirts. When she returned the shirts the next day he paid her. He left with the clothes neatly done up in a bundle, but when he arrived at the next town he put on the top shirt only to discover to his dismay that all the others had been folded but not ironed. Evans' comment was: "What annoyed him was that as a kid I had not only seen dummy wood heaps built but had assisted, only to be caught, at the age of 30, in a place which is behind Hay, Hell and Booligal".

On his retirement in 1955, Paddy Ross reflected on the formative years of organising for the Union:

Finally, I have no regrets for any of the hardships I endured in those early days of organising. The conditions were no worse than those that the employees of Councils had to put up with. Then there was no 40-hour week, no sick pay, no long-service leave, no annual leave, no basic wage (at first) and no fodder allowance for horse “plugs.” Workers’ compensation hadn’t been dreamed of. All these now apply to all employees in local government services in New South Wales, and they have been gained by the energy and perseverance of the officials of this Union.⁹