

PART OF THE FURNITURE

Moments in the History
of the Federated Furnishing
Trades Society of Victoria

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Melbourne University Publishing

MUP CUSTOM

An imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Ltd
187 Grattan Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053 Australia
mup-custom@unimelb.edu.au
www.mup.com.au

First published 2007

Text © Lynn Beaton 2007

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Design and typography © Melbourne University Publishing Ltd 2007

Designed by Phil Campbell

Typeset in New Baskerville

Printed in Australia by Griffin Press

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Beaton, Lynn.

Part of the furniture: moments in the history of the Federated
Furnishing Trades Society of Victoria.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

ISBN 9780522854169 (hbk.).

1. Federated Furnishing Trades Society of Australasia. Victorian
Branch—History. 2. Furniture workers—Labor unions—Victoria—
History. 3. Furniture industry and trade—Victoria—History. 1. Title.

331.88184109945

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PREFACE

While reading the Federated Furnishing Trades Society of Victoria's history I was struck by how much I didn't know about a Union I've been part of for nearly two decades. So much of what Lynn Beaton has painstakingly, and thoroughly researched and written about, points to a Union with a rich, vibrant and, at times, fascinating history. The FFTS' story was crying out to be compiled and told. This is especially the case given much of the turbulence endured by this Union during its existence of well over 100 years. Lynn's heartfelt research and writing of the history of the Victorian FFTS Branch is particularly timely, given the attacks on workers and their unions by the Howard Liberal Government.

The story of the FFTS is inspiring and uplifting. It confirms that unions are living, dynamic organizations made up by people. I throw in this seemingly obvious point because so much of modern Australian trade unionism reflects a bureaucratic subservience to the dictates of the system. Above and beyond the numerous functions of a union, fundamentally they are organizations made up by, and who depend on working people. The FFTS has not been an exception to what may seem the most basic of points. Throughout the years of its existence, many of those who form the employer class and, indeed some Australian governments, have waged overt campaigns to smash unions. In fact, the current right-wing (neo-liberal) government of Australia, led by those most venomous haters of unions and those they seek to represent—Prime Minister John Howard—has embarked on a legislative crusade to throttle unions out of legal existence. What is becoming increasingly clear in the industrial landscape of twenty-first century Australia, is that when employers and politicians advocate the smashing of unions, their real objective is to strip back the rights of working people. Lynn Beaton documents how, for well over a century, the FFTS has resisted the attacks foisted on it by the system, and continues to 'punch above its weight' in the fight to advance the interests of its members.

Over more recent years, along with the expected attacks faced by the union movement from governments and employers, the FFTS experienced its own internal ructions—some of which could be described as

self-inflicted, and others more in keeping with the 1990s ACTU/ALP push for union amalgamations. As one of those officials at the FFTS during these turbulent and highly-charged times, I could not help but feel that the Union's very existence was hanging by a thread. It did not seem fair and just that a proud union, one whose beginnings can be traced back to the initial European settlement of Melbourne, could have its fate decided by a bureaucratic stroke of a pen. If not for the commitment and tireless efforts of members and officials, the FFTS could very well have vanished from the Australian trade union movement, and perhaps occupy merely the space of a footnote in the history of years to come.

Fundamentally, the successful battle to save the FFTS served as the inspiration to commission a history of this great Union. The compiling and telling of the FFTS story has, in recent years, become equally imperative because so many loyal, diehard FFTS members are reaching their twilight years. I sincerely hope that this book—the history of their Union—brings them the pride and satisfaction they so very much deserve. A union is a reflection of its members and, in reading this Union history, I am proud to say that FFTS members are as salt-of-the-earth as the best of them.

Throughout this warts and all history, the FFTS emerges as a distinct Union in its own right, with some unique 'quirks', such as the ability to defy the prevailing orthodoxy of the specific times—a trait the Union carries to the present day. And, like many good histories, this one also encompasses the key signposts of the nation's development from the mid-1850s.

By following the FFTS journey over nearly 150 years, we pass through the momentous events of Australia's history, including 1890s Depression, the two World Wars and many other events.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members of the Union and Committee of Management who supported the commissioning of this history. Of course none of our plans in regards to this project would have seen the light of day without the hard work of Lynn Beaton. Lynn's passion for labour history shines through in the history of the FFTS. Without her keen historian's eye and meticulous researching skills, many of the finer or obscure details would have been lost forever. The FFTS has well and truly stood the test of time. Lynn Beaton has gone a long way towards ensuring that this—the official history of the FFTS—also stands the test of time and does justice to all

those members and officials who have contributed to the life of the Union. For this we owe Lynn a debt of gratitude.

Finally, as Branch Secretary of the Victorian FFTS, I would like to extend my thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed for this book. Over the years much water has passed under the bridge, especially in the hurly-burly of internal CFMEU politics. As a participant who has not always seen eye-to-eye with some in the CFMEU, I am, nevertheless, grateful to all those who have managed to rise above this, and make a positive contribution to this important Union history.

Leo Skourdombis

Branch Secretary

March 2007

IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 4; United Furnishing Trades Society, 1882, T58/1/1, p. 7; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 9; Reprinted from *The History of Capital and Labour* (1888) Oceanic Publishing Co. (p. 121), p. 11; Minute Book, United Furnishing Trades Society, 1882, T58/1/1, p. 20; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 28; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 31; Courtesy of the University of Melbourne Archive, p. 41; FFTS, Victorian Branch Office, p. 53 (top); Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 53 (bottom); photo: Denis Evans, p. 54; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 74; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 79; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 83; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 88; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 89; FTTS Board Room, p. 99 (top); Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, photo: Lynn Beaton, p. 99 (bottom); Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 102; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 105; photo: Denis Evans, p. 117; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 118; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 128; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 145; Courtesy of the Noel Butlin Archive, p. 147; Courtesy of the Herald & Weekly Times Photographic Collection, p. 148; Courtesy of the Herald & Weekly Times Photographic Collection (Herald/Sun), p. 153; Courtesy of the Herald & Weekly Times Photographic Collection, p. 155; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 159; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 160; photo: anon., p. 161; photo: anon., p. 163; photo: Guy Willoughby, p. 165; photo/s anon., p. 188; photo: anon., p. 191; photo: anon., p. 195; photo: anon., p. 196; photo: anon., p. 213; photo: anon., p. 214; photo: anon., p. 257; photo: Denis Evans, p. 258; photo: Lynn Beaton, p. 260; Photo courtesy of Publicity Works, p. 263.

INTRODUCTION

Writing a history is as close to time travelling as it's possible to get. It is such a privilege to have the opportunity to do it, but most of all you feel so honoured when you dig deeply into the records of the past and find the treasures of the lives lived there. The everyday becomes exotic; meetings in houses, the sewing of banners, elections for union officials, singing after meetings—even the process of writing the minutes of the meetings—all of these things, undertaken with varying degrees of duty, enthusiasm and sometimes excitement and pleasure, take on new life as they enrich the lives we live in their shadow and in their future. The great events are revealed as amalgams of thousands of little efforts taken by many and become all the more remarkable for this recognition. A union history is especially enriching because unions straddle so many aspects of life. In working to advance the interests of their members, they become involved in the broader social and political life of society and have input into that life.

The history of an organization that has been around for as long as the Federated Furnishing Trades Society of Victoria can either be a skimming of major events or a peek into moments of that history. I chose the latter method because I wanted, as much as possible, for the stories I would tell from my time travel to bring as much richness to my readers as they brought to me. This was all the more important, as while researching the past I was increasingly aware of the grim events that were unfolding around me in the present. While I was researching and writing this book the Howard Government was preparing and delivering their Work Choices legislation that wiped away with one stroke so many of the gains that had been hard won.

By day I visited the furniture workers of the past, struggling day by day over years and years to win and maintain: the eight-hour day; the abolition of sweating; fair and equal pay rates; holiday pay; ongoing employment; sick leave; education for workers; health care for workers; redundancy payments; superannuation; and the incessant battles to keep these conditions in each and every workplace. No victory was easy and anyone who believes that progress was granted by the benevolence

of those with power need to inform themselves of the facts of history. No employers gave away more than they were forced to give and even when gains were made by the Union they had to be fervently defended from unremitting attempts to undermine them. As I emerged each day from the annals of my history research and saw and heard the debates and the rationale that surrounded the introduction of Work Choices, I was sickened by the careless squandering of the sacrifices that had been made by those in the past for us in the present.

While celebrating the hard work and courage that exemplified most of this history, it is no whitewash. As much as there was to applaud, there was also much to lament. Unions are difficult organizations with diverse memberships working through a democratic process that is often unwieldy. They are hated and vilified because they attack the most sacred, although most undeclared, of all holy cows in a capitalist society, the right to make unlimited profits. The consequent pressures sometimes produce distortions. It wasn't an easy decision to expose some of the darkness in this history, especially at the time it was written. However I believe absolutely that only truth gives light at the end of the tunnel and when parts of the truth are hidden or not told, they lie festering. There is as much to learn from the mistakes of the past as there is from the present.

Also, in bringing the history to life I have maintained old spelling and forms in the quotations from the minutes. I have used the old money system and symbols and, if that is confusing, at the time of the introduction of decimal currency in 1966, one pound was worth two dollars, twelve shillings was worth one dollar and twelve pence was worth ten cents.

'Harmony' was a unique activity that the furniture workers indulged in and I couldn't find any other references to this or anyone else who had heard of it. We can only assume that it was singing at the end of the meetings with a drink or two to add to the cheer.

I am indebted to the Victorian FFTS Branch of the CFMEU for providing me with the opportunity to write this book and I thank the Committee of Management for its acuity in commissioning the work. I also want to thank Leo Skourdombis and Frank Vari for many hours of interviews, reading drafts and giving feedback; Ken Carr whose excellent memory gave living colour as far back as the early 1950s; the staff at the union office for their enthusiastic support and help whenever it was needed; the staff at the Melbourne University Archive who extended

support and hospitality to me way past what they were duty bound to offer—in particular, Sarah Brown, Jane Ellen and Tony Miller; the staff at the Butlin Archive who generously allowed me such ready access to the archival material; all those who gave their time to be interviewed, stretching their memories and talking frankly about topics that weren't always easy; Andrew Reeves and Peter Love for discussions and direction that helped contextualize the research; and, of course, my family and friends who were always happy to listen and offer advice when it was needed.

Lynn Beaton
March 2007

BEGINNINGS

*Let us now praise famous men,
men of little showing—
for their work continueth,
and their work continueth,
broad and deep continueth,
greater than their knowing!*
Rudyard Kipling, *Stalky and Co.*, 1899

BEFORE THE ARRIVAL of the Europeans there were thriving Indigenous communities in the area that became Victoria. Tragically, the Europeans did not bother to get to know the people already living here, or to understand their relationship with the fragile land that they had lived in for tens of thousands of years. Instead they plonked themselves and their foreign ways on the land, wounding its nature and destroying the way of life of its people almost to the point of extermination. One of the things that distinguished the new settlers was that they lived in permanent dwellings and supported their bodies, and their lifestyles, with a range of furniture. The men who made that furniture were here from the beginning.

The British colony of Victoria began when William Pascoe Fawkner sailed up the Yarra River to build the township of Melbourne. To create a European city he brought with him a sea captain, a journalist, a plasterer and two cabinetmakers:

... the first contingent of free mechanics who were destined to form the nucleus of skilled labour in the early but eventful history of this colony. (Murphy 1888)

The first job for the new arrivals was to build Fawcner a house and we can assume that the cabinetmakers used their woodworking skills for the carpentry of the house as well as making the first furniture.

Melbourne grew quickly from the start. After only two years, in 1837, it was already a European village of 500 people and by 1842 there were municipal elections and the City of Melbourne became incorporated. By the time gold was discovered in Ballarat in 1851 there were 77 000 people in Victoria. The gold shaped the future, and the population had swelled to 540 000 by the end of the decade. Victoria had become, in a few short years, the most populous colony in Australia and contributed more than one-third of the world's gold output. This population needed to be fed and housed and the economy and society needed organizing. Houses, banks, shops, offices, boardrooms, hospitals, schools, theatres, restaurants and cafés were shooting up and all had to be furnished.

The men who built this furniture were quick to organize into trade societies along the lines of the societies they had belonged to in Britain. Their earliest history has mostly disappeared under clouds of dust, or vanished in columns of smoke but there are enough remnants to give us peeks into their earliest organization.

In 1856, building trades workers and some associated trades won the eight-hour day. Although the furniture makers were not among those who won that prize, they were almost certainly in the movement and supported the gain. In 1859, they first entered written history when they appeared in the minutes of the Eight Hours League. Coachmakers were on strike because a Mr Williams had reneged on his agreement for the eight-hour day. Williams placed an advertisement in the paper for workers. The Cabinetmakers Society made sure their members did not scab on fellow workers.

On being informed of the advertisements and of the circumstances connected with the strike, the Cabinetmakers Society very generously went to the expense of issuing and posting the following bill:

Notice—Cabinetmakers are requested not to take work in any of the coach manufactories, the coach-makers being out on strike on the 8 hour question. By order of the Cabinetmakers Society. (Minutes 1859)

After winning the eight hour day the societies that had been involved set up a committee to raise funds and organize the building of a trades hall. They soon had a wooden temporary building and it became the focal point for all the trade societies. One of the ways money was raised towards the permanent building was the hiring out of rooms to trade societies. The Cabinetmakers Society and the Wickerworkers Society, both of which became part of the Furniture Trades Society, hired rooms in the Trades Hall from at least 1866. In that year the Cabinetmakers paid rent of one pound, and in 1867 of eight shillings to the Trades Hall Committee for a room in the Trades Hall. (Melbourne Trades Hall and Literary Institute Minutes 1866–67)

In October 1868, the United Furniture Trade Society of Victoria (UFTS) was established. Its first Secretary was Samuel Noel who remained a prominent Unionist for many decades. His name is cemented for posterity in gold lettering on one of the 'honour' boards at the Trades Hall because he became a Life Governor of the Children's Hospital. This was typical of the men in the societies. They were concerned not only with their own wellbeing but also with that of all the working class. In a time when only the rich could afford to go to hospital, they ensured that the poor had hospitals to go to as well. Most of the major hospitals in Melbourne were strongly supported by the early trade societies.

The United Furniture Workers Society was an amalgam of several trades: cabinetmakers, chair makers, mantelmakers, carvers, upholsterers and polishers. In the early days they were always referred to as the Cabinetmakers.

In 1870, the Cabinetmakers rented the Lodge Room in the Trades Hall every Thursday night for their meetings. These men, and they were all men, were artisans who came to Victoria as free settlers with the skills of their trade. Many of them were escaping the oppressive and anti-trade union class system in Britain and Ireland. Many of them had come to make their fortunes in the gold rush but when they arrived in Melbourne they found that their skills were in such short supply that they could make a good regular living from their trade without the risks involved in searching for gold.

As well as rent for office space by the various societies, the Trades Hall rented out its large rooms for social events. In 1871, the Cabinetmakers upset the Trades Hall Committee when they held their annual concert and ball at a venue other than the Trades Hall. They were called to account to a Trades Hall meeting and Mr Evans, the Secretary, explained that respectable vocalists had refused to sing if the concert



The only surviving evidence of the establishment of the United Furniture Trades Society of Victoria in 1868 is the inscription on this photograph presented to Samuel Noel in 1909 for his long service to the Society.

were held at the Trades Hall, because it had a bad name. (Melbourne Trades Hall Minutes 1870) The rules of the Trades Hall required all tenants to use the spaces for their functions and the Cabinetmakers were issued with a set of rules to ensure they would not break them again. The allegation that the Trades Hall had a bad reputation was taken seriously. A committee was set up to investigate and discovered that it had indeed developed a stigma. It seemed that fights often broke out at the balls held there.

Efforts were made to rebuild the reputation of the Trades Hall. It was closed for dancing from 23 February until Easter Monday. A committee of three was appointed to develop regulations for dances at the Hall. The new regulations stipulated that there must be a minimum entrance fee; that events must close by eleven o'clock; and that the lessees were responsible for the conduct of those using the Hall. The Hall Keeper was to keep a close eye out for any group that did not stick

to the rules and if he reported them to the Committee they would not be allowed to rent the Hall again.

After this incident Mr Evans attended meetings of the Committee regularly for a few months. His main contribution was in financial affairs, moving and seconding the receipt of financial reports. On 7 March 1873 we get another glimpse of the interests of Mr Evans. He 'requested to know what would be the charge for the Hall [on Sunday evenings] for the Free Discussion Society to hold their meetings in.' (Melbourne Trades Hall Minutes 1870)

The cost was eight shillings a week and included a side room once a month for Committee purposes.

Evans' involvement in a Free Discussion Society was an example of the sort of men that formed the trade societies at the time. They had come to Australia with skills that had been learned in the craft guild systems of Europe. These were rigid, patriarchal organizations where master craftsmen were identified and valued by the quality of their work and the quantity of their skill. These artisans had developed their skills over generations and it was their responsibility to pass them on to future generations through the apprenticeship system. The furnishing trades: the cabinetmakers; chair makers; carvers; frame makers; polishers; and upholsterers were highly skilled and highly valued members of society. They were part of the top echelons of labour. Work for them was as much about pride in a job well done and the best possible applications of skill and tools as it was about 'earning a crust'. The bond between the members and the identifying feature of each society was common knowledge of the skills of their trades. They mostly worked in small workshops owned by tradesmen, who were often members of the society. They wore suits to society meetings, and to work. They probably took their jackets off to work in their white shirt-sleeves, with a collar and tie, and a white apron to protect their clothes.

The trade societies were benevolent organizations that provided welfare for their members when little welfare was provided elsewhere. They carried much of the heritage of the old guilds but as capitalism developed into a system that valued only profit the societies increasingly found themselves needing to function as a union.

In Melbourne in the 1870s there was an alternative organization to the Trades Hall Committee, which was known as the Trades and Labour Council. Its members were mostly workers who were considered less skilled than those who formed the Trades Hall Council Committee. The Melbourne Trades and Labour Council (TLC) had a broader and more

political agenda. They were interested in developing solidarity between unions and providing support for those involved in industrial action. William Emmet Murphy was involved in the TLC. He had become active both with the Cabinetmakers and the Carpenters. The two sets of skills were similar, and in a young colony with a shortage of the skills needed to build a European city it was not unusual for craftsmen to have tickets for two societies. Murphy played a major role in bringing solidarity to the TLC.

The 1880s was a long boom. More and more suburbs opened up where 'spec' houses flourished and in the city multi-storied office buildings and hotels shot up, creating a strong demand for furniture. Overall manufacturing grew substantially. The earliest surviving minutes of the Victorian Furniture Manufacturers Society are from 1882. The first minute book opens with the record of 'Meeting Night, July 27th 1882', and from then there are continuous minutes to the present day.

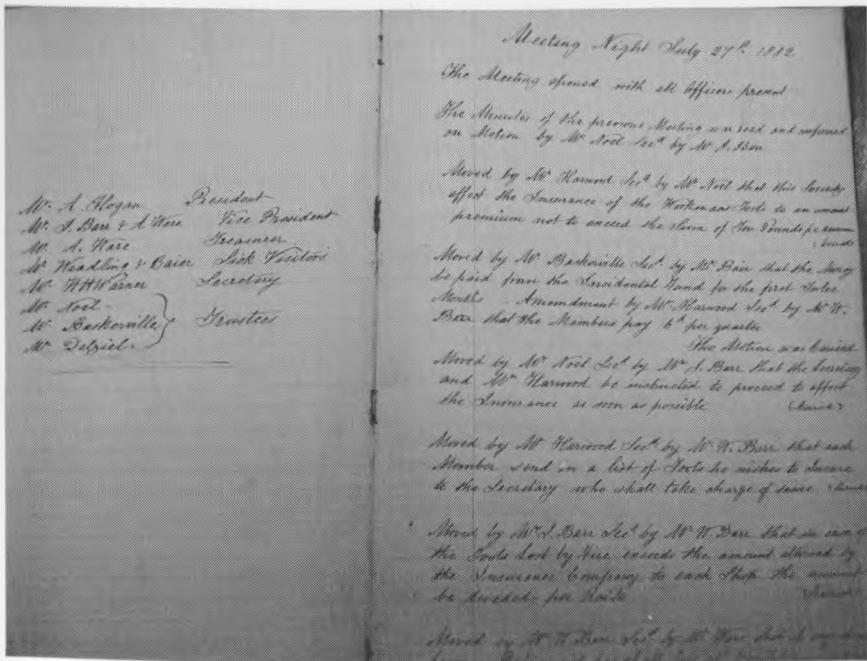
The main business of that meeting was dealing with the complications involved in insuring the members' tools. First they had to decide how much they would insure tool kits for, and after discussion agreed the coverage should be limited to an annual premium of £10. Then they needed to decide whether the Society should cover the cost of the premium from its funds or whether members should pay separately. That was more contentious and needed to go to a vote, which resolved that members would be charged 6d a quarter to cover the cost of the insurance. Then each member was asked to supply a list of tools that they wanted covered. Finally it was also agreed that if:

any member became unfinancial he would lose all benefits including insurance or tools of the Society. (UFTS Minutes 1882–83)

At a later meeting it was decided that members who had tools valued at over £10 would pay an extra 6d per quarter for each extra £5. Once an insurance company had been contacted they required detailed lists of the tools to be insured for each member. Response to the calls for lists was poor and so 'postal cards' had to be sent to each member making it clear that if they did not send in the lists, their tools would not be included in the umbrella insurance cover.

The Society was divided into sections according to occupation. The early Society had sections for cabinetmakers, chair makers, carvers and polishers. There was a fortnightly general meeting at the Trades Hall.

They never had problems getting quorums and on nights when the minutes recorded divisions in the voting there were always well over one hundred men present. An elected Committee met between meetings and made decisions which were always referred to the General Meeting for endorsement. Meeting procedure was much as it still is today; the main difference being the formality with which it took place. All members were referred to in the formal manner, such as Mr Warner, or sometimes, office bearers were referred to as Secretary Warner. Meetings started with the minutes of the previous meeting, which were read and adopted as a true report; next was the listing of correspondence and, when appropriate, letters were read to the meeting; correspondence was formally received and any business arising was dealt with. Next came the regular reports of activities that had taken place since the last meeting, these often lead to action and were formally received. Any other business would come next and the last item was the recording of the monetary receipts of the meeting. There were no paid officials and members paid their dues when they came to meetings. At the first meeting a total of



The opening page of the earliest surviving Minute Book of the United Furniture Manufacturers Society showing the list of office bearers and the record of the meeting 27 July 1882.

£3 11s 6d was received and this was about average for the time. (UFTS Minutes 1882–83)

Every six months there were hotly contested elections for office bearers that sometimes saw up to six nominations for a position. Nominations would be called for at one meeting, and voting would take place a fortnight later. In most cases, voting was by show of hands, unless the count was queried, when there would be a division and members would physically divide; ayes to the right and noes to the left. The two positions that drew the most nominees were for Trades Hall delegates and Sick Visitors. This was possibly because both of those positions drew a small fee. Half-yearly financial balance sheets were produced and printed for all members to view. The minutes were signed at the following meeting by the Chair, or whoever had chaired the meeting if the Chairman was not present.

In the early years of the Society, a great deal of the meeting time was spent administering sick funds to members unable to work. Two, and later three, of the regular officers were the Sick Visitors. Their job was to visit the sick, delivering money and support, and bringing up-to-date reports back to each meeting. To go on 'the sick', members had to lodge a request in writing accompanied by a doctor's certificate. These were read as part of the correspondence at every meeting. Then the meeting would receive reports from the Sick Visitors about the progress or otherwise of the member claiming benefits. Looking after the sick members was time consuming and difficult for an organization that was basically run by volunteers. They had to make sure that the recipients were actually eligible and that sufficient funds were in the kitty to meet the costs. For example:

10th August 1882

Moved by Mr Noel, Seconded by Mr J. Barr that three weeks sick pay be paid to Mr Stupeckie.

Mr Stearman declared on the Sick Fund on July 30th and declared off on August 10th.

24th August 1882

Mr Ware on the sick fund. Mr Wiseman on the Sick Fund.

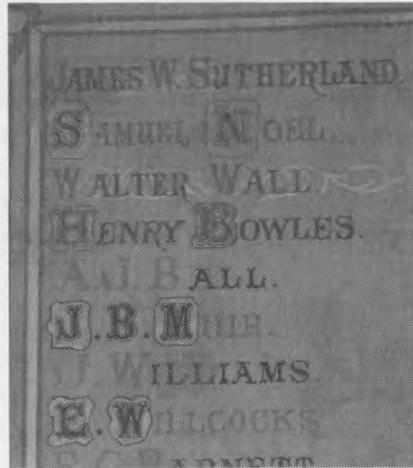
7th September 1882

Mr Ware and Mr Wiseman still on the Sick. Mr Wiseman had not received his fund due to not having the proper address.

(Minutes 1882–83)

The society also provided funds to help support widows and families of deceased members when possible, to provide for the costs of funerals and to provide income to members who were unemployed.

The sense of responsibility for welfare extended beyond the membership. They gave money to hospitals, charities and to the Workingman's College of Melbourne (now RMIT). These institutions honoured the contributions by making Union representatives Life Governors—as in the case of Samuel Noel whose name can be seen on the Honour Board for the Children's Hospital at the THC. They were also heavily involved in developing social and political policy. They formed active groups, wrote articles and letters for newspapers, lobbied parliamentarians, addressed public meetings and spoke at 'speakers' corner' on the Yarra Bank. They were heavily involved in creating and maintaining labour laws and regulations and also the regulation of tariffs and



The Honour Boards that hang in the corridors of the Victorian Trades Hall Council show the names of the unionists who were made Life Governors of hospitals and colleges in recognition of the huge amount of voluntary work and money that was raised by unions to support these organisations in early Melbourne. Samuel Noel from the United Furnishing Trades Society was made a Life Governor of the Children's Hospital.

immigration. At the same time, they were involved in philosophical and political discussion groups and had visions of where the Society should head and how to advance the lives of the membership and their families.

The Society also took responsibility for ensuring the continuation and high quality of skill in the industry as well as for the conditions of employment. The workforce was highly transient in early Victoria and the Society tried to keep track of its members and where they were working. In 1882 it was decided that any member shifting from one shop to another needed to inform the Secretary. A fortnight later a new system for membership was introduced whereby new members had to be proposed by existing members.

In the broader trade union movement in 1882 there was a great deal of activity. The Melbourne Trades and Labour Council had gone broke—spending all its money on supporting a long strike by lithograph workers in the printing industry. W. E. Murphy, the cabinetmaker, was more committed to industrial struggle than to the guild-like activities of the Cabinetmakers Society. He had put his energy into the TLC. When that organization collapsed, Murphy and others shifted across to the Trades Hall Council and brought the more militant strategies of the TLC with them. Murphy became the first Secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council and his influence was significant. Under his leadership the Council made a shift and began to take a more active role in the industrial disputes of its members. This shift was cemented when, in 1882, several hundred tailoresses stormed the male-only Trades Hall, announced they were on strike, and asked for help in forming a Union. They refused to go back to work until their ‘sweating’ conditions were improved. Murphy supported the tailoresses and threw the full support of the Trades Hall and its members behind their strike. This was the first time that the Trades Hall had acted in a co-ordinated way for the support of the whole trade union movement. There was widespread opposition to ‘sweating’—intensely exploited workers working outside the system for long hours with low pay—in all the manufacturing industries. The tailoresses’ victory was significant in having the Factories Act amended in 1885 and the anti-sweating rules made stronger.

The first Factories Act in Victoria was passed in 1873 and allowed for an eight-hour day for five weekdays and until 2 p.m. on Saturday with Sundays as a complete day of rest. The Act was not effective because it was not policed. There was a great deal of sweating and there was continual pressure to have the Act toughened up. The furniture workers were deeply involved in campaigns over the years to have sweating abolished.

William Emmett Murphy

Born in Dublin, Ireland on the 12 May 1841, Murphy was apprenticed to his uncle as a cabinetmaker. In 1865 he migrated to Melbourne and became an active member of the Cabinet Makers' Association. By 1877 he was Secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall Committee. He continued in this role and oversaw the transformation of the Committee into the Melbourne Trades Hall Council in 1884, becoming its first Secretary. Despite successes in helping to organise and win the tailoresses' strike of 1882, the bootmakers' strike of 1885 and the Melbourne Wharf Labourers' strike of 1886, in which he advocated private arbitration between the employers and employees, Murphy was removed from office in September 1886. After dabbling in politics he had rejoined the Trades Hall Council by 1889, although never again as Secretary. Holding various offices, Murphy was perhaps most prominent in those later years for his efforts in organising the funds required for the establishment of a working men's college in Melbourne. Murphy died at Daylesford on 26 February 1921.



William Emmett Murphy was an Irish cabinetmaker who came to Melbourne in 1865. He later became the first Secretary of the Trades Hall Council and was credited with involving the Trades Hall in its first coordinated industrial campaign in support of the tailoresses strike.

In February 1883 a new group held its very first meeting. It was called the United Furniture Trades Eight Hours League and W. E. Murphy was its chairman. In 1856 building trades workers had won the eight-hour day. This was celebrated with a parade that took place on 21 April each

year. Only those unions whose members enjoyed the eight-hour day conditions were entitled to march in the procession. The parade was a major date on the calendar for Melbourne workers and was followed by festivities and organized games in the nearby Carlton Gardens. The magnificent Union banners and regalia were paraded through the streets with pride. Simply taking part was an honour.

While the initial phase of the campaign for an eight-hour day had been short and extremely successful, that success was not consistent across industries or over time. The battle for shorter hours has been one of the constants over time of the trade union movement. It is a long slogging battle that needs constant vigilance and struggle to maintain.

The Eight Hours League had originally been established after the 1856 victory to prolong and broaden the struggle. In line with the political leanings of Murphy, the Furniture Workers League was a broader organization than the UFTS and involved workers from a broader range of occupations that were not so skilled. It began separately to the UFTS but its first meeting was so poorly attended that it was decided to invite the cabinetmakers and to adjourn until 2 March.

On 2 March Murphy chaired the second meeting, which was also adjourned but only after some business had taken place. The first item of business was the election of Officers. Three pound five shillings and six pence was collected from those present to cover the costs of hiring the hall, it was decided:

that the meeting stand adjourned until the 9th March; that the committee meet on the 7th March; and that the meetings be advertised. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

Despite the poor showing at the first two meetings the Committee went ahead and set up a durable organization. They decided on a fee structure for members that involved a joining fee and a weekly subscription with varying rates for journeymen, improvers and boys. They agreed:

that a first class Secretary be appointed to transact the business of the League and that Mr W. E. Murphy be waited upon and asked to accept the office. Carried.

Mr Murphy was approached immediately but declined the offer as he had 'too much to do at present'.

They identified the objective:

That the leading object of this League be to have the days labour reduced to eight hours and no more. (Eight Hours League Minutes 1883)

The following day the cabinetmakers read correspondence from the League at their meeting and decided to wait and see if the new organization would prosper:

In respect to the Eight Hours League after a lengthy discussion it was moved by Mr Lind Seconded by Mr W. Barr that this Society take no action in the matter of the League until it is formed on a firm Basis. (UFTS Minutes 1883)

However, several Society men were present at the next meeting of the League, held the next day, 9 March, and they were not shy in immediately challenging decisions that had already been made. Mr Evans, a past Secretary and Mr Warner, the current Secretary of the Society moved that the resolution of the Committee on entrance fees be rescinded. Evans and Shaw then moved that the joining fees be halved. This was agreed. The next job was to choose a Secretary. Mr Farlow was appointed and it was agreed to pay him two pounds ten shillings. He was asked to leave the room while the discussion took place and when he was invited back in and informed that he had been appointed as the League's first Secretary he received the news graciously.

Mr Farlow thanks the meeting for having placed him in the position of the Secretary and promised to do his utmost to advance the interest of the League. (UFTS Minutes 1883)

Straightaway business was begun. A motion was put that employers were asked to the meeting but it was lost. Then it was agreed:

that the Secretary and some of the members of the Trades Hall Committee wait upon the employers and ask them to sign a document agreeing to the eight hours system. Answer to be given on or before the 2nd day of April. (UFTS Minutes 1883)

The Society had a cap-in-hand approach to the employers, but at the same time, they stood their ground. Over the next few weeks the

Secretary and others visited employers one by one asking them to agree to the eight-hour system without any loss of pay. At each weekly meeting they reported their progress. The timing was perfect; the long boom and high demand for furniture meant that the employers did not want to lose any production. The large firms all agreed. The Society was now entitled to march in the prized eight-hour parade, so on 28 March the minutes record:

That the Secretary see Mr Douglas and give notice of the intention of this League to join in the procession on the eight-hours day and ask for the loan of a banner. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

On 30 March, five weeks after it's beginning, the success of the League was clear:

The Chairman reported to the meeting that the League was now over 350 strong and that new members were enrolling every meeting also that 34 Firms had signed and agreed to the concession desired. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The progress was not all one way, however. Having initially seemed willing in the first place, employers began to niggle about the detail. On 4 April a special meeting was held primarily to discuss the employers' position. They had organized their own meeting and sent a report of it to Secretary Farlow. They requested that the League appoint representatives to meet a committee appointed by them on 5 April at the Clarence Hotel in Collins Street at 8 p.m.

Nevertheless the reports made at the meeting from around the shops were positive:

The Chairman reported that Mr Cohen's employees had commenced working under the eight hours system. Mr Clayton reported that the employees of Robertson and Moffat intended to commence under the system tomorrow.

Some gentlemen informed the meeting that Mr Swanston agreed to the eight hours principal and would sign to that effect. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

It was obvious that the employers were agreeing when face to face with their workers, but when united they were quibbling and trying

to find a way out. The society elected a committee of six to meet the employers and they were given strict instructions to 'strenuously oppose any attempt to reduce the present rate of wages'. Some were impatient to get the ball rolling and moved:

That the eight hours movement commence tomorrow.

But Mr Evans and Mr Fulton successfully amended the motion;

That the eight hours movement become into operation on Monday next the 9th day of April. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

While attention was on the eight-hours system the employers had started undermining another condition that the Society had won much earlier. This involved the ability of the workers' organizations to control the quality of work in the industry. Employers wanted new workers to show references when applying for work. The League's position was that their members were necessarily equipped for the job.

Moved Mr Evans Seconded Mr Hodges—that Representatives refuse to consent to the members of this League having to supply references when applying for employment.

The activities of the League were having an effect on the Society. At its next meeting there was a notice of motion that the first Law of the Society be changed to incorporate the Eight Hours System of 48-hours labour per week. (UFTS Minutes 1882–83)

The following night the League held another meeting:

The Chairman reported that the conference meeting between the Employers and Employees had taken place as arranged and that the business was carried on in a most friendly spirit. The leading subject discussed was the time of commencing and leaving work each day. He informed the meeting that the League had agreed that each firm should arrange that matter itself. The meeting however had decided to work according to the following document which was passed at a meeting of Employers held on 3rd of April. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The employers had arrived at the meeting with a list of resolutions that they had agreed at their meeting and that were adopted by the Society representatives:

1st That the hours of labour under the new system for Chair Makers, Frame Makers, Carvers, Cabinet Makers, Polishers, Upholsterers and Mattress Makers be as follows:

Monday to Fridays (Inclusive)

8 am to 12 noon, 1 pm to 5.30 pm

Lunch 12 to 1 o'clock

Saturdays

8 am to 11.30, 12 noon to 2 pm

Lunch 11.30 to 12 noon

2nd that Employees shall work overtime whenever required and be paid the ordinary days rate and a quarter for such overtime. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The report continued. There had been no mention of wages at the meeting, which was, of course, contentious because reduced hours are only valuable if they are accompanied by no reduction in pay. The employers had asked that the League appoint members to a standing committee that could deal with any disputes that might arise.

The League also took up the battle for associated workers in the companies with whom they had made the agreements: the Carpet Planners, and Storemen and Packers. It was moved that the first case for the standing committee involve these workers, but then amended that:

the Secretary write to the large firms and request them to allow Packers and Storemen to come under the eight hours system. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

Having won the eight-hour day the League was now eligible to declare and celebrate its success by participating in the eight-hour day Demonstration. The planning for this was time consuming and detailed. At the meeting on 11 April many arrangements had to be made:

- getting a band to accompany the League members as they marched:

Mr Leydin reported that he had ascertained that a splendid band could be obtained of seventeen performers for twelve shillings.

After some discussion for and against tendering for a band

Mr Leydin moved

Mr Emerson Seconded

That the offer of the Imperial Band to supply seventeen performers for twelve shillings be accepted. Carried.

- deciding how to pay for the band:

that a levy of sixpence per member be made to defray the expense of the band.

Amendment ... that delegates make a collection in each shop for the purpose of paying the band.

Motion lost, amendment carried

- getting a banner for the day:

That a banner be obtained for the 21st April and the matter be left in the hands of the Executive Committee—Carried

- and the formality of the times complied with:

That the thanks of this League be given through the press to all the firms that have signed and given the concessions desired.—Carried. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

At later meetings the organization for the demonstration was ongoing. Whether to have members carry a banner, or whether to have a lorry with a display of furniture was seriously debated and the final decision to arrange a lorry with furniture on it was carried only after a division had taken place. A lorry and four grey horses had to be rented and some furniture had to be acquired:

The Chairman reported that he mentioned the matter of a suite of furniture to Mr Laurance Cohen when that gentlemen offered to supply all that was wanted without any hesitation and requested Mr Hill to come down to the place in Little Collins Street and pick a suite. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

That some red cloth be purchased and something be arranged on the Lorry with the name of the League on it to suit the occasion. Carried.

Arrangements were almost finalized:

this League meet at the Gaelic Church in Rathdowne Street on Saturday the 2nd inst, at 9 am for the purpose of preparing to join in the main procession on that day.

Resolved

That the Lorry (be) at Mr Cohen's A'Becket St on the morning of the procession at 7.30 to receive furniture.

That Mr E. R. Evans act as Marshall on Saturday next—Carried.
Mr Evans thanked the meeting for the honour done him.

But of course, there were always going to be last-minute hitches. The Parade was to take place on 21 April but on 20 April at the General Meeting of the League:

The Chairman reported that considerable difficulty had been met in obtaining a Lorry but after several attempts an arrangement was made with Mr M. Evans of Horsham for the sum of two pounds. He also stated that Mr L. Cohen had kindly placed a suite of green and gold coloured furniture at the disposal of the League for Saturday.

It was agreed to send an official letter of thanks to Mr Cohen for his kindness, and it was reported that another company Moubray, Rowan and Hicks had granted the Eight Hours System. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

In the midst of this busy time of celebration some employers tried to take the League off-guard. News was received that two companies were trying to get all the other employers to give and demand a reference when discharging or engaging men. The League was adamant that this was not in the interests of their members and foreshadowed further discussion of the matter at the next meeting. They were adamant that no member should accept a reference in the meantime.

On the eve of their first Eight Hour Day Parade, the meeting finished with:

The Chairman urged upon the members to turn out and all to join the procession on following morning. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

In the meantime, on 19 April, the Furnishing Trades Society had agreed to lend the League their banner and to join in the Demonstration, which was a great success. This report was published in the *Australasian Sketcher*:

The twenty-seventh anniversary of the eight-hours movement was celebrated on April 21 by the annual procession of the trades from the Trades Hall through the principal streets of the city, and thence to the Friendly Societies' Gardens, where a programme of sports was gone through. The procession halted at the Treasury, and after the bands had played 'God save the Queen', the members of the Ministry, who were on the balcony, were heartily cheered. This year four additional trades were represented in the procession for the first time, making a total, of twenty-four trades and thirty societies. There was a profuse display of hunting at various points along the route, which was crowded with people. The handsome banners would have shown to much greater advantage on a fine morning, and the weather was threatening enough to greatly reduce the attendance at the gardens, but those who did venture to go there enjoyed an excellent programme of sports, and escaped a wetting. The most prominent of the exhibits receiving notice in our illustration are the coopers, the cigar-makers—whose huge, gold-tipped cigar was a novel feature—the farriers, and the cabinetmakers' trophy—the last a complete suite of drawing-room furniture—a most venturesome display, when the threatening aspect of the sky was taken into consideration. (*Australasian Sketcher* 1883)

The costs of organizing participation in the parade were considerable at a time when a tradesman was lucky to earn eight shillings a day as shown by the half-yearly balance sheet recorded in the minutes.

Mr Cole	Delegates Book	£14 9s
Age & Argus	Advertising	£2 8s
Imperial Band		£12
Mark Evans	Lorry	£2
Band	Refreshments	8 shillings
Mrs Lemmon	Altering Banner	10 shillings
Kennedy & De Lany	Jean for Banner	5 shillings
Secretary	Salary	£2 10s
		(Minutes 1883)

From this point on the Furniture Trades participated in the eight-hour day procession on 21 April every year. An Eight Hour Demonstration Committee was set up every preceding August and delegates from each participating union would begin to meet to organize the parade and festivities. One of the first jobs of each new committee was to elect office bearers and whenever Furnishing Trades representatives were office bearers it was reported to their meetings and treated as a great honour.

After the Demonstration the League decided to offer the suite of green and gold coloured furniture that was valued at thirty-five pounds to the Art Union under the auspices of the League. This means that the prize was donated to the Art Union lottery that was used to raise money for public hospitals or for financing the construction of a permanent Trades Hall. The Melbourne Art Union was known throughout eastern Australia and in New Zealand for its rich prizes of gold nuggets, statues, paintings and in this case, furniture. Tickets were sold for a couple of

1872 Boston St
Philpott St

Altman's Goods

Lloyd	1 Book	7/6	90/2	colours 3h 40
Carpenter	1 Book	8/6	90/2	ret 5 tickets
Painter	1 Book	4/6	90/2	10 tickets returned
Spent	1 Book	1/6	90/2	✓
Shunt	1 Book	4/8	90/2	✓
Squage goe	1 Book	Paid 7/6	90/2	✓
Robinson	1 Book	10/1	90/2	ret 5 tickets 90/2
Savage job	1 Book	20/1	90/2	✓
Belton St	1 Book	18/1	90/2	return 3 tickets
Lloyd	1 Book	11/1	90/2	return 13 tickets
Shunt	1 Book	4/6	90/2	ret 10 tickets
Boos	1 Book	8/1	90/2	ret 2 tickets
Johnson	1 Book	4/6	90/2	✓
Curtain	1 Book	7/6	90/2	100
Robinson		4/6	90/2	
Pleasure	ilubie traps	12/6	90/2	

When a member died his tools were often raffled and the money raised was given to his widow. This list is a record of the sale of tickets.

months and the drawing of the prize took place at a meeting of the League in August. The drawing of the prize ticket was very complicated and it took thirty-five draws under the strict scrutiny of three disinterested members to award the prize to Mr Wills of Simpsons Road with the lucky ticket No. 95.

Now that the prime objective of the Furnishing Trades Eight Hours League had been achieved it began to turn its attention to other issues:

Mr Evans addressed the meeting and said that now as the League had succeeded in arranging the eight hour system and fixing it on a firm basis he thought they ought to turn their attention to further improvements first that of giving the members a benefit of Ten Shillings per week during illness and also by arranging a guarantee for the loss of tools in the case of fire. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The League was now moving into the specific areas that had been covered by the Society. The difference between the two organizations at this point is not clear: the issues they are dealing with are overlapping and so was their membership. A committee was set up to draw up laws for the League, which were distributed to the membership to be reviewed over the next few weeks.

On 27 April the League decided that 'it is now time this League should be represented on the Trades Hall Committee'. And on 11 May, 214 members voted to elect four representatives from eight nominations.

While the League continued to monitor the progress of the eight-hours system they were taking on more and more general organizing. They received regular reports from various shops about all sorts of conditions and the Secretary was regularly visiting shops to enrol new members and ensure that they got the eight-hour day. On 8 June, when a member asked the meeting for clarification of the role of the League, he received a muddy answer:

The Chairman informed the meeting that he understood the intention to be to make this a trade society pure and simple but with benefits included. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

Through the second half of 1883, the League was busy and very active, working with members in the various Branches to maintain their conditions and working with non-members to sign them up and gain

the improved conditions. The numbers continued to grow so fast that when the general meeting passed the laws on 22 June, a print run of one thousand books of laws was ordered.

Winning the eight-hour day was in fact the beginning of the battle to maintain it. There was always one shop or another that was trying to squirm out of it. At the same time, keeping members involved and vigilant was in itself a difficulty. There always have been those who are happy to take the conditions won by Unions but never pay their membership. The League faced this problem too. Whenever they heard of a shop where the eight hours was being worked but the men were not members the Secretary would visit and talk to the men about membership with varying success.

In a Mr Taylor's shop the men had joined the League and a deputation had been made to the employer for the eight-hour day. Mr Taylor had put a nine-hour day in place. Instead of taking this back to the League to bring pressure onto the employer, the men had continued to work nine hours and stopped paying their fees to the League. This was, of course, problematic as the League needed the regular income to carry on. The other difficulty was that they needed to set precedents in terms of the paying of arrears. Obviously they could not survive as an organization if members were able to pay a couple of weeks, not pay a few weeks, then receive some service and start paying again for a couple of weeks. This is an age-old problem for unions. So in the case of Mr Taylor's shop, the League had to insist that the arrears were paid before they could negotiate the eight-hour day. In doing so, they were fully aware that they risked the uniformity among employers that was needed for the eight-hours system to be maintained. It was agreed at the meeting:

That a deputation ... call upon Mr Taylor and urge that gentleman to consider the propriety of reducing the hours of labour in his shop tonight so that a uniformity may exist in all workshops in the furniture trade, explaining that an injustice is being done to the workmen in that shop in compelling them to work longer hours than those in other shops also that an advantage is being taken of those employers who have so kindly made the concession of eight hours. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The deputation was not successful at Taylor's. The Secretary spoke again with the foreman who said that while he agreed in principle with

the eight hour system and with the League he would not take the matter up with the employer until the employer spoke first to him. The Secretary again visited Mr Taylor but with no success, so the following motion was passed:

That the men employed in Mr Taylor's workshop be instructed to prepare themselves to come out on the following Saturday to our next meeting and that the men before coming out forward to Mr Taylor a requisition asking for the desired concession. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The men from Taylor's workshop attended the next meeting and once they agreed to send a request with a hint that they would take action, Taylor gave in. As soon as one struggle ended at least one more emerged. The next motion at that meeting was to instruct the same deputation to visit another two shops where the eight hours were not being worked.

The collecting of subs was done by delegates and was an ongoing battle. The Secretary offered help to any delegate who found collecting difficult.

An intriguing matter was raised at the committee meeting of the League on 22 August. A discussion was held:

as to the Propriety of having Harmony after business was concluded at the General Meetings of the League when

Mr T. Rowland moved

Mr E. Norden Seconded

That this meeting suggest to the General Meeting to take place on Friday evening the 31st inst the advisability of having Harmony at the general meetings of the League as an inducement to attend. Carried (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

At the General Meeting on 31 August the recommendation was adopted when it was resolved:

That harmony be indulged in after the conclusion of business each evening for the future.

Messrs McMahan, Norden, Noel, Camm and Goodwin took the initiative in way of harmony.

On 11 September the minutes record:

The League then went into Harmony and closed the meeting at 10 o'clock.

On 12 October:

The League then went into Harmony.

And on 26 October:

The meeting then indulged in Harmony.

The next meeting had to be adjourned because there was no quorum so the indulgences in Harmony had not increased the numbers.

The League was increasingly taking on work that duplicated that of the Society. The resolution of this began on 22 August 1883 when Mr Holmes asked the meeting of the League:

if anything had been done about amalgamating this society and the other in the Furniture Trade.

After some discussion it was agreed:

That the Secretary correspond with the Secretary of the Cabinetmakers Society upon the advisability of an amalgamation. (UFTEHL Minutes 1883)

The correspondence was read to the meeting of the Cabinetmakers Society the next evening and they decided in their very formal way that they needed to hold a special meeting to consider an amalgamation. When they did consider it, they decided to propose that a committee of three from each organization plus the two Secretaries meet to further discuss an amalgamation. The League readily agreed to this proposal and the committee met on 19 September. Mr Hogan from the Society took the chair and started the meeting by asking the League to explain why they had proposed amalgamation:

Mr Goodwin stated that the object was to benefit the employees in the Furniture Trade by bringing about a greater unanimity.

Mr Goodwin's answer being considered satisfactory the Committee proceeded to discuss the rules of both societies. (UFTS Minutes 1882-83)

The Rules were then discussed one by one. The members of the Society disagreed with a number of points in the Rules of the League that were mostly to do with money—sometimes they thought the amounts were too low and sometimes they thought them too high. (UFTS Minutes 1882-83)

The differences in the ways the two organizations worked were striking. The Society was so much more considered in its approach that we get the impression of an organization that had perhaps become too set in its ways. The next night at the Society, Mr Barr gave a report and the Society postponed the discussion of that report until they had received an answer from the League. The League met on 28 September and after the report of the committee, and the suggestions for changes to their Laws, agreed with all, except for Law 12—however, it was decided that this was not to stand in the way of the amalgamation.

On 4 October the Society considered correspondence from the League.

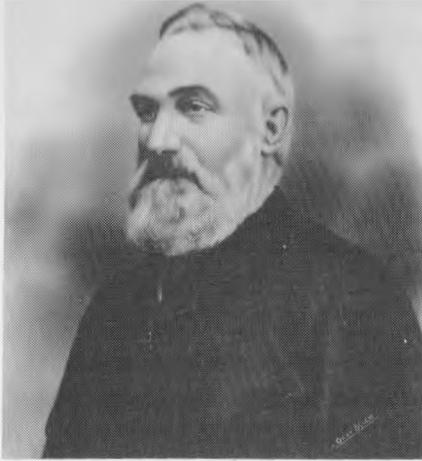
After a lengthy discussion it was moved by Mr Noel, seconded by Mr Baskerville that this Society would be agreeable to go on with the Amalgamation.

An amendment by W. Armfield, Seconded by Mr Waghorn that the answer be postponed and that the Secretary notify by circular to all the members.

The motion was Carried. (UFTS Minutes 1882-83)

On 12 October the League received correspondence from the Society and thanked them for their invitation to attend meetings. However, the Society was divided over the amalgamation and at its next meeting it looked as if it might not take place at all. A motion suggesting that consideration of the letter from the League advising of their acceptance of alterations to Laws should be postponed until the League met again, was amended by Mr Armfield and seconded by Mr Waghorn that the matter be postponed for twelve months and that amendment was carried.

The next meeting was heated. Mr Noel and Mr Lind, who had been attending League meetings, argued strongly to have the amendment



Mr Andrew Baskerville, a prominent member of the United Furnishing Trades Society

rescinded. Immediately Mr Armfield and Mr James argued that this was not in order but they were overruled. The amendment was rescinded and replaced by a motion that called for discussion to be continued at the next meeting in two weeks.

The League's next meeting was adjourned for lack of a quorum. The Rules were still going backwards and forwards and the League agreed to accept all the amendments that the Society had submitted to them. The amendments mostly involved reducing benefits to members.

The Society was an older organization and had more experience of what it could and could not afford to pay as benefits to members in need.

On 29 November, the Society nominated a committee comprising Messrs Hogan, Baskerville and Finch to become delegates to take further steps with regards to the amalgamation. The League received the communication without comment. On 13 December at the meeting of the Society:

The report of the Amalgamation Committee was then given by the President and a discussion followed when a Motion was given in by Mr Finch for this day month as follows that this Society amalgamate with the Eight Hours League on the 14th January 1884. (UFTS Minutes 1883)

A month later the motion was put for the Victorian Furniture Manufacturers Society to amalgamate with the Furnishing Workers Eight Hours League. It was a poorly attended meeting but, even so, a division was called for and the following was recorded in the minutes:

Ayes: Messrs Baskerville, Noel, McNicoll, Courier, Burges, Barr, Scoboris, Cohen, Finch, Warner, Lind

Noes: Messrs Paton, Armfield, Waghorn, James. (UFTS Minutes 1883)

CRAFTING A PLACE IN THE NATION

*The worker need not necessarily gain when the capitalist does,
but he necessarily loses when the latter loses.*

Karl Marx 1844

ON 14 JANUARY 1884, a few hundred men made their way to the corner of Victoria and Lygon Streets in Carlton, up the wide staircase and into the large meeting room at the new and very dignified Trades Hall. For some of them it would have been a well-trodden path but for others it would have been the first time they climbed those concrete steps, adding their weight to the imprints that have been made by thousands of feet on the stairs. The room was full with well over three hundred men seated, chatting with each other and setting the air of anticipation. The meeting would establish a new Society brought about by the amalgamation between the Furniture Trades Eight Hours League and the Victorian Furniture Manufacturers Society. The meeting was called to order and Mr Lind from the Society was elected Acting Chairman and Mr Farlow from the League as Acting Secretary. When the meeting got going there was much discussion and considerable disagreement over each issue as it arose. This was hardly surprising as this was a momentous meeting. The decisions made would determine the structure and the form of the new Society and it was taking place at a time when the old Societies with their links to the guilds were beginning the long transformation into modern trade unions. Among those present were those who pushed for this transformation and those who tried to hold it back.

Minutes of the first meeting of the
United Furniture Trades Eight Hours League
which took place on Sat. 25th day of February
1873

In consequence of the attendance or absence of
certain members a person having been expressed
to invite the Cabinet Traders to cooperate, it was

Resolved,

That this meeting stand adjourned
until this night next the 2nd of March
at a time that the Cabinet Traders and other like
be invited to attend and co-operate

Minutes of adjourned meeting which
took place at the Trades Hall on the 2nd
of March 73

At 7 1/2 to 8 o'clock in the show

The election of Officers was proceeded
with and resulted as follows

Mr. Thomas Hill	Chairman
Mr. Edward Camm	Treasurer
Mr. J. Jefferys	Secretary
Mr. Knowles	Vice Chairman

The Committee consisted of Messrs Dave,
Gordon, Nolan, Lane, Shaw, Barton,
Madson, Guy, Jenkins, and Hutchison

The minutes of the first meeting of the united organization
that became the United Furniture Trades Society.

The tension springs out of the minutes. The first item on the
agenda was the name of the new organization.

Mr Camm moved and Mr Hewitt seconded: That the amalga-
mated Society be named the United Furniture Trade Society.
Mr Evans moved an amendment, Mr McPherson seconded:
That this Society be called the United Furniture Trade Eight
Hours League.

After some discussion the motion and amendment were put to the meeting and the Chairman declared the motion carried and the amendment lost.

Mr Finch moved, Mr Hogan seconded: That two Secretaries be elected for this Society.

Mr Evans moved an amendment, Mr Ferguson seconded: That one Secretary only be elected for this Society.

When put to the meeting the Chairman declared the amendment lost and the motion carried.

Mr Evans demanded a division.

The Chairman appointed Messrs Waghorn and Noel Scrutineers and requested the members to divide after fully explaining the motion and amendment.

The Scrutineers gave in the numbers and the chairman declared the amendment carried—one Secretary to be elected. (UFTS Minutes 1884)

The next item was the salary of the Secretary. It was proposed that he should be paid thirty pounds a year with a 5 per cent commission on all receipts; but that was amended to two pounds a week, then another amendment was successfully moved that the Secretary be paid one pound ten shillings a week with 5 per cent of all receipts. Without any argument it was agreed that the Treasurer be paid five pounds a year. There was disagreement about whether to elect three or four sick visitors and whether to pay them ten shillings a quarter to cover all expenses or whether to pay them five shillings a quarter with expenses allowed over three miles. There were six nominations for President, although four withdrew, and a vote elected Mr Goodwin. A clear show of hands elected the ex-Secretary of the Eight Hours League, Mr Farlow, as Secretary from a field of three. It was seemingly an excellent choice given the wonderful work he had done in achieving the goals of the League. Other office bearers were elected and after some of the usual difficulties it was agreed that Thursdays would be the night for meetings.

The United Furniture Trades Society (UFTS) had been born with relatively little pain. At its first meeting the finances had to be amalgamated, the changed Rules had to be printed and pasted into the books of the Eight Hours League. Then it was business as usual. For the next fifteen years the Victorian UFTS met in the Trades Hall.

Looking after the sick continued to be a major part of every meeting. At the time illness was rife and life expectancy was much younger than

it is now so it was not unusual for men to die during their working lives. Melbourne, nicknamed 'Smellbourne', was disease-ridden and filthy. It lacked sewerage, had no adequate water drainage and a high death rate from typhoid, cholera and smallpox. Not surprisingly, sick men would go to the country, if they could afford it, where the air was fresher and the streets cleaner. This made it difficult for the Society to keep tabs on the progress of their sick.

We get some idea of the processes involved when we follow the case of Mr Salmon's sick reports beginning on 12 March 1884:

Mr Bragge reported that Mr Salmon was improving and had promised to declare off but Mr Tyrrell was worse as he had just had another finger taken off.

30 April

Mr Salmon had taken ill again and was very bad.

21 May

Mr Salmon seems better.

28 May

Mr Salmon is improving.

4 June

Mr Salmon is better.

11 June

Mr Salmon has declared off the funds.

25 June

Mr Salmon was still very unwell.

2 July

Mr Salmon was still unwell.

9 July

Mr Bragge reported that Mr Salmon was still very unwell and wished permission to go to Wagga for change of air. [Motion carried] That Mr Salmon's request be granted subject to his sending a certificate of health once a month.

23 July

Mr Salmon about the same.

28 July

Mr Salmon is slightly better.

6 August

Mr Salmon was still complaining.

20 August

Mr Salmon declaring off the funds.

3 September

Mr Salmon declaring on the funds

Mr Smith moved and Mr Waghorn seconded: That no notice be taken of Mr Salmon's application as he had gone out of the colony. (Minutes 1884)

Members were asked to send in doctors' certificates every fortnight from the country to maintain their payments but that was still too difficult to administer so it was changed so members were only entitled to two weeks' sick pay while in the country.

Other problems concerned funds being received when they were not due:

6 March 1884

McClare was fined ten shillings for going to work before declaring off the funds

19 June 1884

Mr Combes had gone up the country without telling the Society it was moved he be fined one shilling. (Minutes 1884)

UNITED ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS.

Moatdale Lodge, No. 4

MEDICAL OFFICER'S WEEKLY CERTIFICATE.

I hereby Certify that Mr. *Mr McFadden* residing at *637 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne* is still suffering from *Rheumatism*. He requires medical attendance, and is unable to follow any occupation.

17/9/1906 (Signed) *Walter Macgibbon* Surgeon.

* The specific sickness or nature of certificate must be here stated.

N.B.—This Certificate must be furnished to the Lodge Secretary at his residence every Seven Days while the Member continues sick and claims the sick allowance.

Members neglecting to comply with the above shall forfeit all claims on the Lodge for such time as the law may have been uncomplished with.

Thomas McFadden 637 Little Lonsdale St

Members claiming sickness benefits from the Society had to show medical certificates, such as this for Mr McFadden, a Committee member, living at 637 Little Lonsdale Street, who was suffering from rheumatism.

The question of how to support the fund was also a constant concern. From time to time motions were moved at meetings suggesting a second level of membership with cheaper fees but no benefits. These suggestions never got enough support to be adopted but in December of 1884 it was agreed that people over fifty or those who were already sick or infirm could not become full members. In 1885 the Society decided to levy members threepence to cover the costs of funeral expenses paid to widows and families:

30 April 1885

Mr Hendy had at last after a long and troublesome illness succumbed to its powerful influence and had left his wife in poor circumstances.

It was moved and seconded that:

Subscription lists be circulated in the shops on behalf of Mr Hendy.

And then that a lump sum be made available out of the funds

Two pounds sterling be voted for Mrs Hendy.

This latter donation to Mrs Hendy was a discretionary payment decided by the meeting, case by case according to the state of the family that had been left behind and the involvement of the member with the Society. (Minutes 1884)

Wages and Conditions

The fight for the eight-hour day never really ended. Employers continually tried to undermine the conditions. One of the earliest tactics they used was to renege on paying the agreed overtime rate of time and a quarter. Reports were made to meetings, but these were often difficult to act on, because they depended on members being present at the meeting. Consequently, much of the reporting was hearsay. Farlow, the Secretary, had to visit the shops to verify reports and try to establish exactly how many hours were being worked and whether or not the agreed overtime rate was being paid. In most cases the men took action.

December 1884:

Mr Servantes wanted his men to work overtime at the same rate as he was paying during the day, but the men, all but one, refused and did no work nor would they do so unless time and quarter for overtime. (Minutes 1884)

The one man was Mr McHenry, the Society made it very clear they would not tolerate members undercutting Society conditions:

The Secretary was instructed to write to Mr McHenry of Servantes Shop informing that Member that this Society did not permit its members to work overtime for less than time and a quarter pay, and that it would post up the names of those who did in all the shops in the trade, as men who were working against the interests of the Society and Trade. (Minutes 1884)

The overtime rate was formalized in the Laws of the Society. Then some tried to circumvent that regulation by paying piece rates for work done outside the eight hours:

The Secretary was instructed to visit the men in Svenson's Shop to see if they were doing piecework after hours. (Minutes 1884)

In some shops tradesmen did a number of jobs, which could cause a difficulty for enforcing the condition. In one shop the French polishers also worked as packers. As polishers and members of the UFTS they were entitled to the eight-hour day, but not so as packers and therefore the employer could make them work nine hours. Mr Farlow, and the Trades Hall Secretary, Mr Murphy, managed to get the employer to agree that when working as polishers the men must work only eight hours, but if the same men were working as packers they could be made to work the nine hours.

One after another companies broke the eight-hours rule and the Society had to attend the workplaces and try to resolve it. In some cases the problem was that the workers seemed happy enough to work the longer hours and the Society needed to visit the workplaces and explain carefully the importance of the condition and the need for all workers to maintain it. Nothing could be taken for granted. The company who had provided the lounge suite for the first eight-hour march broke the agreement only one year later in October 1884:

30 October

Finch reported that he had been informed Cohen Bros Shop were working more than eight hours—after considerable discussion it was decided that Messrs Noel & Bragg be deputed to speak to Mr Cohen about the time worked in his shop. (Minutes 1884)

To some extent furniture manufacture is seasonal with a peak time at Christmas. So while Cohen had been trying to get his workers to work longer hours at the end of 1884, once the new year began he wanted to reduce their pay rates by 10 per cent. Some of the workers immediately walked out and the Society agreed to:

endorse the action of the men in Cohen Bros Shop in refusing a reduction in the price of work and the society pledges itself to support any of the men that may come out. Carried. (Minutes 1884)

And that:

Mr Farlow wait upon Mr Cohen and inform him of the action taken by the Society in this matter. Carried. (Minutes 1884)

Not enough men came out initially to force Cohen's hand. The Committee of Management (COM) met with all Cohen's workforce to explain the situation. They re-iterated their support.

That this Society support any of the men coming out of Mr Cohen's shop through the reduction of prices. (Minutes 1884)

Preparations for a strike began. The walkout was to be voluntary and the walkout pay was to be twenty shillings for married men and fifteen for single, and a levy of the rest of the membership would be struck to raise the money if necessary. In the event of non-Society men being taken on at cheaper rates, all Society men would be expected to walk out. It was also agreed that the Society put to Cohen the request that all cabinetmakers in his shop go onto three-quarters time instead of reducing the prices.

In May 1884 the following was reported:

Several members of Fallshaw's shop attended the meeting as they were out on strike, in consequence of one of their number having been discharged for requesting Mr Fallshaw not to put

an objectionable man who had been making chairs for 2/- each up in the top shop amongst them.

Mr Hale, together with some of the others, explained to the meeting the whole case and stated that the men did not feel justified in returning to work, unless this man was discharged or the employer be compelled to pay him 2/6 per chair. (Minutes 1884)

A motion was then passed that members of the society be requested not to take employment in that shop until the dispute was settled and the society had advertised it.

Paying piece rates undercut day wages. The payment was made for each piece of work performed as opposed to being paid for the time on the job. This forced workers to lose pay for any hold-up in production, whatever its cause, and also encouraged work at a faster pace at the expense of the quality and safety. The Society saw themselves as the guardians of skill and the successors of the guilds. Often pieceworkers were not trained—they had never been apprenticed and so although they could knock together a piece of furniture, they did not have the skills of the trade. Their existence undermined the pay scales that the Society fought for and which involved reward for skill. For these artisans, their trade was the very thing that identified them and their skill and the quality of their work was a matter of intense pride. Anything that undermined that skill undermined their sense of their own worth.

The furniture workers in Victoria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found themselves in the middle of several big historical trends. Work had been performed in small workshops that were known for the quality of their furniture and where the relations between employer and employee still carried a lot of the relationship between master and journeyman or apprentice. As the colony and then the nation grew, and technology enabled new production methods, there was a shift to factories where the owner was not necessarily a furniture maker, and had no sense or commitment to the development and maintenance of the skills of the trade. The factory system was driven solely by profit and anything that increased profits was beneficial. The change from one system to the other took place in fits and starts. In early Victoria many shops had elements of both within them. The early relationship of workers in Victoria was more fluid than it had been in Europe. Workers and employers were 'thrown together' as pioneers in building this new society—their dependence on one another was closer

and more intimate than it would have been in the home countries. Movement from worker to employer was common, and whether or not employers were entitled to be members of the Furnishing Trades Society was a point of contention.

It took the men at Fallshaw's only a week to get a satisfactory solution. The piece worker was paid for time as an unskilled 'improver'. The importance of the relationship between workers and employers is obvious in this minute from the April 1884 meeting.

That a hearty vote of thanks be accorded to Mr M. Goodwin President and Mr Farlow Secretary for the tact and energy displayed by them in bringing about so amicable a settlement between Messrs Fallshaw and their men. Carried unanimously. (Minutes 1884)

A couple of weeks later it became evident that Mr McNamara had worked at Fallshaw's during the period of the strike. He attended a meeting when summoned and explained that he had not been aware the strike was taking place. The meeting accepted his explanation and it was agreed that he should be 'exonerated from blame'.

Farlow was always busy attending workplaces to sort out problems or recruiting members. At each meeting, members gave reports about conditions in the various shops and inevitably they would lead to work for Farlow, who was the only paid staff member. He visited the shops to establish the situation and invariably discussed the problems with employers as a first step in resolving them. Members sometimes assisted him in this work and mostly they were given some payment for lost work time. The battle for the eight-hour day was ongoing. The Society visited workplaces and negotiated hours and rates of pay with employers. Often they would agree, but then refuse to give the conditions, or they would give the conditions for a time but then retract them and try to coerce the men into returning to longer hours or less pay. Sometimes the members would take action themselves; sometimes it would require a member from another shop making a report to a meeting and the Secretary visiting the men in the shop to determine a course of action. The rules of the Society were strictly enforced.

Each section fought for wages separately but when the Society tried to standardize wages and called for a committee consisting of two delegates from each section the chair makers met and decided not to participate.

Another of the ongoing problems was the constant attempt by employers to undercut the wages of qualified journeymen by employing boys and improvers. This problem was not limited to those in the furniture trades, of course, and from time to time the Trades Hall would tackle the question across industries. In 1884, a committee was set up by the Trades Hall to arrange for a delegation to approach the Government to try to have the question settled. It proved however to be a problem that would, like that of hours and wage rates, continue as long as employees made profits for employers and their conditions were in direct competition with the size of those profits.

By today's standards membership levels were small, but they were growing consistently. In 1884, about 150 new members joined. The Society also grew when new groups of workers became involved. In June 1885, the Society was approached by a group of mattress makers who asked for help in securing the eight-hour day. On 25 June twenty mattress makers joined, and on 2 July the Secretary reported that all employers had agreed, with the exception of one, to adopt the eight-hours system. The palliasses (horsehair mattresses) and mattress makers met as a committee and submitted a log of prices to the Society that were then adopted at a general meeting.

Moved that: two pounds ten be fixed as the standard rate of wages for Palliasses and Mattress Makers.

That cot Palliasses not in pairs filled and finished be 1/-.
(Minutes 1884)

Then amendment:

That the price be 1/3, motion carried. (Minutes 1884)

The log of prices was adopted and the Secretary arranged to meet the employers while the meeting showed its appreciation of the gaining of the eight-hour day in yet another section of the industry.

That a hearty vote of thanks be passed to the employers in the Palliasses and Mattress Making Branch for their kindness in granting their employes the eight hours. (Minutes 1884)

By 1890, 60 per cent of workers in Melbourne were working a 48-hour week over six days. A depression ended the boom with a thud. Bank closures, bankruptcies and loss of property led to closures in industry,

high unemployment and despair. The depression was caused by falls in the prices of exports, particularly of wool and, importantly, the curtailment of loan moneys from English banks. English money had been lent freely to Australian colonial governments, banks and business, but serious loan failures in Argentina had made British banks wary about colonial investment and they tightened their regulations. In Melbourne about 25 per cent of all employment was in the building and associated industries. Much of this work was based on loans that had dried up.

Employers were quick to take advantage of the situation to diminish the wages and conditions of work. The 1890s were marked by the significant defeats of the great strikes that followed the depression. The thinking of unions began to change. They began to see their role as broader and more political. In 1893, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council called on the Victorian Parliament to force banks to release accounts, and discussed the desirability of setting up a state bank in the interests of the community. The strikes were eventually defeated by the intervention of governments and the unions came to believe that unless they developed a political wing they would never be able to win and maintain decent conditions. They also became committed to a belief in the need for an independent judge or compulsory arbitration.

Along with most other unions, the Society had trouble surviving this depression. In his report of 1892 Farlow said:

The unprecedented depression that existed when our last Report was read to you has continued this six months and from appearances will continue through the coming winter. The effect of the depression has very materially reduced the revenue of the Society; yet, when we remember that in prosperous times the members have always liberally responded when called upon there can be no doubt that with an 'improvement in work the members will pay up again as before'. (Executive Reports and Balance Sheets 1892-1934)

To encourage membership and to improve the spirits of members who were facing unemployment the Harmony Nights were re-introduced.

The Harmony Nights, re-introduced in the last six months, have been a great source of enjoyment to the members who have patronized them. All attendants having expressed themselves delighted with the conviviality and good fellowship of

such meetings. It is hoped that the members who like a pleasant evening will attend, as the larger the company the greater the enjoyment. There has been no loss sustained through these entertainments. (Executive Reports and Balance Sheets 1892–1934)

It is always difficult in depressions for unions to maintain their memberships, as there is such strong temptation to accept work that undercuts rates that have been won. The alternative often is not to work at all. So that new members could afford to join and to encourage them to join the entrance fee was abolished in 1892 with new members having higher subs until the cost of entrance was covered. Members who were out of work were exempt from membership fees and had to sign an Exemption Book.

In February 1893 the situation had become worse. Farlow reported the grim situation:

The severe depression that still continues has had a most telling effect upon the Society and its Members, and it has become necessary to be most economizing in the conduct of our business, more particularly on account of the principal portion of the Society's funds being so unfortunately locked up at the present time in failing institutions. (Executive Reports and Balance Sheets 1892–1934)

Farlow refused throughout this period to accept any salary. When he retired in 1894 he was owed his salary for many months. He agreed, after he left the job, to accept whatever money was received at meetings until his pay had been made up.

In the depression, 'sweating' again became a major problem and the Society was heavily involved in the political movement against it. Its interests involved stamping out the 'sweating' that took place in the soft furnishing and bedding industries and in closing the Chinese workplaces that made furniture at cheap prices, using cheap labour. The 'Sweating Board' commenced sittings in June 1893. The Anti-Sweating Committee collected evidence for the Board and the Society took credit for the success of the committee. They reported in the minutes that they had been involved:

to work to educate public opinion on the matter. The editors of *The Age* and *Herald* were seen, and both promised their

earnest support, which they carried out. Within the next two months nine Public Meetings were held in the suburbs of Melbourne, at which over fifty speakers took part—thus not only did we educate the public to our needs, but enlisted the sympathies and active support of a number of influential gentlemen in our cause. The result is, we have got not only all we asked for at those meetings, but a little more. (Executive Reports and Balance Sheets 1892)

Harwood and Wood were appointed to work full time at getting the Bill safely through the Legislative Council, and this cost the Society £22 18s.

The Balance Sheet of the Committees of 30 June 1894–95 August 1896 showed that income was received from employers, employees and the Anti-Chinese League, and totalled £41 14s 3d. The money was spent on printing and advertising, paying Committee members for lost time—mostly Mr Wood—and paying six shillings for the cab hire for a *Herald* reporter.

In 1895 the Anti-Sweating League was formed at a public meeting in Melbourne and this was considered a coup by the Society who had been so involved in the Committee. A royal commission heard evidence and again the Society was involved in giving evidence. One year later, in 1896, the Factories Act was amended to set up wages boards to fix prices for workers in different industries:

The most important provision contained in the Act of 1896, and extended by subsequent Acts, is in regard to the formation of Boards to fix the rates of wages and piecework in various trades, for which purpose it is provided that, to determine the lowest prices or rates to be paid, the Governor-in-Council may appoint special Boards, if a resolution in favour of creating a Board for any process, trade, or business has been carried in both Houses of Parliament, consisting of from four to ten members (half elected by employers and half by employees), who are to nominate some outside person as Chairman; or if no agreement can be arrived at as to such nomination, then the Governor-in-Council shall appoint the Chairman. (*Victorian Year Book* 1905, pp. 237–8)

The Bill was introduced by the Chief Secretary Mr (later Sir) Alexander Peacock. He proposed to set minimum wages for juniors

under 16 years or females only. It was argued in the House that this minimum wage should apply to all workers. The Factories Act had been introduced to protect the weaker sections of the community. However in the end it was successfully argued that if there were a minimum wage for only women and children the result would be that men would be forced to work more cheaply, and that there would be no work for women and children at all. The minimum was set at two shillings and sixpence a week and covered all persons. The wage disparity here is enormous considering that in Melbourne in the 1880s a majority of building and metal tradesmen received ten to twelve shillings a day and unskilled labourers six to eight shillings a day.

The Chief Inspector of Factories was Mr Harrison Ord, who was very committed to the abolition of sweating and was called by a member of Parliament at the time: ‘an honest, energetic, well-meaning mono-maniac’. (A mono-maniac is one who thinks he can accomplish all by himself—probably today we’d say egomaniac.) When the Act was passed Mr Ord said that it ‘was probably the most advanced Factories and Shops Act in the world’. (Hammond 1915)



An invoice for furniture dated 1908.

Wages Boards were established in 1896 as part of the Act to set minimum wage rates and conditions across industries. They were made up of representatives of the employers, Unions and government but the numbers meant that effectively the Government had a casting vote. These Boards proved to be an enormous amount of work for the Union but gave some system of external standards where relativities could be argued and established.

In 1905, a number of Acts, known as the Factories and Shops Acts were consolidated into one Act, the *Factories and Shops Act 1905*. At this time there were 38 Boards affecting over 38 000 operatives. The Boards were to determine piecework rates and minimum wages rates, and the number of improvers under twenty-one who could be employed as a ratio with qualified workers. This legislation had the advantage of being permanent, rather than brought into operation as needed as was the case with the old legislatures. The Act set out rigid times when work could and could not take place and was the basis for the Wages Boards that continued to set wages for Furnishing Trades Workers until 1927.

Average weekly Wage in Furniture including boys in 1896 prior to the establishment of the Board was £1 9s 1d and £1 17s 7d in 1904. (*Victorian Year Book 1905*, p. 2)

The Chinese

During the gold rush, 40 000 Chinese were among those who came to Victoria in the hope of finding a fortune. Like the Europeans, many of them ended up finding work in Melbourne. The Chinese were particularly skilled furniture makers and set up workshops in Melbourne's China Town. The conditions for the workers were abominable; they lived on the premises, sleeping on the floor of the workshops and working long hours, seven days a week. As a result the furniture produced was a serious threat to the marketing of European-made furniture. It was good quality but with such low labour costs it could be sold much more cheaply. Not only was the Chinese-made furniture a threat to the industry, but also the existence of the cheap pool of labour was a double threat to the workers. The Society could have embraced the Chinese furniture makers and fought for them to have equal conditions but that option was not considered. At the time, the majority of Europeans had absolute belief in their own superiority and in the superiority of their methods. Life for furniture manufacturers in Victoria in the nineteenth century was difficult, Melbourne was burgeoning with the problems of

a population centre that had grown too fast, work was insecure and the Chinese made easy scapegoats. Racism was unashamed. The Chinese were reviled; they looked different, spoke differently, wore different clothes, ate different food, even used different eating implements, they worshipped different gods, had no respect for the Sabbath Sunday and they did not seem to care about the eight-hour day. Their craftsmanship had not been acquired through the recognized apprenticeship system and so they could not possibly make quality furniture, according to the men of the UFTS who wanted the Chinese out of the industry and out of the country:

7 September 1882:

It was resolved that Mr Harwood, Mr Noel and Mr Baskerville should visit the Chinese Quarters in view of ascertaining whether work was carried on upon the Sunday. (Minutes 1882)

Groups of Society men visited the Chinese quarter in Lonsdale and Little Bourke Streets regularly to catch them infringing the Factory Act by working on Sundays or after hours. They walked along the streets after dark, looking for lamplight creeping under closed doors as proof that out-of-hours work was going on behind the doors. Most of the fortnightly meetings involved reports of these forays. Members wrote articles and letters to newspapers about 'the Chinese question', they gave speeches and lobbied parliamentarians. They also brought pressure to bear, whenever they could, to stop the Chinese product from being sold. In March 1884:

Mr Waghorn: Reported that he was informed the Cooperative Equitable Store was in the habit of purchasing Chinese Furniture and he thought the Society should ascertain if such was the case.

Moved: That the Secretary be instructed to write to Mr Nuttall re purchasing these goods ... and inform him that the Society feels aggrieved at his dealing with the Chinese to the injury of European tradesmen. (Minutes 1884)

The Cooperative store wrote back to the Society, keen to ensure them that they only had 'twenty-eight pounds worth' of Chinese-made furniture in their store.

Once the furniture had left the workshops it was difficult to tell who had made it. In September 1884, at a Society meeting, Mr Waghorn came up with the idea that if the furniture made by Society members was stamped 'European Labour Only' before it left the workshops, consumers could be sure they were not buying Chinese-made furniture. The suggestion was taken up with enthusiasm.

Mr Waghorn moved, Mr Finch seconded:

That a committee be appointed to consider the practicability of stamping furniture the committee to consist of Messrs Noel, Emerson, Baskerville, Martin and the mover with power to add to their number. (Minutes 1884)

The Stamping Committee immediately but unsuccessfully tried to get the support of the employers. The employers were in a bind and had a different agenda from the workers. For them the Chinese furniture was certainly a serious competitor and obviously they would prefer that it did not exist so, at times, they loudly voiced opposition to the Chinese presence. At the same time, the Chinese served a useful purpose. Employers were not averse to using the cheap labour when it suited. But probably more significant was the way it was used as a battering ram against the Society whenever its members strove for better conditions. It was noticeable that the employers would raise the problem of the Chinese as a covert threat whenever claims for better conditions were being made. The Stamping Committee then turned its attention to arranging a meeting with the Minister to get his endorsement for the stamp. This was given readily but carried no weight. The Society had to develop a more determined strategy and was in for a long battle before the stamp was finally accepted.

The Society did not recognize the Chinese workers, but the Chinese workers were, in fact, running their own battles. In 1885, three hundred of the Chinese furniture workers formed The Chinese Workers Union and went on strike against their Chinese bosses. They sought the conditions that were accorded to the European workers and managed to secure a basic wage, a fifty-hour week, holidays and jobs for Union members only. During their strike they approached the Trades Hall and asked for help and support but were shown the door. (McQueen 2004)

The issue began to take a backseat through the next few years, but in 1887 two Imperial diplomats arrived in Melbourne. While they were

treated with cordiality their presence seemed to stimulate fear that there would be another wave of Chinese immigration. In actuality, the number of Chinese living in Victoria was decreasing steadily but that did not stop the hysteria. *The Age* launched a campaign against Chinese immigration that coincided with a visit from two Chinese diplomats who came to discuss trade relations. The articles were provocative and designed to cause fear among workers:

they manage to live in a way that enables them to evade the duties and the obligations of citizenship. But, above all, they thwart and nullify and render of no effect by their presence legislation that has been specially devised for the benefit of the working classes with whom they come into competition. What is the use of the State restricting his legal hours of labour to eight for a European when a Mongolian can work as long as he pleases; or what is the use of the Trades Unions struggling to maintain the rate of wages when he can work for as little as he pleases? (Gibb 1973)

The article continues its fear campaign, quoting figures from the USA that showed the displacement of European labour in factories. *The Age* drew an immediate response from the furniture workers. On 15 June, it published two letters, the first from 'a working man'.

Already their influence has been very detrimental to our working people, and to several trades simply ruinous. Take the furniture trade for example. How can a skilled cabinetmaker compete with the denizens of Little Bourke Street, who work all the hours they please, and turn out work superficially good looking but constructively inferior, and at the same time live as few Europeans would or could? (Gibb 1973)

The second letter was from the President of the Society, H. A. Harwood who quoted a speaker from the Trades Hall Council meeting the night before, that could well have been himself:

Even the working classes in our own colony, according to one of the speakers at the Trades Hall last night, will get their furniture from the Chinese cabinetmakers, because they get it for

less than the European workman can turn it out ... There are only two ways of preventing it, and they are, either to prohibit the importation of Chinese paupers altogether, or to compel them to submit to the laws of the country they reside in; in other words, compel them to comply with the Eight Hours system and the Factories Act. (Gibb 1973)

In fact Harwood and Murphy both attended a reception given by the Town Hall for the visiting diplomats. Murphy wrote a report of the evening in which he praised the urbane civility of the visitors. He noted Harwood's conviviality with the diplomats and pondered that they would never guess he ran such a ruthless campaign against their Melbourne-based compatriots. (Murphy 1887)

When the Wages Boards were set up, the worker representatives were elected from the industry. Far from welcoming the organization of the Chinese workers and trying to build a solid opposition to employers, both European and Chinese, the UFTS were afraid that the Chinese organization might enable the election of Chinese delegates onto the Board. They lobbied the Premier and persuaded the Trades Hall to send delegates in support of their cause.

Mr Hood obtained the suspension of standing orders to move That this Council strongly urges upon the Premier the necessity of taking steps to exclude Chinese from taking any part in the proposed Boards to be formed in the Furniture Trade.

Mr Hood moved that a deputation wait upon the Premier and Chief Secretary at noon on Tuesday with the representatives of the Furniture Trade Society—the Executive and as many members of Council who can make it convenient to attend. Sec Mr Graham, carried ... (Trades Hall Minutes 1896)

At the end of the century, after the harrowing years of the last decade, the racism in the labour movement was at fever pitch. In the early 1890s, which had been difficult for any union, the Chinese Workers Union collapsed, but it became active again in 1897. An article that appeared at the very beginning of the new century in *The Tocsin*, a radical labour movement weekly paper, sends shivers down the spine of a modern reader, but was obviously regarded as 'progressive' in its time.

The article was headed 'The Piebald Plague':

Must we not view with horror and disgust the gradual and steady influx of the black, brown, yellow and piebald men who swarm in hordes from the Asian continent, and the islands of Malaya and Polynesia, knowing full well that the swarm carries with it the germs of a plague, beside which the bubonic, or smallpox, is a mere bagatelle. The latter affects only the body physical, but the other eats into, and destroys the body politic, and so deadly are its affects that communities stare in hypnotic wonder and watch the piebald procession fasten its fangs on the vitals of the people. (*The Tocsin* 1900)

This sort of sentiment fuelled the rationale for government legislation to treat the Chinese as separate from the Europeans. The Factories Act of 1905 had the following:

A factory is defined to mean any place in which four or more persons other than a Chinese, or in which one or more Chinese are employed in any handicraft, or in preparing articles for trade or sale; or any place in which one or more are employed, if motive power be used in the preparation of such articles, or where furniture is made, or where bread or pastry is made or baked for sale ... Provision is made for the registration of factories; and inspectors are appointed to inspect and examine them in order to see that the health requirements and other provisions of the Acts are complied with. A record is to be kept in every factory of the names, work, and wages of all employees, and the ages of and a strict limitation is placed on the hours of employment for all females and for males under sixteen ... The working hours of Chinese are specially restricted, in order to try to prevent or lessen unfair competition. (*Victorian Year Book* 1905, p. 237)

Legislation like this further entrenched the separation that maintained the competition. The Society continued their vigilance and took action whenever they felt it was needed. The problem arose on many fronts and took several forms. Knowing that the Society would take drastic action if they employed the Chinese labour outright, employers began

to take orders and then subcontracted the work to the Chinese workshops. This was suspected in May 1909 when the Women's Hospital in Carlton ordered forty-eight bedroom suites. The price quoted by a local manufacturer was so low that the Society men were afraid the work was being subcontracted to a Chinese firm. In this case their investigation allowed them to rest at ease, they were familiar with the subcontractor and trusting of his commitment to using European labour.

On 4 March 1909, the minutes of the Society recorded the support of one of the employers for their campaign:

The Secretary reported that Mr Fallshaw had interviewed Mr Jeffrey Syme of *The Age* Office in reference to the Chinese Competition in the Furniture Trades. *The Age* people had agreed to write up some articles in reference to the Anti-Chinese Bill ... he thought that Mr Syme was very favourable disposed towards the white workers and promised to do all he could to down the Chow. (Minutes 1909)

The minutes of the UFTS never mentioned the existence of the Chinese Union or of the Chinese wanting in any way to be part of the battle for improved working conditions. The first recognition that Chinese workers did have awareness and might seek solidarity was another blow. In 1909 a motion was put at the Branch meeting by Mr Wright to prevent 'Chinese or half-caste Chinese' from becoming members of the Union.

Population of Victoria Distinguishing Chinese and Aborigines at Five Census Periods

	Person	Total		Person	Chinese			Aborigines		
		male	female		male	f/m	Pers	Male	F/M	
1861	540 322	328 651	211 671	24 732	24 724	81	694	1 046	648	
1871	731 528	401 050	330 478	17 935	17 899	361	330	784	546	
1881	862 346	452 083	410 263	12 128	11 869	259	780	460	320	
1891	1 140 405	598 414	541 991	9 377	8 772	605	565	325	240	
1901	1 201 341	603 883	597 458	7 349	6 740	609	652	367	285	

(*Victorian Year Book* 1905, p. 122)

These statistics, from the *Victorian Year Book*, show the lack of truth in the fearmongering. From 1861 the numbers of Chinese residents in

Victoria decreased regularly. This was due mainly to Acts of Parliament that imposed increasingly severe restrictions on Chinese immigration.

Organizing Women

In Melbourne, women were excluded from any of the trades. Women's work was considered outside the realms of conditions that trade unions fought for. There was a perception that the only women in the workforce were young girls who worked for a few years before they were married. This was false. The 1903 Census showed that 24 per cent of working women had dependents. Only 65 per cent of men who worked had dependents, but wages were set on a gender basis, so a man with no dependents was very well off and a woman with dependents was in dire straits. Women whose work brought them into contact with the Society were mostly employed in soft furnishing, but women were also employed in many of the woodworking factories.

The structure of female labour involved a high proportion of out-workers whose conditions were not covered by any of the Wages Boards and were extremely poor. These women were often the subject of concern for the Anti-Sweating League and in March 1909 they managed to convince the Furniture Wages Board that it needed to rectify the situation. The Furniture Wages Board agreed to set a wage for 'outdoor hands and upholsteresses' and so the Society called a meeting of upholsteresses and carpet sewers. The first attempt was unsuccessful, so a second meeting was called and more effort was put into publicizing it. The result was better than anticipated. Attendance was good and lots of information about working conditions was provided with a good number putting their names down to join the Union. At first, the Society recommended that the rates were fixed at between two shillings and six pence and twenty shillings for a week of forty-eight hours. There was to be a rising scale with increases every year for five years until the twenty shillings was arrived at. In the end the Board increased that amount to twenty-five shillings a week for all females. This pay was still appalling; qualified men were getting nine shillings a day for five-and-a-half days. A meeting of the women was called and the Society announced the rates that had been fixed which led to many of the women joining the Society. The Board had fixed the rates for all females in the trades who were classified as either carpet sewers, upholsteresses or table or drapery hands. As low as the wages were, they were an improvement on the past and the employers fought back. In some of the shops women were discharged as

employers said they could not afford the increases and in others they refused to pay them. The Society had another ongoing battle.

Overview of Industry

Average Number of Persons Employed in Industry 1905

In Class XIII—Furniture, bedding etc.

	Male Owners	Male Workers	Female Owners	Female Workers
Upholstery, bedding flock—				
Bedstead	19	296	1	121
Cabinet Making including				
billiard tables	151	11	11	28
Picture Frame	19	129	3	26
Venetian Blinds	8	34		
In Class XIX—Minor wares, not elsewhere included				
Basket Wicker	9	46	1	
Glass (including bottles) & glass bevellers are included in Class 111 Process relating to stone, clay, glass etc.				
Glass Bevellers	51	14	150	

(*Victorian Year Book* 1905, p. 562)

No. of Manufacturies—	
furniture, bedding etc.	173
Employed males in industry	1816
Employed females in industry	103

(*Victorian Year Book* 1905, p. 567)

Union Banner

Every year the major calendar event was the eight-hour day parade. The Society was entitled to representatives on the Eight Hours Day Committee and chests swelled whenever one of its delegates was elected by that committee to a leadership position.

One of the highlights of the parade was the outing of the banners that were carried by the Societies. Made of fine silk or cotton the banners were works of art, beautifully sewn or embroidered. They were very

fragile and often damaged when taken out for a parade or a march. In February 1884, just after the amalgamation, the UFTS decided to have a banner made. Raising money for a banner was one of the first items they addressed.

Moved a motion to have a concert and Ball to bring the members together and to raise a little money towards the purchase of a banner. Amendment that a picnic be arranged instead ... (Minutes 1884)

The fundraiser was disappointing and many more had to be organized until there was enough money for a banner. In the first eight-hour day demonstration in which the Society and the League had marched together, they had done so under the banner of the old Society. For the 1885 march, the new Society was determined to have a new banner. By September, plans were underway. A design for a banner was being considered. There were three contenders, but it was decided to accept Mr Cameron's design at a cost of £125, upsetting Mr Rizzie whose design was not accepted. The banner progressed through the months but by 9 April, with the day of the parade fast approaching, it was still incomplete, but the meeting was assured it would be ready in time. It was ready on 15 April and some reported to the meeting that they had seen it and gave their opinion of it. Obviously, enthusiasm was not overflowing because:

after much discussion it was agreed that the passing of the banner be left in the hands of the Banner Committee. (Minutes 1884)

The banners were kept at Trades Hall in the banner room. It still exists, off the courtyard at the back of the old building although there are no longer any banners in it. The pulleys and the rails remain, high up on the ceiling where the banners hung between outings. The banners were hung from the pulleys because the old silk banners were so fragile that they could not be folded without being damaged. Cotton banners were often damaged when folded or when being hoisted on the pulleys, or onto their frames. The frames were also fragile and always seemed to be in need of repair work. The Trades Hall had a problem at one stage with responsibility for damage to banners. Because they were housed at the Hall, it was its responsibility. Eventually, resolutions were passed so that the Trades Hall was not responsible for the banners and it recommended

that each Union ensured that it had insurance for its banner. The UFTS had its banner insured for £100 in July 1885.

Every year, in the months leading up to the eight-hour procession, a Banner Committee was elected, which was often a competitive process. The members of the Banner Committee were paid for their time and trouble. Their job was to prepare the banner for the parade and then carry and look after it during the parade itself.

W. E. Murphy provides a colourful description of the scene at Trades Hall when the banners were being prepared for the eight-hour demonstration:

For several days before the 21st April, the enthusiasm of the Trades runs high; little coteries of men may be observed each evening in the ample vestibule of the Trades Hall with countenances mechanically suggestive of astronomical and meteorological instrument, gravely discussing the indications of the doubtful weather, of which this time of year is susceptible. Others are to be seen in the store and banner rooms, selecting, repairing, and otherwise making quite certain that no hitch will take place, when all should be ready for a start. Another little group is glorying in the privilege of getting the first look at some new banner, which is to be displayed in the gorgeous procession for the first time this year. (Murphy 1888)

On 21 April 1885, the committee and the Collingwood members of the Furnishing Trades Society met at Mr Cameron's house in Collingwood. A band was to play for £1 as they marched into town, with members joining as they passed through their neighbourhoods, until they reached the Carlton Gardens in Victoria Street, where they would meet up with members from other districts and then move towards the meeting place for all Societies. Mr Harwood had the honour of being the chief marshal. It was his job to oversee the furniture workers in the march and make sure everything went off as planned. Members had been asked to wear the Society colours—blue and white ribbon had been bought and rosettes were available on the day.

On 26 April a celebratory concert and ball took place and on 30 April it was agreed to send a vote of thanks to Mr Booth for his effort with the banner:

and also vote of thanks to Members of the Labourers' Society who assisted with our banner on Eight Hours Day. (Minutes 1885)



Charles O'Hara was a cabinetmaker and the Assistant Secretary of the Society. In 1896 he was elected as a 'bannerman' for the eight-hour parade. This was always a difficult job. The banners and their frames were fragile and in 1896 it was particularly difficult as the banner frame had been damaged by strong winds the year before.



Unidentified Committee believed to be Eight Hour Day Committee because of the ribbons on the jackets. Also the pistol being held by one of the men is probably a starting pistol used for the games that were always held after the parade in the Carlton Gardens.

In June that year it was decided to put a frame around the banner design. It was agreed that the frame would be black and gold and two inches wide, although someone had suggested a gilt frame but given that they hoped to keep the cost to £1, that was ruled out.

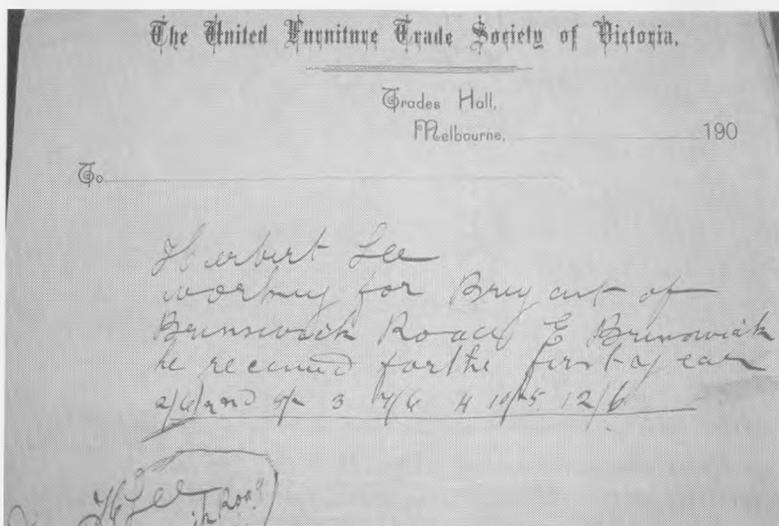
Each year the minutes record the preparation for the eight-hour day parade and caring for the banner was always one of the main issues. A typical entry in the minutes about the banner was made on 7 March 1901:

Mr Wright reported that the Banner Committee had overhauled the banner frame and suggested that certain repairs should be done, also that it wanted painting. Report received. Mr Goodwin moved, Mr Woods seconded that the Banner Committee get the necessary repairs and painting done to the Banner frame. (Minutes 1901)

Changing Language

On 22 August 1888 the minutes of the Society record:

Mr Brommelt: Reported that all the men in Mr Barr's shop but three were in the Society and suggested that the Secretary see these three men and induce them to join if possible. That the Secretary to see the non-union men in Courier's Shop also. (Minutes 1888)



UFTS letterhead printed with the first three numbers of the year 190_.

This is the first time the word 'union' has been used in reference to the Society. Previously the word had only been used to describe the organization of Employers. From that point on the word 'Union' gradually crept into the wording in the minutes until it was used more often than the word Society.

It was during a dispute at Tyes' that the UFTS first organized picket duty. Tye prided itself on having been given the job of furnishing a cottage in the Exhibition Gardens for the Duke and Duchess of York when they visited Melbourne for the opening of the Federal Parliament in 1901. Some time before that in May 1896 Mr Tye tested the patience of his pieceworkers by posting a notice saying that he would fine them if they came late for work. Since pieceworkers were paid only for the work they performed they lost money by coming in late in any case. They were incensed by the notice and especially because Tye was keeping them hanging around from 8 a.m. until 12.30 p.m. before letting them start work—wasting their time and denying them a full day's pay.

Unanimously, the workers approached the Society asking for support because they would not 'submit to such tyranny'. Tye was approached by the Society but he would not discuss taking down the offensive notice. The men decided to strike, but were concerned about one worker, a non-Society man who they expected would 'blackleg'. To stop him going in to work Mr Gilding and Mr Dwyer were elected for picket duty early Friday morning to make sure that he could not work and break the solidarity.

This action was successful, but a week later the NSW Secretary sent a telegram saying that Tye was advertising for men in Sydney and that the NSW Society was doing its best to stop men from coming to Melbourne to work at Tye's. Nevertheless blacklegs did appear and managed to break through the picket line. When eventually the members did return to work some of them were victimized and Tye refused to employ them, saying he did not need them. At the same time, word came from New Zealand that he was advertising for workers there.

Glass Workers

Since its inception the UFTS included glass bevellers whose work involved using glass in furniture making. They had a low profile and their skills were not considered as valuable as the skills of the woodworkers. In February 1908, the Secretary of the Plate and Stained Glass Workers requested a meeting with representatives of the UFTS with a view to amalgamation. It was immediately agreed that the Executive

would meet the glass workers and the commitment was so strong that the meeting immediately turned its attention to the legalities of an amalgamation, deciding that:

a committee be appointed to confer with the Executive as to the advisability of bringing the Union under the Excise Act. (Minutes 1908)

On 20 February 1908 the Secretary reported:

Re the Conference with the Plate and Stained Glass workers we recommended that we accept their members without Initiation fee. All arrears to be charged to any monies held by the Plate & Stained Glass Workers to be handed over to the Furniture Trade Society. (Minutes 1908)

Once they were part of the UFTS the delegate for the glass workers section was Mr Huckerby, who regularly gave reports of the industry:

Mr Huckerby gave an overview of the glass trade and said that it was in bad shape. The Secretary and Mr Huckerby decided to do a tour of the plate glass workshops so they could report back to the Union and hopefully organize a Branch. (Minutes 1908)

The Branch was easy to build once they were in the Society and employers were approached and asked to provide the eight-hour day. It took some weeks but was successful by March 1908 and so it was decided that the float at the parade in April would feature the work of the glass workers. Also Mr Huckerby was paid two pounds for the time he had lost in visiting the workshops and negotiating for the eight-hour day.

The Society was also able to use its influence to persuade the Government to use local labour for glass contracts. They lobbied the railways commissioners to use local plate glass workers in building trains and on 1 April 1909:

Mr Huckerbey reported that owing to the action taken by the Society, the last tender for Glass had been kept in the State instead as formerly from Germany. (Minutes 1909)

Federation and Amalgamation of Branches

The colonies developed at varying paces and by 1879 it had become evident to some of the Societies that it would be an advantage for them to have closer links. Employers in the different colonies used the differences to undercut pay rates and conditions and, when there was a strike in one colony, employers would advertise for workers in the others. People would make long and difficult journeys, only to find they would be used as scabs. The NSW Societies called an inter-colonial conference—in fact, there was only one delegate from Victoria, a carpenter who was living, at the time, in Sydney. Still, it had started the ball rolling.

In 1884, the Victorian Trades Hall Council decided to call the Second Intercolonial Trades Union Congress to be held in Melbourne in the four days leading up to the eight-hour day anniversary. The second congress was well attended by delegates from Victoria, NSW and South Australia. Numerous topics were covered and more importantly, avenues of communication for unions in the three colonies were opened. This would help unions to prevent employers' playing off labour from one colony against the other.

Early in 1884 the UFTS Trades Hall delegates suggested that a committee be set up to prepare an 'epitome of subjects' to be submitted for consideration for the congress agenda and, with its usual diligence, care was taken when electing the committee that all the trades in the Society were represented. By 20 February the committee proposed three topics to the full meeting:

That the Chinese question be one of those to be submitted to the Congress but under two heads/viz/Chinese Immigration and Competition.

That the question of piecework vs day work be also submitted.

That the question: Does the drinking habits of society injure trades as a whole [be submitted]. (Minutes 1884)

When considered by the full meeting, only the first topic was submitted. Mr Goodwin and Mr Farlow were elected to represent the UFTS at the Congress and a levy of threepence a member was struck to contribute to its cost.

The general meeting that followed the congress on 1 May heard enthusiastic reports from the delegates. The congress had stimulated ideas about amalgamation of the Furniture Trade Societies. The

Victorians led the way on this and sent copies of their laws to the other colonies for consideration as a basis for a federated body. The Hobart Furniture Trades Society had been unable to attend the congress but wrote to the Victorians that they would favour an amalgamation. The four colonies had begun regular and continuous communication. They compared pay rates and enforcement structures, visited one another and examined ways of organizing and dealing with employers, placed warnings in newspapers next to ads from employers soliciting scabs, but this communication fell short of further developments towards amalgamation.

After Federation in 1901 there was more impetus for the Societies to become federal bodies. This was recognized by the Watson Labour Government, which was elected on 27 April 1904 to form the first Labour Government in the world. Its opposition was so virulent and so determined to get rid of it that it only lasted a tumultuous four months, but in that time it was able to introduce the Commonwealth Conciliation Act in 1904 and call on unions to federate and register under the new federal regulations. Unions were slow to take the step and by 1906 only two had registered.

The situation changed in 1907 when Justice Higgins brought the Harvester Judgement with its basic wage determination. The rationale of the decision set the way wages were fixed in Australia for the next sixty years and was a departure compared to methods used by the state Wages Boards and by most courts in Europe and the USA. Higgins set a basic wage that was based on need, which was to be paid to all adult white male workers. This basic wage was to be enough to keep a man, his wife and three children in 'reasonable comfort'. He awarded women, whom he believed did not have the responsibilities of a man, 54 per cent of the male rate. On top of the basic wage he set margins for skill. These margins were for fitters and turners in the metal trades, making them the benchmark for all other industries.

This wage was available to federal registered unions, creating a renewed impetus for federation that was taken up by the furnishing workers. While the basic rate set by Higgins was, in most cases, better than the wages set by the state Boards, registration also brought other benefits: it could ensure a consistency of conditions across states; it provided access to the federal courts and their rulings; it gave a legal legitimacy to unions that they had been lacking; and it established clearly the rights of unions to enrol members from particular occupational or industrial areas.

The Furnishing Trades Societies in Victoria, NSW and South Australia began working toward amalgamating and getting federal registration. After a preliminary conference in Adelaide, it was decided to go ahead with an amalgamation conference in Melbourne in February 1909. Although it was initially expected that the federal Society would include members from all the eastern states and South Australia as well as New Zealand, in the end, the conference was attended by delegates only from NSW, South Australia and Victoria.

The Conference was held in the Executive Room of the Trades Hall Council Chamber and went well. Reports were given from each state about working conditions. Pledges to strengthen unionism by organizing a federation were made with general agreement that this would force employers to offer consistent conditions from state to state. A set of Rules that would apply to all States was thrashed out. Finally the conference decided:

That immediately on the adoption of these rules by at least three states the officers shall at once take the necessary steps to register the federation under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration. (Minutes 1909)

In Victoria, a special meeting was called to endorse the Rules. After some discussion the whole of the Rules and Regulations were adopted with only one member voting against them. However in NSW, the Rules were not so readily adopted. Amendments to several of the Rules were sent back to Victoria. All were accepted except the amendment of Rule 28 concerning the ratifying by Branches of new Rules or Rule changes. NSW had changed the wording that ratification had to take place within one month of the Rule change, and the Victorian Society felt this would be more efficient with the addition of the words 'by a majority of Branches'. They sent this back to NSW, which agreed. The South Australians agreed to all amendments. The Tasmanians, who had been unable to attend the conference, had managed to get a Branch organized in time to be part of the original registration. (Minutes 1909)

Applications for registration were submitted by: Victoria; NSW; South Australia; and Tasmania on 23 July 1909 at Carlton, and signed by Archibald Dobson, of Trades Hall, Lygon Street, Carlton and John Bowie, Treasurer, of 180 Williams Road, Toorak. The Association was described as 'an Association of Employees in or in connection with the Furnishing Trade industry'. The form declared that the Association had

not less than one hundred members, and that copies of Lists of Members and Officers of the Association would be supplied.

The Industrial Registrar had a notice published in *Gazette No. 41* of 31 July 1909, on page 1336:

Notice is given that application has been made for registration of the Federated Furnishing Trades Societies of Australasia and asks for objections to be lodged within thirty days after the publication of this advertisement.

No objections were received. (Commission 1909)

The first officers were:

E. W. Cutler—President NSW

J. Jelly Vice Pres—SA

J. Bowie—Treasurer—Vic

G. J. Bawden—Trustee—SA

J. Slater—Trustee NSW

A. Dobson—Secretary, Vic

In August a letter was received from Queensland saying that conditions in the trade were very good; their members had won a forty-four hour week and had a ratio of one apprentice to three journeymen. There was no mention of why they had not joined the federal registration; perhaps they felt they had nothing to gain as they seemed to be doing well by themselves. On the other hand, the Tasmanians were not faring so well. The Secretary of the Launceston Branch was in Melbourne and reported high levels of sweating in Tasmania and:

wages low, boys were in proportion about five to one journeyman—they were not taught their trade and were usually offered 25/- a week when out of their time ... very discontented but too afraid to join Union. (Correspondence files n.d.)

As the date for federation grew closer some members of the Victorian Society worried that they would lose benefits after amalgamation. Dobson put a circular out to all members informing them that:

This Union will go out of existence on the last day of August, and the Federated Furnishing Trade Societies of Australasia will take its place.

All members of the present Union who pay up all arrears will be entitled to full benefits from the date of joining; all other members' arrears will be struck off the books, but must then be treated as new members. (Minutes 1909)

At the next meeting, one member, Mr Mutz, resigned because he could not 'see his way clear to join a federated Society'. Another member, Mr Wright, took exception to the wording proposed by the Secretary and tried, unsuccessfully, to have the meeting adjourned. The meeting continued and Dobson, the Secretary, moved meeting times for the new Branch of the federated Society:

That this Branch of the Society meet every alternate Thursday beginning on September 2nd 1909 and that new pence cards be got with the dates of meeting nights printed thereon for the ensuing twelve months after discussion had taken place the President put the vote and took account and declared the resolution carried by a two-thirds majority. (Minutes 1909)

BECOMING PROLETARIAN

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir Men's blood.

David Hudson Burnham c 1900

ON 3 SEPTEMBER 1909 the Federated Furnishing Trade Societies of Australasia came into existence.

The Federation shall consist of an unlimited number of members, as follows: Males: Piano makers, cabinet makers, chair and couch makers, upholsterers, carpet planners and outdoor hands, wood carvers, French polishers, wood turners, wood mantelpiece makers, billiard table makers and fitters, overmantel makers, wire mattress makers, picture frame makers, bedding makers, Venetian and wire blind makers, glass bevellers, cutters, silverers, leadlight glaziers and cutters, shop front glaziers and cutters, and all wood working machinists preparing material for the above employees. Females: Upholsterers, carpet hands, table hands and drapery hands, and all other employees working in furniture factories, piano factories, mantelpiece factories, billiard table factories, overmantel factories, bedding factories, mattress factories, venetian and wire blind factories, picture frame factories, and plate glass factories.

The objects of the organization at federation were:

To uphold the rights of combination of labour, and to improve, protect and foster the best interests of its members.

To promote industrial peace and efficiency by all amicable means, such as conciliation, arbitration, or the establishment of permanent boards.

To prevent strikes or lockouts.

When differences do occur, to obtain their settlement by just and equitable methods.

To establish Branches of the federation.

To open up regular correspondence with kindred societies in all parts of the world on trade matters.

To urge on the State and Federal Governments the necessity of passing stringent legislation dealing with the unfair competition by Asiatics in this and other trades. (AIRC 1909)

In December 1911, the Rules were changed to incorporate: organ makers; bamboo, pith, cane and wicker workers; packers of crockery, furniture, pictures, carpets, drapery plate and sheet glass in warehouses, shops factories or stores; organ factories; bamboo pith cane and wicker factories. At the same time additions were made to the Rules that provided conditions for expulsion from the Society.

In June 1914 the name 'Societies' was changed to 'Society', reflecting the change in attitude that had grown over the first years. This was now one single organization. Also, advice had been received that there could be legal complications with the plural version of the name.

At the same time a significant change took place in the objectives that shows a major shift in the Society with regard to its role in the world and its analysis of that world. In some ways the changes in objectives mark the real change from a trade society to a trade union. Clause 2 of the Object was changed from promoting industrial peace:

To organize workers on class conscious-lines, with a view to bettering the conditions of its members by securing to them a more equitable share of what they produce, if possible by all amicable means. (AIRC 1914)

Clause 3 was changed from an emphasis of preventing strikes and lockouts to:

When differences do occur to obtain their settlement by justifiable means.

In December 1919 the Objects changed once again, reflecting the growing awareness of the Society as part of the broader labour movement:

To educate and organize workers on class-conscious lines, with the ultimate object in view of controlling industry on a basis of social ownership.

To establish and assist in the maintenance of Labour journals.

To assist kindred societies. (AIRC 1919)

Further rule changes spelt out the responsibilities of the Union in more detail:

To use all the powers and authorities implied or expressed by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act.

To provide legal assistance to the Organization or its members.

To establish funeral, sick, accident, unemployment or other Insurance or Assurance funds or benefits.

To direct the payment of entrance fees, contributions, levies or dues.

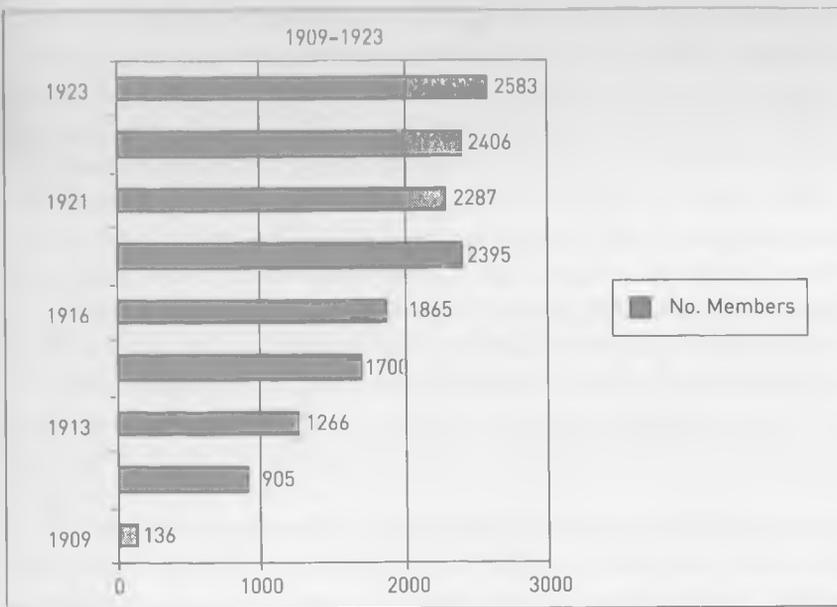
To buy, purchase, rent, lease or otherwise acquire land, and to erect buildings thereon for offices, clubrooms and for other purposes, and to sell, lease mortgage or transfer the same.

To constitute, conduct, carry on and manage clubs in the interests of members.

To impose levies upon the members to carry out any object of the Union.

And generally to carry out such other objects as the Committee of Management may from time to time authorize or decide upon. (AIRC 1919)

The membership was growing quickly and this required rules that were more explicit and detailed to maintain consistency and to ensure equity in dealing with members.



FFTS Victorian Branch: Number of members 1909–23

Source: Industrial Relations files

Industrial Battles

At the time of federation the furnishing trades in Victoria worked a 48-hour week, adult males earned a basic wage of £2 5s 0d with a margin for tradesmen of seven shillings and juniors and females earned as little as twenty shillings and sixpence. There were no public holidays, no annual leave, no sick pay, no right to notice and no long service leave. (*FFTS Journal*) In 1911 there were pay rises across the board. The majority of the furniture workers received raises from 56 shillings, 58 shillings and 64 shillings to 60 shillings, 62 shillings and 66 shillings respectively for a 48-hour week and it was agreed to pay overtime and public holidays at time and a half.

Glass Bevellers' Dispute

In 1911 the glass workers were the poor cousins of the furniture craftsmen with starkly inferior conditions. Glass bevellers, cutters and silverers were paid forty-eight shillings a week when most of the tradesmen in furniture were paid three pounds (sixty shillings). They began to meet regularly and proposed that the Society elect an Assistant to the Secretary, especially to organize the glass industry.

Several meetings were organized and it was decided to seek an increase to three pounds a week from the Wages Board. However, the employers refused to budge, claiming they had no ability to pay any increase at all. The Chairman of the Board with his casting vote, tried to bring about a compromise but both sides stood firm. Negotiations went on for months with the Chairman going from one group to the other with no success. By April tension reached boiling point at one of the plants and the men walked off the job. These workers were persuaded to return until more organising could develop an industry-wide meeting that took place within weeks. It was well attended and lively and set up a committee to organize a meeting with the Glass Trade Association.

The employers neglected to reply to a letter requesting a meeting but Secretary Dobson persisted until they agreed. When the employers arrived they immediately put a bargain on the table. They would agree to a pay rise if the workers agreed to take on a range of extra tasks. The glass workers were in no mood for compromise and insisted they were entitled to the pay rise without strings. The employers left the meeting saying that they would consider the requests of the Union but once away from the table they sent a letter saying that they were unable to increase the wages. It was decided to take a ballot of the glass workers to see if they were prepared to stop work if the increases were not granted within the week. The result of the ballot, 37 to 6 in favour of striking, left no doubt as to the will of the men. The Society expected a long battle. They approached Trades Hall for support and although they got a sympathetic hearing the response was disappointing:

That the President and Secretary of the FFTS should endeavour to see Mr Blair and other employers in the trade with a view of effecting a settlement. (Minutes 1911)

The strike was due to start on 16 June. On 15 June a Society meeting of glass workers set the ground rules. The Union would sanction and support any industrial action; a representative from each workplace was delegated to inform the employers that if they were not given the three pounds they would look for other employment; and that there would be no work at any workplace until the increase had been granted to all eligible workers.

The next day none of the glass bevellers showed up for work. The strike had begun with complete solidarity. The Union held a special meeting and agreed to set strike pay at thirty shillings a week to married

men and twenty to single men. To cover the costs they set a levy of two shillings and sixpence on members receiving over £2 5s 0d and one shilling on members receiving less. Somebody, as usual, moved an amendment to keep the levy down to only two shillings for the higher earners, but that was defeated. A flyer was circulated to the entire membership announcing the levy and emphasizing 'Remember: This Is Your Fight'.

Glass bevellers who were not in the Union joined the strike and joined the Union. Trades Hall was informed that the dispute had begun.

The employers sat it out for three weeks and then, on 6 July they met with the Society Executive offering a raise of three shillings a week and flagging that they would still be agreeable to the full increase of twelve shillings if the unionists would agree to the extra duties. This offer was put to the men the next day and was immediately and unanimously rejected.

The strike continued: it became four weeks old, then five weeks, then six, and then seven. The glass bevelling industry in Victoria was shut down. The Union got agreement from fellow Branches in other states not to allow any bevelled glass to be sent to Victoria. The strike hardened and the workers settled in for a long haul. It was starting to look as if there would never be any movement when out of the blue, on 3 August, two of the companies, Fisher Bros and Cotterel's, broke ranks with the rest of the employers and offered their employees the full three pounds wages without demands for extra duties. Agreements were signed and all the men in both shops returned to work. Dobson sent a letter to all the other employers but they were not giving in just yet.

Support had started coming in from other Branches and other Unions. The NSW Branch of the FFTS and the NSW Glass Bevellers Society sent financial assistance to the strike fund. The levies had not been coming in from the ranks so the strike pay was becoming a major drain on Union resources. An appeal was made to other Unions through the Executive of the Trades Hall Council.

By 16 August there was still no word from other bevelling factories. The Wages Board had met. The chairman made his casting vote in favour of the employers but seemingly under pressure from the Government. He immediately offered to resign as Chair of the Board. The injury to the glass workers was rubbed in when the Wages Board for the mantelpiece trade gave machinists £3 2s 0d.

There were still twenty-seven men out of work and little hope of reaching a settlement. The levy on the membership had been less than successful and was struck off. The glass workers who had gone back in



This photo is all that remains of this grand and very large banner. The date of the photo is unknown but at the Executive meeting of 1913 it was decided to have a new banner made. A prize of five pounds was offered for the design which was chosen in May 1914. This photo was probably the first outing of that banner, with great pride shown as it is conveyed on the dray pulled by six grey horses.

supported the strikers. They agreed to pay two shillings and sixpence a week to provide the strikers with a full wage. On 8 September, one more company, Brooks Robinson, agreed to the increased wages but refused to reinstate one man. One last company held out for another month but, in the end, it too agreed to pay the higher rate and at the next sitting of the Wages Board it was determined that three pounds was to be the minimum rate.

The glass workers had shown their mettle; they had shown the employers and they had shown their fellow unionists that they would be no one's underdogs. The dispute had lasted twelve weeks and every man to the last had remained solid. It cost the Union £436 18s 6d in strike pay. Donations amounted to only £9 12s 0d. In his annual report of 1911 Dobson drew the following conclusions from the dispute:

There is another question I have on many occasions spoken of, which I think this trouble has proved, that the amalgamation of allied trades is a good Union move, for I feel certain that had the glass bevellers still remained a small society of their own, they could not have gained the victory.

While the glass bevellers' strike was still in full swing another dispute broke out that was to plague the Union for many years. In contrast to the solidarity of the glass workers this dispute would test the Society's patience with a workforce that did not seem able to stand up to their employer.

Wertheim

Piano wars—dischord for piano makers

In 1909, Melbourne celebrated with great fanfare the opening of a piano factory in Bendigo Street, Richmond (now the site of the Channel Nine television studio). Its owner was Hugo Wertheim, a great-grandfather of a former Premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett. Wertheim had emigrated from Germany in 1875 at the age of twenty-one and immediately started importing German goods and before long began manufacturing sewing machines and then pianos. The piano factory cost £25 000 to build, and the land was secured by the Premier of Victoria. Its official opening was attended by over 300 people including every dignitary in Victoria and the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin. One speaker after another rose to his feet to praise the enterprise, courage and capacity of Hugo Wertheim. Yet while Wertheim bathed in the accolades at the opening of the factory, and while history has bequeathed him a reputation as an honourable burger of Melbourne, those who worked at the piano factory would tell a different story. The workers in Hugo Wertheim's factory made his fortune, but far from recognizing their contributions he constantly tried to undercut their entitlements and undermine their dignity.

The piano factory was very different from the small furniture workshops around the city. It was a forerunner of the brave new world of mass production. The Society was used to dealing with tradesmen who had become employers but Wertheim was a businessman who traded in profit and was determined not to share a penny more of that profit with his workforce than he was forced to. While his pianos were of good quality he was not concerned about the traditions of the trade or maintaining its standards or ensuring its continuation. His factory and his workforce of 400 were organized to produce as many pianos as possible as cheaply as possible. The organization of the work created jobs that needed specific but limited sets of skills. Combined with the introduction of machines in the factory was the beginning of the long process of de-skilling and technological replacement that has dominated the history of the furniture trades. In a system where wages were pegged to levels of skill, loss of skill means loss of wages. The Society was not ready for Wertheim

but it persisted, and began the battle that was to continue for decades to maintain wages and conditions in the face of the growth of Taylorist production methods.

At first the Society was anxious to make the piano factory a success. Working to strengthen the industry as they always had, they helped trade to flourish by lobbying the Government to buy only locally produced pianos for state schools. But the relationship soon turned sour. After a couple of months membership contributions were not being collected. A couple of weeks later employees were working after five in the evenings in contravention of the Factories Act. In April 1910 there were disputes about the wages that should be paid to different classes of workers. Wertheim was exploiting the particular division of labour he had introduced to push down wages. Prices were set on particular pieces of furniture and pianos fell out of the usual formula. Men working on certain presses were not classed as cabinetmakers but as machinists, men working on sandpapering machines were being denied the rates they would get for similar work elsewhere. A few months later it was the veneer workers that Wertheim insisted should not be classed as cabinetmakers. Then he began employing women at one-third the wages the men received. In every instance the Society negotiated, but keen to make the piano factory a success they made compromises because Wertheim was not backing down and the workforce were not united. They decided that the best way to deal with the situation was to try to get a Piano Wages Board operational so that there could be a third party, with some semblance of independence involved.

In July 1911, in the middle of the glass bevellers dispute, Wertheim tried to introduce a bonus system of payment. This stirred the workers as the earlier issues had not and they contacted the Society saying they were afraid that they would need to work long hours to make a living wage. The Society called a meeting which was well attended and it seemed that the workforce were beginning to realize that they needed to stand solid against their employer. They unanimously agreed:

That this meeting of Employees in the Manufacture of Pianos are of the opinion that the Bonus system introduced by Wertheim & Co is against the best interests of the workers. Its only object being to introduce a vicious system of sweating and what is best known in America as speeding up. (Minutes 1911)

When Wertheim heard this he called a meeting at the factory the next day. He explained the details of the bonus system to the workforce

and asked those in favour of the system to go to the right and those against to go to the left. The large majority went to his left. The next day he called another meeting, repeating his arguments in favour of the bonus system. This time he called for a secret ballot that he claimed resulted in a majority in favour. The Union wrote to him saying that they were opposed to his continuing to take votes on this same issue in which the men had already made their opinions known. But Wertheim was dismissive and insisted he had the support of the workforce and that the Society was misinformed. He asserted that the bonus system he had in mind would not be detrimental to the employees.

The system was introduced and the Society set up a committee to investigate. They sat several times, interviewing employees in detail to establish exactly what was involved in manufacturing pianos, how each job worked and how it connected with the other jobs and how a bonus system would affect the working conditions and wages. A great deal of evidence was collected and it became clear that the fears of the employees and the Society were justified. Dobson led a deputation to put the Union concerns to Wertheim management. The meeting lasted three hours and at the end the Union representatives were confident that the bonus system would be abolished and expected confirmation of this in the mail.

They waited in vain. A week later, with no communication from Wertheim, a special meeting was called. It was well attended, but not by all the employees. Those who were present felt strongly and passed the following resolutions:

That the Secretary write to Messrs Wertheim and Co informing them that on and after the 8th Jan 1912 no member of this Union will be allowed to work under a Bonus or piecework system.

Further any member who continues to work under either system may be expelled from the Union. Carried. (Minutes 1911)

The problem was to get those employees not present to uphold the motions. Without complete solidarity they could not win and Wertheim had already shown himself able to drive a wedge in the unity of his workforce. Copies of the resolution were printed and distributed to the entire workforce. Moves to instigate a Piano Wages Board had floundered, so the Union had a meeting with the Premier to ask him to extend the powers of the Furniture Board to fix minimum wages for the piano

workers. The Premier was sympathetic but said he would have to get the agreement of employers. Wertheim objected.

By January, it was clear that the workplace opposition to the bonus system was too weak to have an impact and the resolutions passed at the Society meeting amounted to hot air. Wertheim took advantage of this and called a meeting with representatives from the Society to propose a piece-rate system instead of the bonus system. Union policy had long opposed piece-rate payment but it was in no position to argue. It negotiated that it be involved in setting the rates; that there would be a guaranteed minimum weekly wage of three pounds and, to make sure that any agreement was upheld by Wertheim, the Union wanted it formalized before a Federal Judge under the Arbitration Act.

It took five months and hundreds of hours for the Union to interview the employees and gather sufficient information to develop a schedule of piecework rates for each job that existed. On 28 May 1912 Messrs Bowie and Holdsworth delivered a report to a Special meeting. A document had been prepared that ensured a legal minimum wage, set out the exact rates for each piece of work and had been endorsed by both employees and management. All it needed was the ratification of the Branch. This motion threw the meeting into pandemonium. Someone argued that the motion of December 1911, which outlawed piece rates for Union members, was the Union's policy. The Chair ruled that it would automatically be rescinded if this motion were carried. There was dissent from this ruling and more arguing. There was concern that policy was being flouted; that years of fighting for set wages were being sacrificed but in the end the motion was carried. The December motion was taken as rescinded, leaving the gate open to the introduction of piece rates. Now that the Branch had agreed to the document, it had to be officially signed by Wertheim.

It was sent to him but there was no response. Efforts to contact him and have the agreement formalized were unsuccessful. It was not until November, five months after the Branch had ratified the agreement that Wertheim wrote to the Society. His letter caused outrage. In spite of having agreed to the draft document, he now refused to sign the agreement while it contained guaranteed minimum weekly rates. He was contacted again, but still refused to sign.

The new year of 1913 began ominously. While negotiations for the new agreement were taking place, the bonus system was still operating. It had now been eighteen months and agreement seemed no closer. In January, a special meeting was held at Trades Hall. Emotions were

running high. Anger and indignation dominated and led to a complete reversal of the previous position:

That in the opinion of this meeting piecework should be abolished. (Minutes 1913)

Wertheim was to be informed by Dobson that the Branch was withdrawing the piecework price list they had submitted and did not intend to agree to any revision of it. He would also be informed that they were prepared to meet him but would only discuss fixing flat rates. This was carried unanimously and Dobson sent the results of the meeting in yet another letter to the piano manufacturer.

The reply was prompt but unwelcome. Wertheim did not accept that the letter received from the Secretary conveyed the opinion of the majority of his employees. It was hard to know whether this was true since not all the employees had attended the meeting. At the next meeting discussion went to and fro, from outrage to conciliation until it was agreed that the President and Secretary visit the factory to meet with the men to try to establish the true position. A workplace meeting was organized. Dobson and the delegate, Mr Wright, addressed the workers. Wertheim responded with another secret ballot on 7 February. The result was devastating: 62 voted in favour of the piecework rates, 28 voted against, 3 voted informal and 1 was absent.

The Union was left high and dry. It seemed there was nowhere to go but to lock in the rates that had been agreed. At the next meeting Dobson moved:

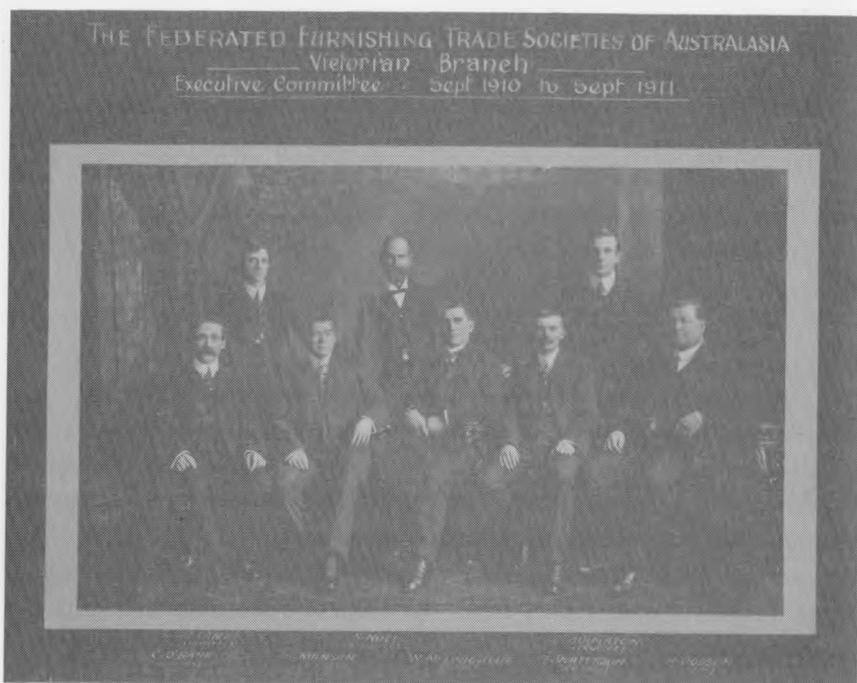
That Mr Wertheim be informed that if the men had agreed to the Schedule, the Branch would sign the Agreement providing they would settle the matter within fourteen days. (Minutes 1913)

This was not popular among the membership. There was much discussion and general resentment, but after a division it was declared by the Chairman to be agreed with a large majority. Although it stuck in the craw, the Union had little choice when the employees at the factory had succumbed to the pressure of the employer. For the Agreement to have legal status a special meeting had to be held for the members to endorse it. That meeting was set for 18 March. In the meantime Dobson and the Executive worked around the clock to get an Agreement they could sign. Although the members at the factory had agreed to the list of prices

submitted by Wertheim the Union was obliged to check that they were realistic. This was just as well as some of them were completely understated. They visited the factory to check with the workers involved—in particular, the problems involved action fitters and fly finishers.

Eventually, they had a document that both parties would accept. Wertheim and Phillips, the Union solicitor, attended the next Executive meeting. The whole Schedule was gone through, each point discussed back and forth. The Agreement was to be for five years. The final sticking point was that the Agreement should contain a clause that guaranteed that the firm would not victimize employees for belonging to the Union or holding Union positions. The Executive still had to get this ratified by the general meeting:

Your Executive have to report having had two Conferences with Mr Phillips Solicitor and Mr Wertheim re the proposed AGREEMENT to be signed as to the wages to be paid in the Factory. The Secretary also visited the Factory to ascertain from the Employees the correctness of the Schedule.



The Executive Committee of the Victorian Branch in the year after federation.

The amounts put down in some instances were not correct, but after they had been pointed out they had been put right, new clauses had been added to the agreement, which the Secretary will read to you.

The Executive now desire the Branch to adopt the AGREEMENT, the term to be five years.

We desire to say that there has been a lot of time involved with this firm and we are pleased to recommend the Branch to adopt this report.

Signed: R. Boyce President, A. Dobson Secretary (Minutes 1913)

In their usual form, Boyce signed in black ink and Dobson signed in the green ink he favoured. The frustration of the Executive and their determination to have this issue put behind them is clear in the wording of the report. The Branch understood this because after a few small changes the Report was adopted and the Agreement was approved.

While the Victorian Branch had been forced to come to terms with this compromise over the past two years the other states had not. As a Federal Agreement it had to be signed by the Federal President, Mr Cutler, who was also the NSW Secretary. To the immense frustration of Dobson and the Victorian Branch, Cutler refused to sign because he feared that the Agreement would open the way to piecework rates in other states. Dobson tried to assure the NSW Branch that it would not affect them, but still Cutler would not sign. The Federal Industrial Registrar weighed in, writing to NSW to express his surprise at the actions of the Federal President, but still Cutler refused. The normally harmonious and friendly relations between Dobson and Cutler broke down. Dobson, in absolute desperation to get the matter finished with, wrote to the NSW Branch President complaining about Cutler but without result. Cutler's recalcitrance dragged on. In late April he sent a letter reiterating that the Agreement would affect the NSW Branch and saying:

the Sydney Branch repudiates the Agreement between Wertheim and the Victorian Branch. (FFTS Correspondence files April 1913)

Dobson was forced to go back to the drafting table with his adversary Mr Wertheim. The solicitor Phillips and the Federal Registrar Stewart developed an Agreement between the Victorian Branch and the Wertheim Company that could be filed under Federal Law. The

Agreement had taken two years and hundreds of meetings to reach, and trouble was still far from over at Wertheim's. The Agreement had a duration of five long years and throughout that time the Society was not able to move the conditions of its members forward.

The outbreak of the the First World War brought more trouble. Wertheim cut hours so pay was reduced. He convinced the workers that this was necessary because of the stringencies of the war and to avoid his having to lay anyone off. The Union allowed the breaking of the Agreement. In contrast, when the Furniture Wages Board awarded an increase in pay and the Union requested it be extended to the piano makers, Wertheim held up the Agreement and refused to bend. This riled his employees. Rising prices had diminished the value of their wages; they were all suffering the hardships of the war and wanted some justice. They demanded that Wertheim meet with them. He tried to split the workers by offering to increase the pay of the day workers at the expense of the pieceworkers. This was refused. After he had left the room two of the workers moved to accept the situation. This motion was lost by 42 votes to 32. A delegation was elected to take the matter to the Society.

This battle became as confused and contorted as the earlier ones. Wertheim was asked for a flat increase of five shillings a week and opposition to the piece rates was put back on the table. Wertheim took a month to respond and then refused to drop the piece rates and offered five shillings for the cabinetmakers and polishers, and three shillings for the machinists, which was reluctantly accepted.

The next dispute involved the polishers. In 1917 Wertheim claimed that, because of the war, he could not get spirit he needed for polishing. The polishers in particular were disgruntled with their conditions; they wanted a higher pay rate and they wanted the piecework abolished or at the very least they wanted the jobs re-priced. As well, suspicion was widespread that Wertheim was using the issue of the spirit to get rid of some of the men. Twenty-one of them walked off the job. They did not contact the Union, nor give notice of why they were walking off; they just walked out and in doing so, they broke the Agreement. Wertheim's response was to sack them all.

A meeting of all the members from the factory ensued but it was divided at the start. One section of the meeting wanted the sacked polishers ejected and another section argued that the sackings had been victimization for Union activity. However, Dobson drew the meeting together in anger against Wertheim when he read a letter from the Secretary for Labour informing them that Wertheim was single-handedly

preventing the establishment of a Piano Manufacturers Wages Board because he was refusing to override the existing Agreement. The meeting ended with a motion requesting that Wertheim re-instate the locked out polishers before engaging others that was carried overwhelmingly, with 89 votes to 13. This had no effect on Wertheim who continued to lock-out the polishers, who then began to draw strike pay. But old habits die hard. At the plant, Wertheim was once again successful in getting the Union members to take a secret ballot to vote overwhelmingly in support of his position.

Dobson was furious. At the next General Meeting of the Society on 25 September he said that he was appalled at the action of holding shop meetings and reversing decisions carried at a duly constituted meeting of the Society. He then moved:

That it be an instruction to all Members that no shop meetings be held unless such meeting is sanctioned by the Branch.
(Minutes 1913)

Things only became worse when two of the polishers returned to work and signed a round robin that involved other Society members who were not polishers taking it in turns to work in the polishing shop with the two returned polishers.

The following week rumours reached the Branch that Wertheim was going around the factory asking people to join his new Union. It was true—Wertheim the master of making the most of any advantage he had, was using this situation to force the Society out of the picture for good. The Union sent notices to all the Wertheim members calling for a meeting. The meeting was poorly attended. It was decided to propose a negotiating team to meet with Wertheim:

for the purpose of clearing up what appears to be some misunderstandings between the Union and the Firm. (Minutes 1913)

Wertheim's reply was brutal: He could not devote his valuable time to such a conference.

By the end of January the Union had developed a position on the issues involved in the Wertheim dispute. The Branch passed the following resolutions on January 29:

Meeting instructs members not to join any industrial Union unless it is affiliated with the Trades Hall Council and calls

upon any members who belong to any such Organization to immediately resign from same.

That we members of the FFTS of Australasia working in the Wertheim Piano Factory object to work with other employees who are not members of an affiliated Union.

We resent the attitude taken up by the Director Mr Wertheim in refusing the Union, of which we are Members a conference and ask that Mr Wertheim reconsider his decision not to meet our Delegates in Conference in order that the trouble that exists in the Factory may be settled in a manner that will be acceptable to all concerned.

That no steps be taken by this Branch to provide industrial Legislation in the Piano Industry until the principal of preference to Unionists is established. (Minutes 1914)

This all sounded well and good, but sometimes the pen is not mightier than the sword. It was not settled until the Trades Hall Disputes Committee met three times with the Chamber of Manufacturers Disputes Committee and eventually managed to extract an agreement from Wertheim as follows:

1. The firm not to assist in any way the bogus Union, but to recognize the Union affiliated with the THC.
2. The immediate creation of a Wages Board to cover the whole of the Pianoforte trade.
3. The question of Shops Committee to be decided by the whole of the men in the Shop and if decided upon to be elected by and from the whole of the men in the shop without regard to the Department in which they work and the Union to sanction or reject anything the committee decide upon and any future trouble which cannot be settled by the Union and the firm to be brought before the Chamber by the Trades Hall Industrial Disputes Committee. (Trades Hall 1914)

In the meantime the Government had passed a bill through the Lower House to establish a Piano Industry Wages Board. The board included workers involved in the manufacture of the pianos and also those involved in the tuning of them. Wertheim objected to the tuners being included. This was ridiculous. Tuning was a critical step in piano



Unknown function at Trades Hall attended by Furnishing Trades Society members circa 1915.

manufacture. They were tuned over and over. The Wages Boards comprised elected representatives of employers and employees across the industry they covered. Many tuners worked for the wholesalers of imported pianos and others were self-employed. If the tuners were excluded from the Board, Wertheim would be the only significant employer involved and the workers representatives would be his employees.

Despite the injustice in his arguments and despite the fact that there was no precedence for the Upper House involving itself in Wages Board issues, Wertheim managed to convince a number of members—who were not elected, but appointed and largely represented business interests—that the tuners should be excluded. To the absolute disgust of the Union the Upper House refused to pass the legislation until the piano tuners were excluded from its coverage.

Membership

During this period there were constant discussions about amalgamation and coverage. In October 1909 the wicker workers approached the

Society asking whether it would be prepared to amalgamate. Robert Boyce attended its executive meeting and proposed to the FFTS that the wicker workers should be accepted into the Society. It was agreed that they must hand over their books, funds and their right to collect the interest on a £50 debenture held by the Trades Hall Council. The wicker workers decided they could not accept this deal and in early December they sent a letter saying they would not amalgamate and intended to re-organise, charge higher fees and give greater benefits to their members.

Packers in furniture shops were sometimes covered by the FFTS. In March 1911, they organized meetings to try to recruit all the packers in the furnishing industry. However, they were unsuccessful. Many packers had come from other shops outside the industry and already had Union tickets.

In 1919 the Society tried to extend its coverage again. It applied to cover workers processing three-ply, makers of musical instruments involving wood, and coffin makers. This drew two objections. The first was from the Australian Timber Workers Union and the second from the Undertakers Assistants & Cemetery Employees Union of Australia. The timber workers and the furnishing trades had worked closely together for many years. They supported each other through hardship, and, every year the furniture workers joined in the timber workers' picnic. Over the same time, a number of demarcation disputes had arisen. The problem was that timber workers claimed the manufacture of three-ply was wood processing and the furniture makers claimed that, since it was not used for any purpose except furniture, it should be covered by the furniture trade. The timber workers had conceded that when the work was in furniture establishments it was FFTS but wanted to maintain sole coverage of the work done in wood-processing factories.

The three Unions were called into the Commission. With regards to the timber and furniture workers the Commissioner said that both Unions had been on his register for many years and perhaps made a massive understatement when he said:

You have worked amicably together up to the present, and I do not see why you should not do so in the future. (Commission 1909)

Dobson argued the case against Thomas from the timber workers:

Dobson: Yes, the whole thing is used for furniture. It is not used for anything else. We use it in our factories extensively.

We are the only people who use it. In Queensland the Cabinet-makers make this three-ply, and they are members of our Branch. (Commission 1909)

After long discussions about exactly what the manufacture of three-ply entailed and where it was made the two Secretaries agreed to maintain the status quo.

With regards to the coffin makers the objection was based on perceived overlap with the constitution of the Undertakers Assistants & Cemetery Employees Union (UA&CEU) that described its membership as:

an unlimited number of persons who are employed in any position in connection with the making, trimming, or polishing of coffins, management of Branch establishments or any other general work in connection with the business of an undertaker or in any general work in Cemeteries. (Commission 1909)

Most of the coffin makers worked in funeral parlours where they also had to prepare and tend to the bodies; place them in the coffins; drive the horses in the funeral processions; and generally do all the work of an undertaker. In Victoria at the time there were 46 men who made coffins. Of those, 42 were members of the Undertakers' Union, two were the sons of undertakers and not in a union, one was an anti-unionist and one was a member of the FFTS. Coffin makers in Queensland were all in the Furnishing Trades Union, so when Dobson saw an advertisement in *The Age* for an undertaker that asked for a skilled cabinetmaker he decided it was reasonable to file for coverage. Dobson was also aware that in every country in the world coffin making and dressing was covered by furniture trades organizations.

However, the UA&CEUA insisted it was the legitimate Union for undertakers and that cabinetmaking was not a requirement of the job, as the coffins were not necessarily made by artisans or with craftsmanship. They also argued that in Australia the industry had developed in a different way from other countries. Each small business made its own coffins, whereas in other places the coffins were made in factories. Making the distinction between the work involved in making a coffin and the work involved in cabinetmaking proved to be no easy task. The undertakers argued on the one hand that they were not skilled craftsmen, but on other hand showing clear pride in the quality of the coffins

they built and polished. Dobson argued that the building of the coffins was indeed the work of skilled woodworkers who were covered by his Union, and the Registrar at first seemed to agree with him when he replied to Mr Bessell, who represented the undertakers:

Registrar: That is all very well, but it seems to me that the man who makes and furnishes a coffin must be a skilled workman.

Bessell: Of course.

Registrar: He cannot turn it out unless he is a skilled carpenter or a skilled cabinetmaker.

Bessell: Without prejudicing our case, as we might possibly approach the Arbitration Court for an Award, I can say here that we have coffin makers in Melbourne who came into our calling and never used a tool before in their lives, not of any description.

Registrar: I think that is a bad state of affairs that a man who can turn out that class of work can be looked upon as an unskilled man.

Bessell: We have one man who sat on the Wages Board, representing the coffin makers, who when asked by the Chairman if he could make a table similar to the one they were sitting at, said 'No, I can make a coffin but nothing else.'

Registrar: Does that not put your industry on a very low plane?

Bessell: It would do.

Registrar: Yes, it would.

Bess: But still, this particular man as far as making coffins is concerned, can turn out some of the best work that ever went out of the shop.

Dobson: I should say it is some of the finest work in the world. I consider myself that a skilled coffin maker, who can turn out a good oak coffin, with all the mitres that are in it, could make any piece of furniture you would like to put before him.

Registrar: That's what I should think.

Dobson: A man who can polish an oak coffin like they are polished in Great Britain and other parts of the world, I should say is a skilled artisan.

Registrar: I should think so, and I am very much astonished to hear Mr Bessell's statement.

Bessell: We have some polishers who turn out some of the finest work, but who have never learnt French polishing. Some polishing work was on exhibition some little time ago, which was performed by a man who had never learnt French polishing.

Dobson: You are talking of Yiddish coffins.

Registrar: That's just a box, which a carpenter or a box-maker could put together.

Dobson: A box-maker.

Registrar: Even a bush carpenter.

Bessell: It takes more than a bush carpenter to make a coffin.

Registrar: That is why I should say it is a very high class of work.

Bessell: Yes it is; but, at the same time, I contend we have men who can make the best work that is turned out in Melbourne, who are in our Organisation, who never served their apprenticeship to any class of work of any description.

Registrar: They must be very expert men and very highly intelligent people to do that. (Commission 1909)

The Registrar, unable to find satisfactory differences in the type of work involved, proposed amalgamation as a solution. The undertakers said that they had approached the furniture trades several times about



It's obviously been a long hard day for this Eight Hour Day Committee. The photo is undated so we do not know exactly what year it is, but we can be sure it was 24 April when the Eight Hour Festivities were a highlight of the year.

amalgamation but had been refused. The Registrar asked Archibald Dobson why he had not accepted the offers to amalgamate and he replied: We do not like the gravediggers. (Commission 1909)

Organizing Women

The Higgins wage decision in 1911 provided a basic wage for men, but maintained a much lower rate for women. They were granted 54 per cent of the male rate for the same work, which continued to ignore the fact that many women were actually breadwinners for dependent children or aged or infirm families. It also entrenched the gender segregation in the Australian workforce. Employers tried to take advantage of the cheap labour and so the unions responded, not by showing solidarity with the women and fighting for them to have equal conditions, but by seeking to have the Commission regulate that women were not allowed to work in numerous classifications. In the FFTS the workforce was segregated by the dominance of tradesmen. Women had always been excluded from these trades and their role in furniture making was to take on the 'women's work', which mostly related to sewing and assembling soft furnishings. Although much of this work was classified as unskilled, sewing carpets, upholstery, bedding, curtains and blinds requires significant skill.

The threat of female labour nevertheless did raise its head when Wertheim set up his piano factory and shocked the Union when he told his workers that he wanted to employ girls for certain jobs. This was unheard of in a woodworking shop. He eventually got the Union's agreement to employ women at one-third the rate he employed men by appealing to State patriotism. He argued that the Beale's piano factory in Sydney was employing women and argued that his prices would not compete unless he too, was able to employ cheap female labour.

The Society supported the battle for women's emancipation. In July 1911 they employed the well-known activist and public speaker for women's rights, Ellen Mulcahy as a part-time and casual clerk and typist. Mulcahy also took on the job of organizing women. In August Mulcahy organized a meeting of the women working in soft furnishing shops around the city. The meeting was attended by the Executive of the Society who were there to put the case for women to join the Society and answer any questions. Large numbers of women did not attend but those who did were enthusiastic and fourteen of them joined the Society and established the 'Female Section'.

The First World War

War was declared in England in July 1914 and the first contingent of Australian troops went overseas in April 1915. Australia was never the same again. The Labor Party won the Federal election in September 1914 but could not sustain the divisions within it when faced with the issue of conscription that split it apart in 1916. Wartime shortages led to changes in production methods. Workers bore the brunt of the war both by supplying the bodies for the 'killing fields' and having working conditions undermined by zealous demands for patriotic sacrifice. At the end of the war there was hardly a family that was without the grief of having lost an immediate family member. Then at the end of the war there was a huge housing shortage and massive unemployment. In *The Journal* the Victoria Branch published a list of those 'missing in action', the list went on for three issues. This was only actual members of the Society and did not cover those immediate family members that, had they been included, must have quadrupled the size of the list at least.

While each and every member of the FFTS would have experienced emotional strain and angst from the participation of loved ones in the war, Union business continued. It took up the issue of conscription.

When war broke out, young Australian men had flocked to the recruitment offices to join up, but the eagerness to volunteer for the war faded as reports of the carnage on the battlefields got back to Australia. The government decided to send conscripts to the war. Why Prime Minister Billy Hughes was so keen to send Australian men to fight a battle that had so little to do with Australia is hard to understand. Historian Humphrey McQueen (2004) has suggested that Britain was about to make a deal with Japan, such that if they entered the war on the side of Britain they would have favoured trade relations after the war and Britain would guarantee them immigration rights for Australia. Hughes is said to have offered Australian troops to ensure that Britain did not need Japanese troops, thereby keeping Australia white. However, he was forced to try conscription to supply enough troops. The FFTS, along with most unions, opposed the referendum for conscription and subsequently the war itself. They saw young Australians used as fodder for an Imperial war that really did not benefit Australia.

The Victoria Branch supported the anti-conscription campaign. They supported the committees by sending delegates and money. They attended anti-conscription meetings and rallies and handed out fliers and posters to their members at meetings. One flier has survived. It is

pasted on the inside of the stationery cupboard door of the Victorian Branch Office and it contains the following poem:

The Blood Vote

Why is your face so white Mother?
Why do you choke for breath?
O I have dreamt in the night my son,
That I doomed a man to death.

They gave me the ballot paper,
The grim death warrant of doom
And I smugly sentenced the man to death
In that dreadful little room.

Over several months in 1918 *The Journal* published lists of over 200 Victorian members who did not return from the war. It was headed 'Missing Members'. The stark simplicity of the list of names is more chilling than any purple prose.

In fact the prose that was written about the war was not in the form of eulogies for those killed but anger at the hypocrisy of the masters of war. Through the war years the Union had watched profiteering by employers while the sons of working-class families were being slaughtered and maimed. If they were lucky enough to return there were no jobs and no houses. After the war the furnishing factories started to cut their hours. Some were cut down to two or three days a week, others were just told not to turn up for a whole week because there was no work and of course they were expected to manage without pay. Attitudes to employers had sharpened as witnessed by this article written by Dobson for *The Journal* in 1918:

However, if your boss puts you off ask him what he is slowing down for. Remind him that whilst the war was in progress the wage earner was told that in order to win the war he must speed up! And on no account to slow down. And now that the war is over and we have won, and at the present time celebrating a glorious victory, wherein civilization and humanity have been saved, he is turning you adrift, and leaving you with the sad reflections that after all the old, old tragedy of unemployment

is still dogging the worker and his family, who will have to wake up to the fact that the only solution of this problem is the abolition of wavery. ('Wavery' was a common expression of the time and came from shortening the more formal political phrase, wage slavery.)

What has been for the masses the cause of death, destruction, ruin, and despair has been for the capitalists a means of piling up colossal fortunes, both now and in the future.

In the Office

The Victorian Branch thrived after its federation with the other states. Although it did not win all the battles it certainly faced them with courage and determination and learnt that the new breed of employers were not the gentlemen artisans they were used to dealing with. Meetings were well attended and debate was rich. The Executive was committed and hard working and the Secretary, Archibald Dobson, was forward looking and skilled. Dobson was a cabinetmaker who held office from 1894 to 1926 and was the longest standing Secretary in the history of the Branch. He was known as Archie, Arch and to close friends and intimates, Dobbie. He dressed flamboyantly and signed documents with distinctive green ink. He steered the Union through a period that saw enormous challenges and changes—from the 1890s to the mid-1920s. It was a period of suffering for the Australian working class, from the defeats of the 1890s to the profiteering and misery of the the First World War, and finally to the despair of the post-war depression. Dobson was the driving force behind the building of the national organization.

He was a large, fair man who stood out in a crowd. He wore smart three-piece suits with a long coat and a prominent gold watch chain. Dobson was certainly not the 'cloth cap', or 'cap in hand Union man'. He was an employer and looked more like one of the Chamber than one of the Trades Hall. He dealt with employers as equals and expected their cooperation but there is nothing to suggest that he did not always work towards the best interests of the members. For Dobson, who was used to the employers in the small furniture shops, Wertheim and the glass merchants must have been brash and rugged opponents but he stood up to them with chutzpah. He could talk the hind leg off a donkey. In arguments he could take facts that were used against him, twist them around and serve them back up in his favour.



The Picture Framers Executive before they amalgamated with the UFTS.

Dobson was an employer and soon after he was elected as Secretary there were objections from some members to his appointment because of this fact. But he became a very popular and highly respected Secretary. In 1896 when the Eight Hours Committee asked the Furniture Makers to nominate a life-governor for the Fever Hospital in Fairfield, Dobson was elected unopposed.

In 1898, a special committee was set up to investigate the position of Secretary. It decided to appoint a permanent Secretary rather than have the position balloted every year along with the other executive positions. They would pay the Secretary £2 10s 0d a week, the same rate as a cabinetmaker, and he was also entitled to 5 per cent commission on contributions. Dobson assumed that position unopposed and was left to arrange the work and time allocated to tasks, whereas in the past the Secretaries had received more guidance from the Committee.

Dobson was a fierce class fighter. His understanding of the inequalities between capital and labour were clear. When he wrote about the bosses, there were no holds barred. After the war he wrote in *The Journal*:

What has been for the masses the cause of death, destruction, ruin, and despair has been for the capitalists a means of piling up colossal fortunes, both now and in the future. (1917)

He was very involved in the Anti-Chinese struggle, and as the Secretary of the Anti-Chinese Committee spent many hours on Sundays on the soapbox at Speakers' Corner talking about the problems he perceived with the Chinese in the furniture trade. He was a prominent Melbourne City Councillor. He was also the President of the Building Committee at Trades Hall and worked diligently on getting the second stage of Trades Hall finished and opened. It was opened on May 26—just after his death.

He died in office on 9 April 1926 suddenly in the morning, exactly 30 days after the death of his wife from a long and painful illness. Dobson had helped in her nursing. Those close said that her death took such a toll that it killed him. When he died flags flew at half-mast over the Melbourne Town Hall, the Trades Hall and the Exhibition Building. His funeral was the biggest seen for a Labor man. His obituary said that he was known as a man who had a special way of making his beliefs reality. He was strong and opinionated, but also known as a man who worked tirelessly for every member of the Union. His successor O'Donnell said, 'He was as straight as the barrel of a gun, as true as a steel and as white a man as the Labor Movement has known.' And that he was '... a real guide, philosopher and friend.'

In 1915 when the federation required delegates to travel more often than previously the Branch moved to amend the Federal Rules:



This plaque at the Victorian Trades Hall Council commemorates Archibald Dobson who was Secretary of the FFIS from 1894 to 1926.

The Convention shall allow delegates to Conferences and meetings fares as follow: First-class by steamer and by rail. Branches shall pay all other expenses incurred by the delegates. (Minutes 1915)

In 1919 the Union Office got its first phone: the number was F 1932. The Branch also employed its first organizer, R. O'Donnell.

The staff members were, of course, overworked and this took its toll. In 1920 they were granted paid holidays exclusive of public holidays for the first time. They were to receive two weeks' annual leave.

Vale Samuel Noel

October 5th 1920

The Secretary reported the death of Comrade Samuel Noel, the first Secretary of the Society, and gave a brief history of what the late Comrade had done for the Society, stating that all who knew him could revere the good work he had done. He was always at meetings, he was always a steady influence, he was an auditor and a Trustee for many many years. He thought that some suitable recognition should be made for the late comrade so that it could be placed on record. Several other members eulogized Mr Noel's services to the Society.

Members then stood for a minute with heads bared as a token of respect. (Minutes 1920)

DEPRESSION BETWEEN WARS

What has been for the masses the cause of death, destruction, ruin, and despair has been for the capitalists a means of piling up colossal fortunes, both now and in the future.

Archibald Dobson 1919

THE BATTERING TAKEN by workers in the First World War and its aftermath quickly led to soaring awareness of the conflict that existed between private ownership and wage labour. Workers came to believe that the only way to make reasonable lives for themselves was to challenge capital and the bosses head-on. The workers' movement had come of age, struggling for conditions and recognizing the inherent injustice of the private ownership of industry. When one class owned and one class worked there was bound to be conflict. In 1917, the Russian Revolution was seen as the zenith of the struggle for workers' rights. The Bolsheviks took power in one of the biggest countries on Earth on behalf of the workers and in the name of workers' power. In England, which was still thought of as home by most Australians, the Trades Union Congress called a General Strike of all workers that lasted for nine days and nearly brought the capitalist heartland to its knees. Understanding the economy and social structures and deciding what sorts of actions would change them for the better led to the emergence of many and diverse political streams. The resulting ideological battlefield formed a background to Unions during this period as they struggled against the depressions that ravaged their members between the two great wars.

industrial

One Big Union

One viewpoint that was widely adopted was the idea of the unity and solidarity of all workers within One Big Union (OBU). This idea seeped through the union movement at many levels. At its most radical, it took the form of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The Wobblies, as they were known, with their famous songster/leader Joe Hill, believed that global solidarity was the key and that the ills of the world would be solved if all the workers on the globe belonged to just one Union. They advocated that the only way to liberation for the human race was for workers to fight, through the IWW, for a fair and just world. In the USA they were considered such a threat to capitalism that their leader Joe Hill was framed on a murder charge and executed by a rifle squad. Their policies were far-reaching, calling for workers' power and ownership of production.

The Wobblies had a distinctive presence in the Australian trade union movement. The FFTS Victorian Branch was too conservative to show strong support for the Wobblies and mostly ignored their letters asking for assistance. They did, however, advocate a more moderate idea of OBU that called for solidarity between unions. The Victorian Branch sent delegates to conferences to discuss the possibility of organizing one big Union that would end the divisions that often destroyed solidarity between trades:

In the very near future, therefore, Unions will be called upon to TAKE SIDES—to decide, that is, between adopting a modern and comprehensive system of organization with a single purpose and uniform policy of action and administration, or remaining content with the craft system and divided control of our interests. (*FFTS Journal* 1919)

A strong minority of the VTHC supported the idea of OBU. On 6 October 1919, 43 delegates voted in favour and 65 voted against the proposal. In the FFTS a move to have a secret ballot of the membership on the issue failed. Finally, these grand schemes were not successful but they served to shift the focus of a society such as the FFTS with its history of artisan chauvinism. The cross-fertilization of ideas was inevitable. In August 1919 the Secretary of the Timber Workers Union wrote to ask if the FFTS would attend a conference to form one Union across all the

woodworking industries. The FFTS did send delegates but the will to change could not be translated into an actuality. In the same vein, Union delegates were called together from the State Trades and Labour Councils to form a federal body. From these ideas, the ACTU (Australian Council of Trade Unions) was born. At one stage the FFTS was sending delegates to OBU conferences and to conferences of the All-Australian National Congress of Trade Unions. The expectancy in a greater future and the pride in their achievements were clear in the closing statement of the All-Trade Union Congress that was held in 1921:

I close by expressing the earnest hope that 1922 will see all Unionism seriously, unitedly and determinedly labouring to bring the Congress scheme to fruition in the sense that every trade unionist in the Commonwealth is by direct payment a partner in probably the greatest and most inspiring, most powerful and most potential enterprise ever undertaken in the history of the world's Labor Movement. (*FFTS Journal* August 1921)

The philosophies of the All-Union Committee on Industrial Organization were not that far from those of the Wobblies:

We hold that there is a class struggle in society, and that the struggle is caused by the capitalist class owning the means of production to which the working class must have access in order to live. The working class produce all value. The greater the share which the capitalist appropriates, the less remains for the working class; therefore, the interests of these two classes are in constant conflict. (*FFTS Journal* August 1921)

The Victorian Branch adopted these ideas enthusiastically. Dobson wrote in his report of the Congress:

From the political viewpoint it is to be hoped that as a result of the Congress we shall emerge from the stagnating influence of present-day politics and tactics, and with an enthusiasm, stimulated by a re-birth, make use of the Parliamentary machine for achieving our object of obliterating the system of Capitalism, instead of merely prolonging its life by amelioration and compromise. (*FFTS Journal* August 1921)

These ideas broke down the barriers between trades in the FETS. In June 1920 there was a sharp break with past practice. Instead of going through the various Wages Boards a demand was made to the Chamber of Manufacturers for a 50 per cent wage increase for all workers across the industry. The move was too advanced for the world into which it was launched. The Chamber of Manufacturers was divided into Divisions, and they claimed they needed to take the matter one by one. The first meeting took place with the Furniture Division, who could not speak for the Glass Division or the Picture Framing Division and so on. Then any agreements made had to be ratified by the segregated Wages Boards in any case. The move still paid off. In the end it was dealt with by the Trades Hall Disputes Committee who were able to negotiate with the various divisions of the Chamber and won significant rises—short of 50 per cent, but a set minimum of £4 13s 6d for nearly all of the categories covered for 48 hours. Of course this did not include Chinese or women. The Chinese were still excluded completely and women were to receive a raise to £2 4s 0d for 44 hours. The approach was beneficial and had avoided months and months of waiting for the Wages Board wrangling and determinations. When the agreements came before the various Boards they were adopted, except for the Musical Instrument Makers Board. The employers on that Board, including the Society's old adversary, Wertheim, refused to accept that the Chamber had endorsed the agreement. In particular they argued against the 44 hours for females. After several meetings of the Board, interviews by the Chairman with workers, and the Chairman requesting that all the correspondence involved in the Agreement be brought to him, the Chairman finally agreed to allow the 44 hours. The employers then insisted that if that were so, he should reduce the pay rates. After some arguments the Chairman supported the employers in this, so the women workers in the Musical Instruments Section ended up working for less than their sisters in other trades. The Union wanted to extend the shorter hours to the 'adults'—meaning the men—without reductions in pay. However, when the Board next met, the employers refused to have this discussion and the Chairman supported them.

Later that year the Glass Wages Board met. The workers' representatives had the wage rise ratified but the employers stalled at the idea of 44 hours. The glass workers had put forward strong arguments for 44 hours. While the Chairman did not support them, he commended their abilities, saying that they had put up the best argument for a shorter week that he had heard on any Board he sat on. The glass workers were

so delighted with their prowess that they held a Smoke Night to congratulate the reps on the Board and invited all the other sections.

Trade picked up after the war but started to slow again in 1921. Some of the factories closed down and unemployment climbed higher than it had been for years. In March 1922, the Glass Wages Board met again and the Union representatives, still buoyed up from their near success the last time, argued again for reduced hours, believing that the rising unemployment would strengthen their case. The employers however, had a different agenda. They were not interested in reduced hours; they wanted reduced pay rates. They proposed a 10 per cent wage cut. The Chairman prevaricated and tried to find some compromise to which both parties would agree. It was not to be. The workers were abominated at the very idea of any cut to wages at all and the employers were adamant. After weeks of wrangling, to the horror of the glass workers, the Chairman supported the employers—although not for the full 10 per cent, but for a variety of reductions to different classifications.

The Union took action. A special meeting attended by 104 glass workers voted overwhelmingly—96 to 8—that they were not prepared to accept the determination of the Wages Board. This was new ground. The Society had always accepted the judgments of the arbitrator as a matter of principle, but this they could not swallow. The reps from each shop tried to set up meetings with the employers one by one, but most of them refused to discuss reneging on the Wages Board decision. The workers decided that they would cease work immediately they received a reduction in wages and the Board's decision was put into operation on 9 June.

On 8 June, a meeting was held at the Trades Hall. As the time approached most of the employers had let the workers know what their positions were. Some had agreed to maintain the old rates but others had said they would reduce the rates on 9 June. The men stood firm and intended to strike in the shops that tried to introduce the pay cuts. The need for solidarity was recognised as uppermost and a motion was carried:

That all non-unionists who come out be treated as unionists in connection with this Dispute. (Trades Hall Minutes 1922)

The next day some of the shops tried to introduce the pay cut but there was no consistency in the amounts cut from one shop to the next. Workers in the affected shops stopped work. The Union took the matter

to Trades Hall Council and they called a special meeting for 16 June of all the building trades that pledged support to the glass workers:

Delegate Dobson stated that the Glass Beveling Section of their Union were threatened with a reduction of wages to take place as from the 9th of June, the members of that section supported by the other sections of the Union had decided to resist the enforcement of the reduction, they had decided to cease work on the 9th if the employers insisted on the reduction being put into operation. (Trades Hall Minutes 16 June 1922)

The Trades Hall Executive resolved to take whatever course of action was 'deemed best in the interests of the men out on strike'. A strike fund was established: single men received £1 and married men received £2 and a levy of five shillings was struck on members to cover the costs. The employers continued to maintain that they would stick by the Wages Board decision.

If the FFTS had any doubts about the popular political analysis of the time, that the world was divided between employers and employed, the events of the next weeks would have convinced them. Eleven days after the strike started Sir Robert Gibson, President of the Chamber of Manufacturers, sent for Archibald Dobson to meet with him. On Friday 30 June at 4 p.m. Gibson told Dobson that the Furnishing Section of the Chamber had met and decided that if the Glass Section did not go back to work, they would close down all the furniture factories in Victoria. Although it had been common practice for employers to continually try to undermine the conditions set by the Boards, suddenly they claimed that they were standing firm to defend the principle that the decisions of the Wages Boards must be upheld. Gibson emphasized how strongly the Chamber felt about this. He also said that the Chamber believed that there might be about 30 per cent of the Furniture Manufacturers who would not obey the call to close, but they would be whipped into line by having their supplies cut off, and they would even go as far as closing down the timber yards if necessary. Gibson promised that if the men returned to work, a meeting of the employees and employers of the glass industry would be held within two days and any agreement would be put to the Wages Board for ratification.

Dobson reported back to an executive meeting on 3 July. With unemployment growing Dobson knew the Union was vulnerable. The united front of the employers showed how determined they were, and the 1890s had left no doubt that if the employers were determined they

would stop at nothing and could destroy the Union. He warned members against discussing information outside the meeting. There were also rumours that some of the glass workers were thinking about going back on the reduced rates. One man had been offered the old rates for the time being to return to work, but when the matter was settled he would have to pay back the difference if the wage cut took place. While this might have sounded like a reasonable offer, the Executive recognized it for the trap that it was: it was a clever tactic to break the strike. The employers were pulling out all stops. Given that cracks were appearing in the ranks, combined with threats from the employers to smash the Union, the Executive reluctantly decided to recommend the return to work—but not before they passed a resolution to have a statement on the books of their true sentiments:

That the Executive has arrived at the understanding that nothing has transpired since the trouble started to alter their determination to win this Dispute, and to ask all members to concentrate their activities on resisting wages reductions. (Minutes 1922)

The recommendation from the Executive was not well received at the general meeting and the report was followed by lengthy discussion. Some members yelled their outrage and indignation at the threats to the livelihoods of the entire membership. Others faced the situation with grim acceptance—there is no point fighting when you know you cannot win. You have to know when to withdraw so you can regroup another day. When Dobson finally moved that the Executive recommendation be accepted he was apologetic and recorded in the minutes:

it was with great reluctance that he moved the same but he believed it was in the interests of all concerned to do this. It was for the members to adopt it or turn it down. (Minutes 1922)

Undoubtedly it was with great reluctance that the members adopted the recommendation. The Union met with the employers to make arrangements for the return to work, hoping that their agreement would soften the employers and they might be granted an extra few shillings. The meeting took place on 7 July and lasted four hours. The employers refused to budge. They asked that the men return to work at Wages Board rates of £4 17s 6d or they would take the matter to the appeals court.

They promised that if the return to work took place there would be a conference within two days when they would discuss the rates and then support Wages Board ratification of whatever was agreed. Sir Robert Gibson had agreed to chair the meeting and for some reason Dobson trusted him. If, on the other hand, the matter went to the appeals court, the whole affair would be back at the Wages Board with the employers again insisting on a ten per cent wage cut. The employers reiterated that if the conference did not take place, steps would be taken to close down all furniture factories and any employer who would not close down would have pressure brought to bear. His timber and the whole of his supplies would be cut off. They would also recommend to the other five Wages Boards involved in the industry to have wage cuts across the board. They said that this was not a threat: it was an actuality. The Society had experienced nothing like this show of solidarity from the employers. What the Branch had started in working across the industry for their advantage the employers had turned upside down and they were now using that tactic against the workers. There seemed no choice but to accept the ultimatum.

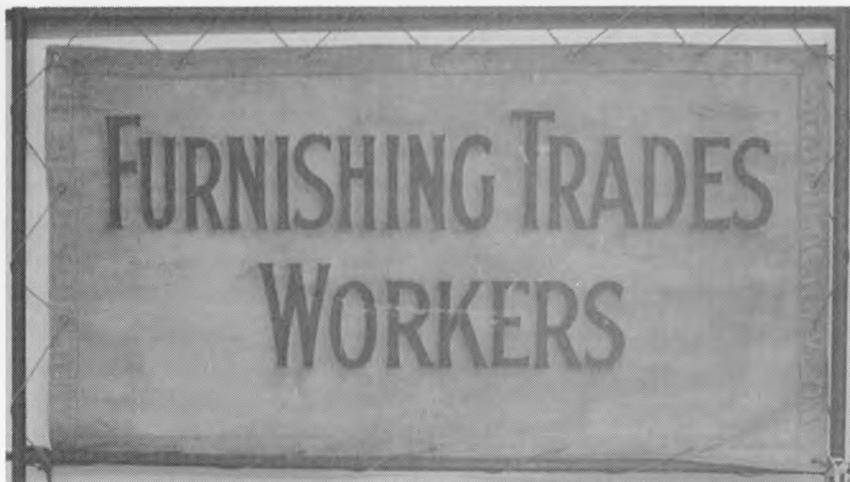
With spirits low and heads bowed the men returned to work after five weeks out with nothing to show for it. The employers were true to their word. They agreed to an extra two shillings and sixpence at the subsequent conference. Making the most of the situation, the Union claimed a victory in being the first group ever to increase the amount awarded by a Wages Board by industrial action.

The Wages Boards continued to be a problem. They often did not meet when scheduled because the employers found some excuse not to attend. The chairman was supposed to be chosen by mutual agreement between the two parties but when this was impossible, as it often was, the Government would appoint a chairman. The wrangling about this could take months: months that delayed improvements to pay and conditions. In 1927 there had been objections to the chairman of three of the Boards affecting the FFTS from the Chamber of Manufacturers. The Picture Frame Board was so temperamental that the Society applied to have it abolished and have the coverage taken over by the Furniture Board. Eventually it did meet but refused to discuss the matter of shorter hours but granted wage increases. The Furniture Board awarded an increase of two shillings and sixpence and the Glass Board three shillings. At times it was even difficult to find representatives for the Wages Boards. The Wicker Workers and Baby Carriage Boards nearly collapsed at one stage due to a lack of workers prepared to take it on.



PRESENTATION OF ROUND TABLE TO INDUSTRIAL COMMISSIONER, 1926.

The furniture trades craftsmen had great pride in their work. This magnificent table was presented to the Industrial Relations Commissioner in 1926 and this picture hung in the Union Boardroom for at least thirty years.



The date of this banner is not known but it was most probably made in the 1930s and used to identify the group rather than to be carried in parades.

in 1927 a major decision was made to leave the Wages Boards behind and move to a Federal Award. The Society applied for a Federal Award for Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. NSW and Queensland had sympathetic governments and conditions that were superior to a federally determined award.

The Second World War

War was declared in September 1939. The memories of the First World War and the hardships that continued after it were still vivid and workers were not prepared for a repeat performance.

Politically they were much stronger: they were more aware and more organized. The ACTU was a central voice: most Unions had been involved in major disputes and had toughened up as a result. Social reforms were needed to convince a sceptical population that they were not about to be sacrificed at the Imperialist altar again. A Labor Government was elected to oversee the war and introduce significant reforms that had been promised for thirty years.

While much scepticism might have been felt about the war, the Depression had ensured that there was no shortage of volunteers and once the Japanese entered the conflict, and Australia was directly threatened, it was all hands on deck. The impact on the furniture-making industry was unprecedented and created many problems for the industry to the Union. The big problem was the transfer of manpower from civil employment to the army or to the production of war equipment. Patriotic necessity became the rationale for everything. The feeling was that it would not matter if, at the end of the war, we had supplied too much army and equipment, but of course it would be a disaster not to have supplied enough. Production was geared to the war and only the most basic necessities were considered needed at home. All industry was assessed and graded according to its ability to provide for the war effort. Consumption without 'need' was frowned upon as unpatriotic. A special Department of War Organization of Industry was set up to rationalize industries in order to secure, 'the maximum diversion of labour, plant and material from non-essential to vital war tasks'. The Manpower Authority was set up to organize the placement of labour in the most beneficial ways.

It was a difficult time for unions who are never presented by the media as heroes. The moving around of labour took place with no concern for conditions or the maintenance of skill. Unions were often unpopular for raising these issues. The media was always looking for

scapegoats to take the focus away from the actual horrors that were facing the population and unions came in for more than their share of being the bogeymen. In one paper, the editor of a newspaper suggested that strike news should be placed alongside the casualty lists. In another incident the Minister for Supply was reported saying that a union steward had been dismissed for preventing men speeding-up on war production. The Union said the steward had drawn attention to the fact that a new man had been speeding-up, with the result that the work had to be done again.

Furniture Trade Panel

Furniture was not considered a vital item, but not all furniture was considered as an absolute luxury either. Many of the workers from the industry were conscripted. Some of the shops were turned to produce for the war effort and this sometimes meant that the workers in those shops were required to change unions. Other factories were able to produce limited amounts of product to highly regulated patterns and sold at regulated prices. A Furniture Trade Panel was established to set the regulations for the industry in each state, to give advice and offer assistance in executing the plan in the furniture industry. The Furniture Panel put forward a three-point plan. It was proposed that the only furniture that needed to be produced was 'a few lines of basic furniture for newly-weds'. Other people could manage with what they had until the war was over. This furniture was to be basic and inexpensive with little variety so as to minimize labour resources. The Commonwealth Executive of the Panel produced a list of items that could be made to particular specifications, and the prices they could be sold at during the war years. These included:

Children's cots 4'6" folding, with wire mattress	55/-
Children's cots 4' x 2'3 fixed, with wire mattress	50/-
Wire mattresses double	70/-
Single mattresses	45/-
Box spring double	150/-
Box spring single	90/-
Ice chests: maximum size 4' x 26½ x 17 Porcelain lined	160/-
Galvanised iron lined	120/-

All labour was classified according to its importance to the war effort and the manufacture of this furniture was considered 'essential

civilian work'. If a company had protected status the workers could not be called up for the armed forces or civil works programs; on the other hand the workers were unable to leave or be discharged without the permission of Manpower, and subject to an Appeals Board.

Another problem for some industries was the shortage of materials. Imports had become precarious as shipping was hazardous, many materials were diverted to the war or to servicing the American forces, and transport was restricted. A shortage of the materials required to manufacture perambulators caused several of the pram factories to close down because they simply could not get the supplies they needed; others only worked half-time. By 1944, wicker workers and baby-carriage makers were using Queensland cane that was much harder to work with than the imported cane they were used to. They applied for a pay rise because of the greater difficulty of their work. The Wages Board failed to make any decision as it was struggling to survive at all throughout the war years.

Substitute materials began to be used and this caused deterioration in the quality of the products that worried the Union. Plywood was especially scarce and solid wood was more expensive, but also becoming increasingly scarce. There were some reports of manufacturers using cardboard.

By 1943 there were serious concerns about the use of unsatisfactory materials and shoddy construction methods. The Union complained to the Department of War Organization in Industry about shoddily made furniture. Both the materials and the methods used were criticised. Frames were not well constructed and often off-the-square. The Union complained that the timber was badly planed and that wardrobes,

a new basis of manpower control which would be in the form of protecting establishments which the Panels in each State would submit to Deputies be instituted.

In a communication sent to the Director-General, the Federal Executive put forward the following proposition -

That branches of the Furniture Trade Panel of Australia in each State submit a list of furniture factories engaged on war and/or essential civilian work to Deputy-Directors General with a view to such establishments being declared "protected undertakings."

"Essential civilian work" shall comprise the restricted lines of furniture produced at factories which are included in those set out in the attached schedule (the maximum price schedule).

The subject was again discussed on the following day and adjourned pending consideration by the Director-General of the Executive's submission.

During the Second World War manufacture of furniture was strictly limited to what was considered necessary. This list was produced by the Panel and showed precise detail and pricing.

dressing tables and chests of drawers were being made with no dovetailing or dowelling used for joins; instead nails were used with the result that timber split and frames would fall to pieces with minimum pressure. Most of the skill had been sent off to the war—women workers were not skilled and manufacturing methods were adapted to allow for the de-skilling and the use of substitute materials.

Organizing Women

With Ellen Mulcahy in the office, attitudes to women members changed. In February 1920, a meeting of the female section was called to include all women working in soft furnishings, whether or not they were members. The meeting was well attended and it soon became evident that conditions varied in the different workplaces. Although some shops had already been granted a 44-hour week, most worked 48 hours for 48 shillings. The introduction of the 44-hour week meant the end of Saturday work, which had obvious advantages for women, most of whom had responsibilities at home. The women were keen to have this condition extended across the board. The carpet sewers also wanted something done about the filthy state of the carpets they were forced to work with, especially in public places. Twenty-five women joined the Union at the meeting and Mr Wardley and Miss Craig moved the following motion:

That the girls ask for 44 hours and that the officials of the Union interview Mr Kerr in regard to this matter and report at a future meeting. (Minutes 1920)

Once word got around that the Union was going to battle for women's conditions they started joining up. In the next month over 100 women joined, putting the lie to long-held beliefs that women were industrially weak, and showing that if the Union stopped excluding them they would respond favourably.

While the FFTS was preparing its actions to obtain shorter hours for women workers, 700 female bookbinders went on strike for the shorter hours in March 1920. The bookbinders demanded a five-day week of 44 hours with no work on Saturday. If successful, the bookbinders would set a precedent that other unions could follow. The FFTS supported this very important dispute strongly:

Your Executive Recommends that the sum of Twenty-five Pounds be voted to this Appeal and further, that all shop Delegates be asked to Take collecting sheets, and collect in

the Factories each week for the Girls, Your Executive further desires to urge upon each Member to contribute regularly towards this deserving Fund. (Minutes 1920)

As the strike went into its third week, the Trades Hall Council decided to levy all unionists one shilling a week to make sure that the bookbinders could stay solid. The FFTS supported this call and levied their members.

In the meantime two of the soft furnishing shops, frightened by the strength of the bookbinders and not wanting to lose weeks of business, agreed to give their employees the 44 hours. The Union lobbied the other shops heavily and by the end of June the 44-hour week was granted in all the shops they had lobbied. Women in the FFTS had achieved the 44-hour week with no loss of pay and, as such, they were the first group of any workers to have shorter hours, although their pay rates were still far behind those of the males. The Union ran the line for the women employees, 'first the hours and then we'll tackle wages'. However there was one section that lagged behind.

The Wages Board ratified the agreements one by one until they came to the Musical Instrument Board where Hugo Wertheim argued that if the women were to get a cut in hours they should get a proportional cut in pay. The employee representatives on the Board were all men whose wages had been increased at the same sitting to 93 shillings a week. At first they happily agreed with Wertheim that the women's pay should be cut from 48 shillings to 44 shillings. When the Union Executive heard about this they took it up with the men, arguing that the women's wages must be maintained to protect the gain of the shorter hours and explaining that if this gain was maintained it then stood as precedence for future claims. On this occasion the Union seemed to understand that inclusion was a better policy than exclusion. To support the case, Dobson produced figures that showed that by then, of 40 000 females employed in Victoria, 32 000 were working shorter hours. It was to no avail, Wertheim was still a merciless opponent and the wages were cut by four shillings.

The FFTS was in regular contact with Muriel Heagney. She was instrumental in the setting up of the Council of Action for Equal Pay in the 1930s, and right through the Depression and the Second World War she fought tirelessly with unions to persuade them to take up the cudgels for equal pay for women. She often corresponded with the Victorian Branch requesting funds or requesting to address meetings. These

requests were always well met. In the time of Arch Dobson a small hand-written pencil note on a scrap of paper still lies in the minute book that says: Miss Muriel Hegney for the 14th September with Lantern Slides if Necessary. Yet in July 1921 when Trades Hall was planning a Female Workers' Conference and sent out an appeal to help fund it, the FFTS sent a donation of £2. Hardly a strong statement of support!

In 1926, the Furniture Board awarded an increase of four shillings for all males and three shillings for females, which was a creep up the scale. It was an increase of 75 per cent and as such *slightly* decreased the gap between males and females.

When the Second World War broke out, everything changed for women workers. The war caused such severe labour shortages that women were needed to keep production running. They were brought into industry to replace men where needed. This raised the question of

**PICTURE OF
A PATRIOT...**

“I know they're getting shabby—but they'll have to do until the war is over! I'll put the money into War Bonds!”

HAVE YOU JOINED A STREET SAVINGS GROUP?

That's the spirit which will win this war quickly... the unselfish determination to put the needs of our fighting forces before everything else. There's plenty of time when the war has been won to buy those extra luxuries and non-essential things which call for the spending of money which is urgently needed

THE WAR SAVINGS STREET

Much of the war propaganda was aimed at women to support the war economy. This advertisement shows the way this pressure involved furnishings. The Patriot ...

**A SABOTEUR
AT WORK...**

I enclose herewith my cheque for Carpets, Furniture & furnishings supplied by you. Yours truly, Mary Quinling.

HAVE YOU JOINED A STREET SAVINGS GROUP?

THAT'S the spirit which will win this war quickly... the unselfish determination to put the needs of our fighting forces before everything else. There's plenty of time when the war has been won to buy those extra luxuries and non-essential things which call for the spending of money which is urgently needed

THE WAR SAVINGS STREET

... and the Saboteur.

setting the wage for a group who had always been paid much less because their work had always given lower value. Women had established the principle of equal pay for war work, but employers insisted that their levels of production were lower. As insulting as this was to women it meant that in most cases the wages were way over those that a woman could normally earn. The Women's Employment Board was set up to arbitrate on the pay and conditions of women entering 'men's work'.

In the FFTS a number of sections began to employ women. In each case, claims for conditions had to be prepared and the workplaces had to provide facilities that were considered appropriate. One application came from Hygienic Baby Carriages Pty Ltd, Hawke St, West Melbourne.

We desire to employ Females as a wartime measure in three classes of work:

Upholstery: As no Tradesmen can be made available by the Manpower Board even to instruct, and all our regular upholsterers being called up, we have been compelled to alter our entire system of, upholstery to suit the class of labour which is now available. That is unskilled female labour. Award Rates, Males £5 13s 0d—female rate for similar work in the Furniture Award £3. (FFTS Correspondence files)

The Board determined:

The board inspected the premises and observed the work being performed there. The method and conditions were not conducive to high efficiency and the productivity of the females observed was not as high as it might well have been under more favourable circumstances. At present the females are working only part time and that is another cause of loss of production.

The work is not beyond the capacity of females and no long period of probation is necessary. The WEB is of the opinion based on its large and growing experience that the productivity of the females so employed might easily exceed the figures and results submitted by the applicant ...

The Board therefore decides:

1. That the females covered by this application are females within the Regulations

2. That a period of probation is necessary for the said females and that the period be fixed at two weeks.
 3. That the rate of payment during the probation period be 70% of the male rate of payment and thereafter 85% of the rate of payment for males doing similar work based upon an hourly rate of payment.
 4. That the hours and conditions applicable to the said females be those prescribed for males doing similar work.
- That this decision binds the applicant, the Furniture and Allied Trades Union and its members. (FFTS Correspondence Files)

Unemployment

As the 1920s began unemployment began to grow again and the Union was faced with the ensuing problems. They increased subs of working members by three shillings a quarter to set up an unemployment insurance that would pay £1 per week for not more than eight weeks in any one year.

A bigger threat to the conditions as a whole was the constant availability of workers willing to undercut conditions. Two policies were developed to ensure that the Union kept control of the working conditions. The first was called the Special Resolution. It had three planks: members were required to register at the office on becoming unemployed; no member was permitted to answer an advertisement for work without first consulting the office; and no member was to accept employment until notifying the Secretary and informing him of the wages and conditions that were being offered. The second plank of the policy was the 'OK card' that was given to members when starting at a new firm to prove the bona fides of the new worker.

Unemployment eased in the mid-twenties but towards the end of the decade, it was out of control again. In March 1928 a levy was struck on all adult male members of two shillings per week to increase the fund available for unemployed members. A special committee was set up to administer the fund but as more and more men were put out of work it became impossible to meet demand. The Union office stayed open late on Friday evenings to make it easier for members to deliver payments. Those who did not contribute were outed in *The Journal* and threatened with legal action. The Union was also opposed to speed-ups at workplaces and blamed this for a great deal of the unemployment, which was growing into the worst levels ever seen.

The following were listed as unemployed by the Union on 8 July 1929:

Cabinetmakers 110
Polishers 101
Machinists 30
Chair makers 25
Glass section 25
Upholsterers 37
Musical Inst 12
Labourers 5
Females 3
Outdoor Hands 4
Mattress & Bedding 9
Carver 1 (Minutes 1929)

The situation in 1929 was aggravated when timber workers were locked out of the timber yards because they would not accept a wage cut and work more than 44 hours a week. The attack on the timber workers was seen by the union movement as a whole as a test case for all industries and so the men were strongly supported. It was very close to home for the FFTS and it struck a levy of two shillings per member to support the locked-out workers. In April it was discovered that 'black' timber was starting to emerge in the furniture shops. Union members refused to handle it and were subsequently stood down.

It was tragic for workers to see the fruits of their labour lying around in warehouses and stockpiles as they were put off work and thrown onto scrap heaps while their families went hungry. The unemployment committee was extended in order to deal with the problem of unemployment, not only among the Union membership but also the entire working class. Discussion about solutions to unemployment became common. A popular solution put forward was for the shorter hours to be extended across the board, but employers, with a great pool of cheap labour and failing markets, were in no mood to grant any concessions at all. The committee lobbied the Government to provide unemployment benefits and also to provide an extra payment of ten shillings each week for rent. As business spiralled downwards most of the employers who managed to stay afloat tried to cut corners with workers' conditions. The Union's work became more tedious—a lot of chasing back pay for those who had been sacked and were still owed money.

Membership started to build up again in 1934 but the Depression had taken its toll. While the State Branches had limped to survival the federation had not. It had virtually collapsed.

In 1935 there was an informal conference of State Branch Secretaries of the federation to decide what could be done. In order to ensure that the federation could function effectively as a federal organization in the interests of the furnishing trade membership, they put forward a proposal to set up a federal committee with the following duties:

The business of the Federal Committee shall be to consider and determine such matters as affect the interests of the Furnishing Trade membership, particularly in regard to Industrial conditions affected by the Federal award, and domestic affairs relating to the Federal Meeting shall take place not less frequently than monthly.

1. The Secretary should send monthly reports to Branches to keep them informed and to get consideration, recommendations etc. from Branches ...
2. Issue a financial statement for the period ending February 28th 1935.
3. Branches to pay 2.5% of fees to Federal Committee.
4. Federal Secretary to hand over all documentation.
5. *Furnishing Worker* be restored as a quarterly journal.
6. That no fees, except for outside professional legal assistance be paid to any officer of the Federal Committee unless previously approved by a majority of Branches.
7. That all Branches endorse and operate the OK Card rule as adopted in NSW—that a card must be shown before starting work, but that members can find their own jobs if desired.
8. Branches embark on vigorous policy to prohibit overtime in the Furnishing Industry except with written permission of Unions.
9. Negotiation opened with Western Australia—with a view to that body re-entering the Federation.
10. Seek a new award.
11. Correspondence to be forwarded to the Secretary of the Victorian Branch. (FFTS Correspondence Files 1935)

Politics

The forthright political debate around the One Big Union was extended to a debate about the nature of society itself. Socialist ideals became popular and the main question seemed to be whether it would be won through revolution, as in the Soviet Union, or through the gradual reforms of the Labor Party. Word about the workers' haven that was being built in the Soviet Union spread. The economy in Australia fluctuated and plunged to terrifying depths. The Communist Party became a natural attraction for many workers and a strong influence in the union movement and the Labor Party. Three clear political streams developed and contended for the leadership of the labour movement. The communists believed that capitalism had to be overthrown by revolution to build socialism; the left of the Labor Party believed that socialism could be introduced through parliamentary reforms; and the right wing of the Labor Party thought that capitalism was fine as long as the workers got a 'decent' share of the cake. Not surprisingly, given the diversity of the membership, all of these trends were represented in the FFTS.

In the immediate post-war the Union journal published articles from around 1919 about the Russian Revolution and the new society that was being built in the Soviet Union. The first to appear were small descriptive articles about the society that was being created. Later articles were printed that offered 'the truth about the Soviet Union' to counter the hostile propaganda that flooded the mainstream media. By August 1919 there were advertisements for books about the Soviet Union and articles that sang the praises of the state dedicated to the liberation of workers. The *Furnishing Worker* even reprinted an interview with Lenin from the *Manchester Guardian*, titled, 'The Head of Soviet Russia' and described the attitude of the Soviets towards other governments in the world.

By the 1930s the political battle within the Branch had become heated. Boyce, who had become the Secretary, was part of the right wing of the Labor Party and Brown, who was working as an organizer, represented the left wing. Their differences went far beyond narrow political objectives, their politics represented worldviews that influenced everything they thought and did. Their attitudes to organizing a Union and representing the best interests of the members were as different as the skills of a glazier were to a chair maker and they were constantly at loggerheads. At the same time members and supporters of the Communist Party became more and more vocal in Union meetings. The

Victorian Branch as a whole was sympathetic to the Communist Party being entitled to freedom of speech. In July 1935 the government banned the propaganda paper, *Soviets To-Day*, from being sent through the post. The Branch opposed the ban and ordered two dozen copies to be delivered regularly. Three were marked for members to read in the office and the rest were for sale to members.

The Government followed the banning of *Soviets To-Day* by banning the Pastoral Workers Union journal, *The United Bushworker*. This was an attack on the freedom of speech of Unions and was, not surprisingly, viewed with disgust by the Branch. They sent letters to the Government immediately, demanding the withdrawal of the ban as being: 'a Fascist measure directed against the democratic rights of our Trade Union organizations'.

Later in 1935 the Government raised the issue of the legality of trade unions and the Branch was quick to respond:

That the members of this Union emphatically protest against the actions of the Federal Government in attempting to declare working class organizations illegal and furthermore we demand the repeal of the Crimes Act and all repressive working class legislation as contained in the Arbitration Amendments Act and Transport Workers Act. (Minutes 1935)

The Branch was affiliated to the Labor Party and a great deal of the meeting time was taken up discussing matters for ALP conference agendas and for supporting electoral campaigns. However, the Branch members were also often critical of the ALP. They were particularly committed to joint work between the ALP and Communist Party. They opposed the ALP decision to reject United Front proposals from the Communist Party in August 1935:

That this Union request the Central Executive of the ALP to call a Conference to reconsider their previous decision in regard to United Front Proposals as submitted by the Communist Party, in view of the imminence of war, and the urgency of the matter at the present time. (Minutes 1935)

Fear of a war with Hitler was growing. A widespread and populist peace movement grew but could not find unity. The ALP and the Communist Party battled it out for leadership and the FFTS Branch

condemned the rivalry and called for unity in fighting for peace. The ALP tried to smother the Communist Party organizations by turning Unions against them. On the other hand, in the Soviet Union the Stalinist bureaucracy had taken control and mercilessly used its followers around the world for its own purposes, so that the attitudes of the communists to the war became mirrors of the shifting positions of the Soviet bureaucracy.

In the meetings of the Branch these issues often led to heated debates. A new phenomenon emerged in the Branch meetings. The heat of the debates was non-productive because the issues became buried under meeting procedures. At the General Meeting on 1 October 1935, what would have seemed a simple issue became a contortion of tactics that were intended to intimidate any opposition rather than consider an alternative opinion. Three delegates had been elected to attend an anti-war conference being held by the ALP. Delegates were elected and then:

Mr S. Johns moved: That the delegates be instructed to move for the support of application of sanctions against Italy.

The President ruled the motion out of order.

Mr S. Johns moved and Mr H. Poppins seconded: That the Chairman's ruling be disagreed with.

The Chairman vacated the Chair, and Mr W. Ward took same.

Mr F. Bridger moved and Mr W. Marshall seconded: That only two members be allowed to speak for either side.

The acting Chairman accepted the motion.

Mr E. Stewart moved and Mr R. Boyce seconded: That the Chairman—Mr Ward—Ruling be disagreed with.

Mr Ward vacated the Chair and Mr S. Johns took same.

The motion to disagree with Mr Ward's ruling was put to the meeting and declared Lost. 18-22.

Mr Ward resumed the Chair.

Mr Bridger's motion was then put to the meeting and declared Carried.

The motion to disagree with Mr Brown's ruling was then put to the meeting and declared Lost. 18-22

Mr Brown resumed the Chair.

Mr Ansell moved and Mr W. Mackay seconded: That the delegates to the Conference use every means in their power to

bring about Unity between the Labor Anti-War committee and the VCAW&F. (Communist Party Anti-War group)

The Chairman ruled same out of order.

Mr Mackey moved and Mr Ansell seconded: That the Chairman's Ruling be disagreed with.

The Chairman vacated the Chair and Mr Ward took same.

The motion was put to the meeting and declared Lost.

The Chairman then resumed the chair. (Minutes 1935)

For the remainder of the thirties the Branch members were staunch supporters of the peace movement and severely criticized the ALP whenever it took contrary positions. Within the ALP, a new virulently anti-communist group were growing. Increasingly strong peace activists were being linked with communist ideas and becoming incompatible with the ALP leadership. Expulsions began and the Victorian Branch response was divided. In December 1935 when a Vice-President of the THC was removed for his anti-war activities, a motion at the FFTS Victoria Branch to protest against his removal was passed by a narrow majority of 21 to 19.

In August 1936 a motion was moved at a General Meeting that politicians be balloted and asked if they were in favour of compulsory military training:

The Chairman stated that it was not necessary, as the labour movement is against war. (Minutes 1936)

Such naiveté so soon after the turnaround of the previous Labor Government in the First World War is perhaps surprising. But it was not to last long. In 1939 the Government brought in a national register for men and boys to provide their details in preparation for conscription for the war. The Branch followed ALP and ACTU policy in supporting a national boycott of the register. But before a month was out the ALP and then the ACTU called off the boycott. The Branch was outraged and continued to support it even though it was the only Branch in the FFTS to do so.

With the right wing in ascendancy in the ALP, they wanted to increase their influence over the trade unions while diminishing the influence of the Unions on the ALP. In line with this, at the ALP Conference in Easter 1939 they moved that Union delegates to ALP conferences must have two years' continuous membership of the ALP. This infuriated the FFTS who believed that membership and representation

issues were the prerogative of the Union and not of the ALP. The FFTS protested the ruling.

The political environment had widened the scope of its solidarity. In October 1939 a small but significant event took place. An Aboriginal speaker from Coomeroogunja addressed a general meeting of the Branch, asking for support and recognition of the cattle workers' dispute. He asked for: 'an equal footing with other workers'. His address was well received and applauded. The Branch had been able to extend comradeship with a group of Aboriginal workers, but their attitudes to the Chinese at this stage had barely changed.

The Branch was able to show little compassion towards 'aliens' during the war. In September 1940, someone moved:

That for the duration of the War and for 12 months following that no unnaturalised enemy subject be allowed to be a member of the Society. (Minutes 1940)

Another member asked if that was contrary to the rules. Boyce replied that it would be in order seeing that the meeting has power to admit or reject a member. However while Boyce might have allowed it as compatible with the rules, the members on the whole were not prepared to support it—it could not even find a seconder.

Electioneering in Northcote

On 7 May 1942 a letter was received by Trades Hall from Robert Boyce foreshadowing the following motion:

That the Commissioner of Police be requested to hold an inquiry into and supply a report on the reasons for the arrest of two members of the Furnishing Trades Union at Northcote on Wednesday 18th February, whilst one was addressing a meeting of their members in reference to their Union Elections. (FFTS Correspondence file 1942)

And enclosing the following report:

Report of Police Interference with Meeting at Northcote

On Wednesday, February 11, I asked to see Mr Baragwanath for permission to address the men in the dining room on the

Union elections, with a full explanation that it was not an official Union meeting but mostly an address as candidate for election.

The Manager explained that Mr Baragwanath was not in, and in his absence, he—the manager—was not prepared to give me permission.

He agreed, and did on request, send one of the men (Louis Fiddleman) out to see me.

By this time, it was too late to hold a meeting in the street. I asked Louis to notify the men that I would be out to speak to them on the following Wednesday, the 18th February, in the street at the back of the factory. He agreed to tell the employees.

On Wednesday the 18th, J. Arrowsmith and I arrived at the factory at 12.20 P.M. and went to the back of the factory in the street. The men (13) came out of the factory yard to listen and sat along the fence in the street.

J. Arrowsmith opened with a few introductory remarks on the reasons why we were there, and who we were. He spoke for about 6 minutes.

After I had been speaking for about 15 minutes, two policemen—one in uniform—came around the corner from the front of the factory wheeling their bicycles.

They approached our meeting and stood a few paces away and listened until I had concluded.

The men had to resume work at 18 minutes to 1 P.M.

The policemen were listening for 6 or 7 minutes and made no attempt to interfere or take notes of any kind.

After the men had gone in to the factory yard and we were preparing to leave on my motor cycle, the policemen approached and suggested that we should have no objection to giving our names and addresses—not because of any breach of the regulations, but merely because they thought it was necessary to have the names and addresses of all people holding meetings.

I told them that I considered that they were grossly abusing their authority and that it was a deliberate attempt to interfere in legitimate Trade Union affairs and for these reasons I was not prepared to comply with their request.

I told them that if they wanted to get my name and address they must lay a charge in the proper way and be prepared to substantiate it.

After 15 minutes fruitless endeavour, by a mixture of threats and cajolery to get our names and addresses, we were ordered to go with them to the Northcote police station.

After refusing to allow Arrowsmith to go away to use a public telephone, they eventually allowed me to use the station telephone, to get into touch with my solicitor (Slater & Gordon).

The solicitor spoke to the uniformed policemen over the phone and evidently convinced him that he had made a mistake, as he indicated when he had finished his conversation that we were free to leave.

At this stage I was asked for my motorcycle licence, which I produced. They had evidently wakened to the fact that they could get my name and address in this way.

The plain-clothed policeman then accosted me with a further demand for Arrowsmith's name and address which he still refused to give, and an intimation that we would be charged under a Northcote Council By-law 53. Street obstruction.

This despite the fact that the only traffic in the street during the meeting was one woman pedestrian on the opposite side of the street.

He also informed us that a warrant would be issued for our arrest.

We then left the station at 1.33 p.m. without them getting Arrowsmith's name or address. (FFTS Correspondence files 1942)

In the Office

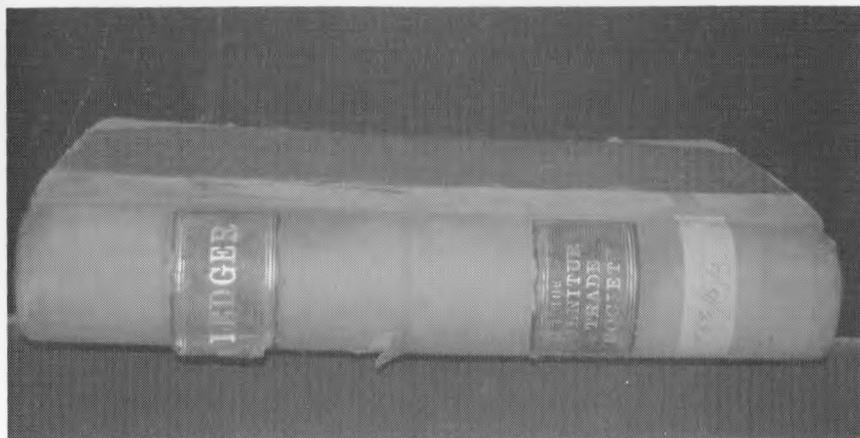
As the Union expanded, the infrastructure needed to handle the work grew. Maintaining the office and making sure it ran efficiently sometimes became as demanding as the business of fighting for members' conditions. The changes in the procedures of the Union administration over the years tell their own story of the journey of the Victorian Branch.

The minutes of General and Executive meetings were initially written by hand. In the earliest years the minutes were written with an ornate calligraphy. The crafted script reflected the craftsmanship employed in members' work. But as technology began to creep into workplaces the writing lost its embellishments and as the twentieth century

dawned the penmanship of the Secretaries became more angular and harder to read. The victory of the machine in the factories was forecast in the office in August 1919 when the first typed minutes appeared. The storing of the minutes is its own story of the changing times. At first the typed pages were pasted into the minute books but within a couple of years they were clumped together with a clumsy wire spring. This was replaced in the 1960s with dignified binding in black hard-back covers. Since 2000, the minutes have been stored loosely in spring folders.

Many stories hide within the sagas of car use and the Branch. The first time a car was used officially was for the eight-hour day parade of 1917 when a car was hired to transport the 'older' and respected members of the Branch in the parade. In 1929, Robert Boyce had become the Secretary of the Branch. He was a car enthusiast and the Branch bought its first car—a Triumph that cost £210. Not long after the Depression depleted the resources so badly the Branch could not afford to keep the car on the road, so it was stored until December 1932. Four years later, in August 1936, Boyce requested a new car because repairs for the old one were costing too much. He was asked to research the best deal and present a choice of two to the next meeting:

the best value, both in regard to price and economy of running, was the Ford V.10. The purchase price was £273 2s 0d. Deposit £93 2s 0d, balance including 2 years insurance and



This ledger was used by the Victorian Branch to keep financial records from 1920 to 1946.

7 per cent interest, payable in 24 equal monthly instalments of £9 13s 8d. He would endeavour to obtain the best price possible for the Triumph, either as private sale or trade in.

A motion was then carried: That we purchase a double seater Ford V.10. (Minutes 1936)

Two years later when Bill Brown Senior became an organizer he had to buy his own car. The Branch lent him £110, which he had to pay back at £6 a month. He also got fifteen shillings a week for his expenses. In 1939, unemployment was high again and war was imminent. Boyce proposed trading in the Ford because it was due for new tyres and a general overhaul. But the Executive insisted that he hold off on a new car until things improved. Two years later in April 1941, he raised the issue of the car again and was authorized to investigate the upgrade. When asked what sort of car he would get he said, 'One with a little more horsepower than the Ford.' At the May Executive meeting he reported on two cars: a Vauxhall and a Standard and proposed the Vauxhall that had 14 horsepower. However, in what became very characteristic of their relationship, Brown opposed that recommendation and said he thought the Standard (12 horsepower) was a better deal. However, Boyce had his way and the Vauxhall was approved.

The office was Room 39 in the original wing of the Trades Hall next to the room that is now called the Old Ballroom, but was then a meeting room. Robert Boyce arranged to have the office divided into two and



The FFTS office at Trades Hall was in the room that adjoins the Old Ballroom.

painted in the Christmas holidays of 1935. On 21 August 1940 a letter-box was fitted in the door of the office so that ballot papers, payment of levies and other information from members could be delivered safely when the office was unattended.

In 1925 the staff consisted of: Secretary Dobson who was paid £18 a fortnight; two organizers, R. O'Donnell and A. Stewart who were paid £16 16s 0d a fortnight each; and an office clerk, A. Gray who received £13 6s 0d a fortnight. These salaries remained constant for a number of years.

When Dobson died R. O'Donnell replaced him as Secretary. On 25 May the Union ledger recorded paying Rolston and Co. £45 17s 6d for Dobson's funeral. O'Donnell was Acting Secretary for some time and then became the Secretary. In June R. Boyce, who had been an active member of the Union and a Committee member for some years, was hired to replace O'Donnell as organizer.

O'Donnell had held the position for only six years when Robert Boyce took over. Boyce was a conservative man who stood on the right wing of the labour movement. He believed that business was best done through discussion with the employers. He had a close relationship with the Chamber of Manufacturers and called the Secretary, Mr Stonhill, 'my good friend'. In a letter to the Manager of the Guild of Furniture Manufacturers his tone was intimate as he explained why he had missed a meeting. Boyce said:

This sciatica is the most annoying companion that I ever had to tolerate. One day you feel well on the road to recovery, the next you are back to zero. (FFTS Correspondence file 1946)

He was Secretary through a period of political turmoil and although he continued in the position for fifteen years he was continually challenged by those around him who stood to his left politically, both within the Labor Party and from the Communist Party. He rarely got his way at meetings and worked in a state of constant tension with those around him.

Boyce died in 1947 and the obituary that was printed in *The Furnishing Worker* is embarrassingly formal. There is no sense of enthusiasm for a class fighter who brought commitment and courage to his members. It feels as if it could have been written by an employer, and certainly was not written by any of his more left-wing brothers.

Vale Robert Boyce

One of the hands which bore the Union's torch of hope and guidance, has relaxed its long-sustained fidelity to duty.

One of the brains which knew the trades Union and labour movements, has given forth its last fragrance and blossomed into our common life, called Death.

He will be seen no more among us; fair and gracious personification of manhood; his wise, and courageous righteousness shall no more be presented to us in his own words.

A Guard of Honour was formed at his home, of Union members, members of the broader union movement and employers of the Furniture Industry as a mark of their respect and esteem. The depth felt because of his passing and extent of it was shown by the many hundreds who attended at his burial service at Brighton Cemetery to pay their last respects.

The Depression was taking its toll and on 26 October 1931 the Union had to face up to a financial crisis of its own. The situation was grave and the Branch made some decisions about what it could afford. It decided to keep all the staff on, but reduce their pay and get them all to take one week off in every four. The monies that were set aside for special funds, the sick fund and the sustentation fund were all brought together into the working account. The Union changed its range of responsibility for sick pay—so that if a member was receiving any sick pay from insurance or the company the Union pay would only commence once that was ceased. The money in the insurance fund was to be used to pay sick benefits and the insurance policies on tools were not to be renewed when they came up for payment.

The Secretary's salary was reduced from £15 12s 0d a fortnight. In December 1931 he received two payments, the first for £4 12s 0d and the second for £7 6s 9d. The other staff received similar amounts. The reduction in salary was nearly 66 per cent. But hard times call for hard measures and it was evidence of the strong commitment of the staff that they continued to work with increased workloads and stringent reductions in their pay. In January 1932, the salaries were further reduced so that over the whole month the officials were paid £16 18s 0d each and the clerk was paid £13 14s 0d. In February, the officials received £11 15s 0d. From then the salaries were inconsistent, mostly less than they were owed, but occasionally they were reimbursed for arrears—

although never enough to make up for the actual amounts that had been lost. The Union was treating its staff in the same way that some of the employers were treating their employees. In November 1933, the Union funds were down to £250 and there was a serious arrears in salaries. The arrears in salary were paid back very slowly. In January 1933 the arrears owed to staff had reached £516 18s 0d—from that time they began to be paid back. In February 1935, it still stood at £248 5s 6d and although O'Donnell had not worked for the Union for three years, he was still on the payroll, receiving his arrears. The arrears were not fully paid off till 1938.

In the late 1920s O'Donnell employed Frank Gray as the office clerk. He became a strong presence in the office, taking on some of the organizing work and becoming a member of the Executive Committee. In October 1941 a tragedy beset the office when Gray took ill and died soon after. A month later Boyce returned to the office where Brown was updating some financial statements. Boyce asked what shop he was doing and Brown told him it was Myer, and commented with surprise that it had not many members. However, Boyce knew there was a healthy financial membership at Myer. Boyce told the next General Meeting:

It was then I started to check Frank's affairs and came across a shortage; that was on 8th November 1941. I informed COM and Federal President. (Minutes 1941)

Auditors were brought in to study the books, and there were certainly shortfalls. The money was never traced. Several meetings were called. The situation was explained to members. Boyce took responsibility and offered to resign. In the end it was decided to let the matter drop because Gray was dead, and there was nothing that could be done. Whether there was simply a mistake, or whether the books had been fiddled was never established, but some light was possibly thrown onto the situation when rumours emerged, some time later, that Frank Gray had committed suicide.

POST-WAR DIVISIONS

If the war didn't happen to kill you it was bound to start you thinking. After that unspeakable idiotic mess you couldn't go on regarding society as something eternal and unquestionable, like a pyramid. You knew it was just a balls-up.
(George Orwell 1939)

Overview

After the Second World War, Australia experienced unprecedented growth and stability in the period that is known as the 'long boom'. War industries were turned to peacetime manufacture. Work was plentiful, home ownership became a realistic goal for workers and migrants flooded to Australia from southern Europe and Britain. High employment rates gave workers the confidence and the ability to increase their wages and conditions. Although reforms started earlier it was really the post-war period that saw workplaces dragged, often screaming, out of Dickensian darkness. Many of the conditions that Australian workers have come to take for granted (although now in danger of losing due to the changes in industrial relations made in 2006), were won in this period. These conditions included permanency, temperature control at workplaces, facilities for eating, lunch and tea breaks, regular holidays, regular sick leave, workers' compensation, long service leave and training. Unions grew and became increasingly powerful, leading to intensified political fighting within the union movement for control. This battle was sharpest in Victoria with the emergence of the industrial

groups and the eventual split in the ALP in 1955, and then the withdrawal from the Trades Hall Council of twenty-seven unions in 1967.

The Union was led through this period by William Brown, followed by his son, also called William Brown. The Browns were dissimilar in so many ways, but pulled as one when it came to the political and industrial direction they believed that the Union should take. They were committed to a broad left political program that believed in fighting hard for members on both the industrial and the political fronts. The Browns believed that because workers made the wealth, they were entitled to their share of the rewards. They were entitled to be fully represented and justly compensated for their labour and valued for their abilities and contributions.

Reconstruction

Immediately after the Second World War the Government set up the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction to try to avoid some of the problems that arose at the end of the First World War and to try to ensure that the return to civilian life was economically sound. In September 1945, the regulations covering the manufacture of furniture were relaxed and a larger range of items could be made. The Union, at this time, worked side by side with the Government and the employers to get things back to normal. They were concerned that the changes made to production methods as a war measure might become standard practice and would inevitably de-skill the workforce.

In November 1945 the Victorian Branch organized a national conference on the furniture industry that was co-sponsored by the Victorian Furniture Industries Confederation. The agenda included government speakers on reconstruction, furniture manufacturers' associations, the Prices Commissioner, and the Furniture Retailers Association. The conference was at Trades Hall and was as much an exercise in PR as making decisions. It lasted a full week, starting on a Wednesday. The first three days were devoted to the speakers. The agenda also included free time, a cocktail party and buffet on the Saturday night, a trip through the Dandenongs and an alfresco tea on the Sunday, and visits to factories and stores on the Monday. Tuesday was set aside for discussion on the information that had been presented and the final day was taken up by golf.

Industrial

This was a period of gains, but none were handed out—they all had to be fought for. Employers wanted to expand and extend production and

the Union battled to make sure that was accompanied by improved conditions for the workers.

The first Bill Brown became Secretary when Robert Boyce retired in 1947. As soon as Brown became Acting Secretary he immediately set about creating the Branch in the image he believed a Union Branch should be. He believed that the members should be as involved as possible. His approach was to get members involved in disputes rather than Boyce's preferred method of approaching employers first to see what could be resolved. When Brown first became Acting Secretary he put his intentions for the job forward, making the differences between himself and his predecessor clear.

I intend if successful in my effort for the position, to carry on my work as organizer, but I cannot organize any more new factories that must be understood. If I find at the end of the next 12 months, assuming I get the position, that is too much work for me, I'll tell the Committee of Management. I know it is going to be very heavy going but I am fit and well and I feel I can do the job. I do not want to be in the office if there is no work to keep me there. I cannot be inactive. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

Athol Moore, an upholsterer, and life member of the FFTS, remembers the change in Secretaries:

When Bill Brown senior took over for the first time it became a professional place with staff that got out on the job. Before that there were some of the chaps would go into the Union office to fill in the day, have a couple of beers and just sit around in there—this was under Boyce. People such as myself were never notified on an issue—you'd go to your rep in the shop and he had maybe been contacted—the only time you saw them—they'd come around and collect the money. The difference was with Bill Brown—the information that we kept receiving about things—about awards, about working conditions—he would ring the shop and speak to the shop steward—he would write letters to the shop rep—and if you asked him a question he would take time and answer you with care. (Moore 2005)

General Conditions

At the end of the Second World War there were two levels of tradesmen for each of the trades in the industry—for example, there was a cabinet-

maker and an assembler, and this was repeated in all the trades. The Society went for a new award and the hearing before Commissioner Dwyer began in May 1952. Dwyer decided to inspect factories in South Australia and Victoria in addition to hearing witnesses. Once the witnesses had given evidence the employers notified the court that they intended to submit a counterclaim. In September 1952 the employers submitted their claim to insert a second-grade assembler. The employers successfully argued that the introduction of new machinery had enabled some of the workers to require less skill and therefore the pay rates would be reduced for that classification.

Then in 1964 the Union went for another award. The new log of claims that registered the dispute in the Federal Commission was met by a counter log from employers that included a process worker or fourth grade of worker and an application for women to be employed in what was previously male work as process workers on female rates—which would have been the female basic wage.

The Society decided to throw everything into defending members from these onslaughts.

And when we got the employers counter log we started to get some movement from the troops themselves we had a long series of meetings warning the workers about what the outcomes might be if the employers got these awards, of the deskilling and this great threat from females, particularly in the lower skilled areas, being able to work at far less rates of pay than the males and in a sense becoming an economic threat to the males. That was the message we were putting out and for the first time ever I think we had a full stoppage of the industry. I think it was a one-day stoppage. So many came that we could not use the Richmond Town Hall we had to go to a football ground close by and we had to have the meeting there. (Carr 2004)

Nevertheless, the employers won this round too and the industry was further de-skilled. These decisions changed the nature of the Union. The decisions epitomized the move away from the days of the artisans to the days of the process worker.

At the same time there were many gains. Workers won three weeks' annual leave and long service leave, their sick pay was extended to two weeks, workplaces had to be temperature controlled, there was

consideration for disability allowance and protective clothing started to become part of the standard conditions. Although the new classifications were introduced the wages for existing classifications were regularly increased. In 1959 adult male wages ranged from £18 10s 0d to £13 18s 0d, and females ranges from £12 2s 0d to £10 10s 0d. In February 1960, the Union managed to get the margins for both males and females increased by 29 per cent.

Glass

At the end of the war the glass workers applied for a pay rise of thirty shillings a week. Employers had used the war as an excuse for not improving conditions and they were reluctant to change the tactic when the war was over. The Chamber of Manufacturers wrote to the Branch on behalf of the Glass Merchants:

You must be aware that the National Security (Economic Organisation) Resultations still operate and, as the Prime Minister had said, are a part of the system adopted by the Government to control the price level. These Regulations make it illegal to grant any increased wages without the approval of the Arbitration Court. (FFTS Minutes 1947)

Not deterred, the glass workers went on strike and stayed out until the glass merchants agreed to talk. In 1946, the glass workers raised another issue with employers. The work was changing and increasingly involved heights that had been unconsidered before the war. Glass workers wanted danger money for working at such heights. They listed the heights that concerned them:

There had been considerable development in this class of work since the award was instituted and no provision is made for danger involved because of height and skill required in erecting own scaffolding by glaziers.

Height—Newport Power House—120 ft

Old Newport Power House 11 ft

Melbourne Hospital 100 ft

Yallourn Power House (Boilerhouse) 110 ft

Nobel Explosive Manf. Deer Park—60 ft (FFTS Minutes 1946)

Also, the size of the sheets of glass had increased so handling them was more dangerous:

Since the original award Shop From its construction has altered from a number of small sheets to one large sheet of glass requiring extra concentration and skill in selecting and cutting, dexterity of handling because of size and danger.

Stan Wheeler describes working as a glazier in the 1950s:

I was about 24 in 1956 when I got into the industry. It was very primitive; everything was done physically. I worked for Silverwood and Beck and they were one of the biggest places at the time ... the only thing to lift glass was block and tackle—I worked on the plate for a couple of years there and everything had to be manhandled. If you wanted to shift a big plate you'd have to rouse up the place and find enough men to do it. It was all physical work, putting slings under it ... The glass was taken out of cases and it was in racks and they were very narrow, just big enough for one man to walk through. If you were in there when something broke you were in a dangerous position if you were down the end cause there was a brick wall behind you. Practically no safety precautions. Compensation arrangements were very poor. Can't remember exactly now ... I got injured once and I had a week off and it wasn't my full wages, it wasn't anywhere near them. I can't remember exactly what it was but it was pretty poor. The safety arrangements on the job were pretty poor too.

At the end of every year—you got a week's sick pay a year and at the end of the year if you hadn't taken the sick pay, you got the pay at the end of the year at Xmas time. Blokes didn't want to take the time off cause they'd get it at Xmas time when the money was wanted. (Wheeler 2005)

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the glass industry started to change in response to changes in the building industry. Glass was an increasingly significant part of the construction of multistorey building and the glaziers worked alongside the growing militancy of building workers. As the building workers increased their conditions the glaziers were not far behind in demanding an increase in their conditions. In 1959 the FFTS made an application to the court for a variation to its award with respect to a disability allowance for 'on site' glaziers. Construction workers were already being paid £5 6s 0d a week. Employers



The back wall of a glazier's shop in Sydney Road, Brunswick, where business has been constant for many years.

tried to argue that the glaziers did not suffer the same disabilities. The Union took the Commissioner around the jobs in the city and after this he agreed that the glaziers were entitled to the same disability allowance as building workers. This same process took place for a number of conditions on building sites.

Piece Rates and Bonuses

In the post-war period the issue of piece rates and bonuses continued to be an issue but was sometimes complicated by the fact that workers wanted to take the higher rates on because, in the short term, they could earn more money. The Society maintained the policy that piece rates always, in the end, undermined their conditions, and certainly endangered health, as they tended to encourage speed-ups. In times of labour shortage such as these, employers offered attractive piece rates to hold labour but by doing so they avoided increasing wage levels. The Society was fighting a losing battle—increasing numbers of workers in the industry were being put onto piece rate schemes.

Early in 1952 a dispute broke out at Gainsborough where employees were being requested to use time cards and to cooperate with a time and motion study. The Committee of Management (COM) developed a position and the workers subsequently adopted it.

That this special summoned meeting of members employed at the Gainsborough Furniture Company strongly condemns the action of the firm for introducing the time on motion studies system. Further this meeting pledges itself to use every legitimate means, and if necessary industrial action to prevent the working of the system at the Gainsborough or any other factory. It is derogatory to the interest of the Branch and the trade generally.

This type of system could well be the means for a return to the shoddy furniture production of the past, with its low wages and sweated working conditions and unfair competition. The Society pledges itself to stand behind its members in their efforts to prevent this vicious system from operating. (Minutes 1952)

The employees readied themselves to go out on strike to stop the time and motion study from being introduced and management decided to drop it. This was a success but across the industry the same methods were being introduced and although the Society was successful in holding them back in some places, they gradually made inroads.

Pilkington Glass

In 1948 Pilkington Glass opened a factory in Geelong to provide windshields to the car industry. Two of the workers, Greg West and Andy Riddle, set out to find what union they should join. They discovered that they had a choice. They could join the Australian Glass Workers Union or the Furnishing Trades Society. After careful investigation of conditions they chose the Furnishing Trades Society. The Society had the award amended to extend coverage to car windscreen-making so the glass cutting and laminating that took place at Pilkington Glass was covered by the FFTS. This introduced a new membership to the FFTS who were basically process workers with considerable industrial muscle because of their association with the powerful car industry.

In 1960 Pilkingtons changed some of the working arrangements on the Number 8 Furnace, which increased the workload. The men asked for a £2 increase in wages to compensate for the workload that they claimed had doubled. Brown Jnr, who was the organizer, put the position to management and they offered to pay an extra £2 by introducing an incentive scheme. The men's response was to threaten to walk off the job unless they were paid the extra £2. When this was again put to

management, they proposed a time and motion study throughout the factory that would form the basis of an incentive scheme. The men threatened again to walk off the job. Their stoppage would affect other workers at the plant and Brown thought they needed more preparation before taking action. As well as that he wanted to evaluate an incentive scheme that had been employed in South Australia and that had satisfied members there. He convinced the men on Number 8 Furnace to settle for a little longer while the COM considered the whole picture.

The following motion was passed by the COM:

Having regard to the possibility of members other than those employed on No. 8 furnace affected by any action taken by No. 8 furnace employees the COM direct:

1. No walk off from the job by any member until the whole dispute has been considered by all members employed at Pilkingtons;
 2. time and motion study system as suggested by the firm be not accepted until it is clear what is involved over the whole factory and adequate protection clauses are agreed to by the committee of management;
 3. an interim rise of £1 be requested by the Union from the management for the additional task in operating No. 8 furnace;
 4. that the secretary has undertaken to arrange a special meeting of all members employed at Pilkingtons on Wednesday 23 March at 8 p.m. in the Geelong Trades Hall;
- State Committee of Management to attend such a meeting.
(FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

The special meeting supported the COM recommendation and Brown requested the £1 wage increase from management. Management claimed to be worried about other sections wanting flow-ons if they granted an increase to one group. The workers on the Number 8 Furnace met again in their meal break and when Brown reported management's response they refused to return to work unless the £1 increase was paid. Brown took this back to management who still refused and the men walked off the job. When three of these men went into work on Thursday to collect the pays they were told to leave the premises and were not given their wages. The dispute escalated. The Chamber of Manufacturers

became involved and the Geelong THC. The Union was able to convince management to pay the men the wages that were owed. But Pilkington Glass took the matter to court. The court instructed the parties to hold a joint meeting to discuss the proposed incentive scheme.

At this meeting Brown explained to the members that the answers to any questions they raised would be analysed by the Union and also that they needed to discuss the methods being used by the management to obtain extra production throughout the factory. He explained that the extra workloads would certainly be spread to other sections if members did not take immediate action and he stressed the need for solidarity.

A motion was moved by two of the shop stewards, J. O'Brien and M. Flannigan, and carried unanimously:

Whilst acknowledging the principle in our contract of employment, that is to say a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, this meeting declares that any action taken by the management in an endeavour to force employees to work above their normal capacity shall be met by refusal of members to perform such additional work. Furthermore this meeting states that in the event of any member being threatened with dismissal actions such dismissal shall be followed by a cessation of work by all other members continuing until such time as those involved are reinstated. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

Brown then read the decision of Commissioner Chambers on the dispute over the Number 8 Furnace. He disagreed with the decision and told members that if they stood solid and in support of the Union an agreement could be made out of court.

Recommendations were made by the Union that they oppose the incentive scheme. The Geelong Trades Council called a combined union meeting of all Pilkington workers and a log of claims was eventually presented from the entire workforce. In the end, a pay increase across the Board of five shillings for males and ten shillings for females was agreed upon.

Dirty Fillings

After the war there were few supplies for mattresses and upholstery. Companies were using second-hand filling that was often filthy dirty. In April 1947 the Branch decided that this must be dealt with by having

regulations placed by the Government on the standard of the flock because it was not only a potential hazard for workers but also for consumers. A letter was sent to the Minister for Public Health informing him that there was, 'resentment of members called upon to handle such germ-laden filth'. When it was reported that some of the flock being used was from 'dirty mattresses from repatriation hospitals that were feared to be contagious from disease', the Society wanted the use of second-hand flock banned altogether. There was no evidence that even if sterilized the flock was actually clean and free from contagion.

The Government claimed that it was preparing legislation but by June 1947 it had not materialized so the Branch managed to win a 12.5 per cent loading for working with second-hand materials. This was not a perfect solution and was not easy to enforce because employers constantly argued about what exactly constituted second-hand materials. By 1949 the Government had released a draft bill, the Regulation for Enforcement of Second-hand Bedding and Upholstering Bill, which the Union examined and made amendment proposals. The main concern was Clause 9 that described 'removing materials' in a vague and unrealistic way. The Union proposed the wording:

When for the purpose of any trade, business, or calling, for the purpose of remaking, renovating, teasing, refilling or repairing any bedding, no person shall remake such bedding until such casing or covering and filling materials have been boiled for a period of not less than 30 minutes or otherwise completely cleansed. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

The regulations were introduced but failed to address the problems. The issue came to a head in November 1951 when a Mr Sayers wrote to the *Herald* complaining that a new mattress he had bought at Myer had 'shoddy materials and foreign matter in the flock'. Brown contacted Sayers and took up the campaign against second-hand flock again. A special Committee was set up and Brown was authorized by the COM to take legal action to have the dirty flock eliminated. However the Government claimed that it was difficult to make a prosecution in the above case because the mattresses passed through a number of hands. In June 1952 amendments were still being added to the legislation but were still unsatisfactory and in December 1952 the award was changed to make provision for employees working on second-hand upholstery, bedding, floor coverings and soft furnishings to be paid a 25 per cent

loading. The loading provided an incentive for employers to provide new or clean flock.

Organizing Women

After the Second World War when enormous industrial unrest had been caused by inconsistencies in female pay rates, women were granted an increase to 75 per cent of the male rate by the High Court across the board. The FFTS in Victoria was barely affected because it was rare for men and women to be doing the same work. This began to change very gradually throughout the 1950s when women began to trickle into men's jobs. The first of these brought to the attention of the Union the report of a 'lady woodcarver' who was being employed at Myer in 1951. Some months later women were employed in a couple of shops as polishers. In these cases the women were earning 75 per cent of the male rate and the Union's concern was for the preservation of the male jobs and argued that the women should not be employed although the award allowed it. These incidences were so infrequent that it was not a major problem, although it did cause concern.

In December 1952 concerns became more widespread. Margins were awarded for female employees with rates that were significantly less than those awarded in the same decision for men. The highest margins awarded women were twenty shillings as compared to fifty shillings for men. The award did not allow open slather but it did open the door to new areas for women. It said:

females may be employed on such work as is customarily in the retrospective groups and should it be so desired by any party to this award to include another class of work. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

In 1955, employers in South Australia applied to have women employed on bevelling machines. The Victorian Branch took up the issue, expecting it to spread and a mass meeting of employees voted:

That we strongly protest against the employment of a female on a bevelling machine, as we regard this work should be performed by males. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

The machine in question was a new machine and arguably required less skill than the older machines, but this too created concerns about the rates that should be paid. Possibly the work would become female

work only if the Commission ruled that the women could be paid a lower rate than the male classification, 'bevelling shop employee'.

The concerns were not limited to the Furnishing Trades. A special meeting was called by the THC, which had set up an Equal Pay Committee. Harry Maloney went to the meeting and came back with a formal report about the finances of the committee and its promotion of equal pay propaganda. However the Branch did purchase copies of the booklet, 'Equality Will Be Won'.

An article from the Trades Hall Committee was subsequently published, with the endorsement of the Branch Executive, in the first journal of the Victorian Branch in August 1959 giving details of the fight that was being waged around the country for equal pay.

In September a new wage decision increased the margins for women, but still left the range of jobs unclear. In October, with the young Bill Brown as Secretary, the policy changed and the Branch made a breakthrough. They received a report that five women were employed at Champion Glass:

Secretary Brown reported ... The girls are employed washing glass, inspecting glass for scratches but not silvering. Secretary has interviewed inspectors concerning same and also inspected job and girls' work, he felt the employer should be approached to pay male rate. Moved W. Sydney and seconded K. Carr that the Secretary be empowered to interview employers with the view to obtaining male rate for women. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

At last the Branch had changed its tack. Instead of trying to exclude women from men's work they began to fight for them to get equal pay. In the June 1960 issue of the FFTS *Journal* the arguments were clearly laid out:

The advent of more and more automatic methods of production had made it imperative that the principle of equal pay for work of equal value should be implemented without delay.

Union agitation for the application of this principle has been motivated by two major propositions.

Firstly that there should be no discrimination between sexes where the job is of equal value, and secondly, because of the exploitation of many workers through the use of lower paid female workers to replace the higher paid male.

In 1964 employers applied to the Commission to use women in the newly created assembler positions and it was granted. This opened the floodgates for women process workers to be brought into the industry. This shifted the significance of the problem of low wages for women and the Union had to take the issue to a new level.

Membership

Membership statistics 2 February 1950

Male adults	3378	Female adults	128
Male apprentices	228	Female apprentices	1
Juveniles	287	Female juveniles	23
Total males	3893	Total females	152
Total membership	4045		

Training and Apprenticeship

After the war training of skills was a major concern of the Union in the battle to preserve skills. Employers were reluctant to get involved. For them, informal training and movable standards made paying lower wages easier.

The introduction of new machinery after the war affected most sections of the Society and in particular raised questions of skill levels and their acquisition. The first section to raise these concerns was the Glass section. On 23 May 1947 their members held a meeting that expressed concern over companies trying to introduce unskilled labour at cheaper rates. Opinion was divided at the meeting between those who did not mind the unskilled labour as long as the set rate was paid for the job, and those who believed that unskilled labour would inevitably reduce the rates because it could always be bought off the street at any time.

The issue came to a head first at Gill's where the Society was at pains to determine the exact nature of the work of the silverers. Brown wanted to develop a policy to keep unskilled labour out of glass working but some opposed this view as they thought it was overcautious. Brown organized a survey of members to provide information about the methods of training that were taking place in the various shops. The survey showed that throughout the industry there were 100 silverers and 450 unskilled labourers working. The general problem was aggravated by the special rehabilitation training that had been set up for returned

servicemen. The Union was constantly in discussion over the numbers of trainees they believed the industry could manage without undermining the job availability and conditions of those already working. In 1950 the training scheme was extended. In November 1950 the officials decided it was a losing battle and agreed that as long as employees were paid the full rate they would not oppose the employment of unskilled glass workers.

At the same time the Society was seeking increased recognition and standardization for other groups of workers. They sought to become a trade under the control of the apprenticeship commission. This would involve setting up a trades school and standardizing the skills. The Union held meetings with the Secretary of the Apprenticeship Commission and found out that the first requirement was to get the agreement of the employers. Consequently, a letter was sent to them. In September 1948 Brown called a special meeting at the Trades Hall of apprentices and their parents to put together an up-to-date case. A response came from the employers that they were not interested in having the trades brought under the Apprenticeship Commission.

The process dragged on but in March 1951 the Apprenticeship Commission approved a training scheme for furniture workers involving four hours of night school and four hours of day school with an aim to make it eight hours of day school when facilities were available. The employers opposed the introduction of the scheme, causing delays whenever they were required to give agreement, and tried to undermine the quality and length of training.

By November 1951 the Commission agreed to accept the scheme and the furniture making trades of cabinetmaking, woodcarving, wood turning, chair and couch making, polishing and machining were set to be brought under the auspices of the Apprenticeship Commission. The Chamber continued to object. The Society, on the other hand, sought to have coverage extended to organ building, piano making and the glass trades. The system was ready to begin in March 1952 and in September the employers challenged the whole scheme in court. The objection was unsuccessful and in December the apprenticeship system for the Furnishing Trades is prescribed in the award:

The award also prescribed that the following shall be apprenticed trades: cabinetmaking, woodcarving, wood turning, chair and couch making, polishing, upholstery and, polishing, upholstering, machining with instruction and practice in

four of the following machines viz: bolts carver or shaper, moulder, band saw, a jigsaw, circular saw, dovetailor, buzzer, planer glue jointer, tenoner, copying lathe and automatic lathe; Furnishings—carpet planning of floor coverings, soft furnishings; wicker and baby carriages—wickerwork, basket making and baby carriage making: musical instruments—cabinetmaking (including piano and player piano case making); side including, fly finishing, veneer scraping and part making, sound board making, making other musical instruments, tuning, player mechanics, polishing and wood machining: Organ Building—organ building and wood working; voicers, metal pipe making, tuning, polishing and wood machining; Wire Mattresses—wire weaving, wire mattress making, polishing and wood machining; Bedding—mattress making; Glass—bevelling, silvering, embossing, glazing (including lead and copper glazing), painting and designing, cutting, bending, blocking, scratch polishing and sand blasting with a provision that in wood machining in this section instruction and practice shall be given on shaper, moulder or router. Apprenticeship shall be compulsory—certain qualifications for various states—

The terms of Apprenticeship for males are five years for those entering between 14 and 17 and four years for those entering in the 18th and 19th years and for females the term is four years. (FFTS Minutes 1947–55)

By May 1953 there were sixty apprentices under the Apprenticeship Commission.

Groupers

The Browns, as a father and son team, worked well not only in the Union but in the Labor Party. They were part of the left-wing leadership group in Victoria. Their allegiance to the ALP was staunch, but they fought within it to maintain a socialist stance. Younger Brown was more eloquent and more educated than his father and his politics echoed that difference as well as the difference in their ages. While both Browns had strong left-wing politics, old Bill was seen as a conservative man but young Bill was seen as personally flamboyant.

The political differences in the ALP sharpened throughout the 1930s and by 1941 Catholic Unionists had built a network that

developed within the next couple of years and had some influence with ACTU President, P. J. Clary, and the VTHC Secretary, Vic Stout. From the start there had been a large number of Catholics in the union movement and in the Labor Party. A Papal encyclical in 1891 had supported trade unions and said that workers should be paid a just wage. But when in 1934 another Papal encyclical denounced the twin evils of laissez-faire capitalism and communism, Catholics in the labour movement began to organize. Soon after this B. A. Santamaria, then a Melbourne University student, established the *Catholic Worker* as a journal with the policies set out by the Pope.

In the aftermath of the post-war period and the turbulence of the 1930s many workers were drawn to the ideas of the communist movement that talked about a workers paradise, where not only did everybody have an equal share of the pie, but also an equal share in deciding how to cut it. The Communist Party became a pole of attraction. By the end of the Second World War Communist Party membership peaked at around 23 000 and they had won the leadership of several unions. At the 1945 ACTU Congress the influence of the communists was obvious and this added fuel to the fire of anti-communism in the bellies of the followers of Santamaria. With funds supplied by the Archbishop of Melbourne, the Catholic Social Studies Movement (the Movement) was set up to operate as a clandestine organization to influence the union movement. Industrial groups were set up in workplaces claiming that their intention was to promote the policies of the ALP, but the real agenda, clearly spelt out in their constitution, was to counter the influence of the communists. The Browns were Catholics but also staunch socialists and virulent opponents of the Groupers.

In the FFTS Victorian Branch the issue first arose at a management meeting on 28 April 1947. One of the delegates from Myer said he wished to set up a group at Myer. The idea was supported by one of the organizers, Harry Maloney, who had been employed by Boyce and was of the same political colours. Maloney spoke in support of the setting up of ALP groups. Another member raised a note of caution saying that there was a group around that was trying to split the Labor Party and asked how the Union would counter such action. As the industrial groups gained power, positions in the FFTS Branch hardened. Before the 1947 ALP conference there was heated debate about the groups and a fear that they would split the labour movement.

The numbers among the active membership between the right and left of the Labor Party were fairly equal at meetings in the late 1940s.

Votes taken at meetings varied according to who had the numbers on a particular night. The issue of the ALP groups came to a head in June 1948. A resolution had been passed at a general meeting to support ALP groups in factories 'to propagate the policy of the ALP and to oppose Communist and other anti-labour forces that circulated throughout the Union'. The COM refused to endorse it. In opposition Brown moved 'that the COM recommendation that ALP groups not be fostered in the Furnishing Trade Society' be endorsed. President Purchase gave ruling that this motion was not in order as previous meetings had endorsed ALP groups. Brown moved disagreement with the ruling. Hoyne took the chair. Brown said that there had never been a special meeting called to endorse ALP groups as policy of the Union.

President Purchase then stated that on two occasions meetings of the Union had endorsed ALP groups. The motion was then put that the Chairman's ruling be disagreed with, and the Chairman ruled that the President's ruling was upheld.

Uproar followed this decision until another vote was taken by a show of hands. The President's ruling was overwhelmingly defeated and more uproar at the biased ruling of the Chairman broke out. The meeting became overheated when Brown moved that the COM recommendation be endorsed. Hoyne opposed the recommendation, and Maloney supported him. Voices were raised, people stood up and points of order were flung at the Chair. The issue had again become one of procedure—whether it was valid for this meeting to endorse a COM resolution. In the end it did just that and this settled the matter of the groups within the Victorian Branch. Their leaders, Hoyne and Purchase, said they were only doing their best in the interests of the Society.

Athol Moore remembers the meeting. He had received a call from Bill Brown asking him to attend the Special Meeting as they expected it to be stacked with Groupers. Athol said:

On this occasion Bill Brown wrote a letter saying would you come in. We came in—people did not bother to go to Union meetings—so me and the Union rep went in.

It was a Special Meeting—to do with the way these people wished to change the Union rules and we thought this would disadvantage existing members.

For me we wanted to retain the Union as a socialist organization—the Unions were for the working person—to fight for all the people—equal opportunity for all—socialist

manifesto—I remember reading the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx.

It's hard to believe how arrogant and sneering this lot were. When the meeting was called they knew that it was a historical fact that members did not attend meetings. They packed the crowd on this one night. As it turned out we had the numbers, but only just.

On this occasion I was choked—I was vehement about what I had to say and expressed myself very forcefully—I felt very strongly opposed to their suggestions.

Bill Brown Junior, in his late 20s, was there. He threw out a few lines every now and then. One of the chaps tried to talk him down—he jumped to his feet and tried to fly at him—but I was sitting next to him and managed to restrain him along with the person on the other side of him. I knew that this would ruin the meeting.

That was the only time the groupers made a play—they got an awful knock back.

I'd never seen any of these chaps before. (Moore 2005)

With the defeat of the Groupers and under the leadership of the Browns, the Branch became solidly identified with the ALP left wing and this gave it an identity that extended beyond the identity of the membership. The Groupers were still powerful in the VTHC and the ALP. The communists became less powerful and the major battles were between the factions in the ALP. It was war. It raged over conferences and who would attend them, when they should be called and who would boycott them, who would be preselected and who could be trusted as officials. Every Union and each ALP Branch were dominated by one faction or the other and every issue became a battle within the war. The Branch received boxes of correspondence and dealt with it at meetings, but Brown dominated the decisions such as the attendance at conferences and the selection of delegates. Maloney was still employed and although he was tolerated he was a reminder within the office of the presence outside.

Anti-communism was not the prerogative of the Groupers in the ALP. It was also rife among conservatives. A federal election had been called for May 29 which the ALP was expected to win easily. Then, in April, Menzies fuelled anti-communist fears when he announced the defection of Petrov and set up a royal commission into espionage. The

Commission's hearings began just prior to the election and the press played up insinuations that there were spies close to Labor politicians. Labor narrowly lost the federal election of 1954 despite getting 50.03 of the vote. This inflamed the situation within the ALP. In January and February the Branch was embroiled in a confusion of correspondence, recommendations and eligibility criteria for attending conferences. Bill Brown Senior was a regular and devoted announcer on the ALP radio station 3KZ and the Branch was instructed by the Victorian Executive not to broadcast.

The main issue of contention became the existence of the groups and whether or not the ALP would endorse them. Early in 1955 this caused a split at a national conference. In April that year the new Liberal opposition leader in the Victorian Parliament moved a motion of no confidence in the Cain Labor Government and four of the Labor politicians, who supported the Groups, crossed the floor. At the subsequent election they enabled Henry Bolte to win and to maintain power for the next two decades.

Young Bill Brown became a member of the new Victorian ALP State Executive and in 1959 when he became the Secretary of the Branch it became more involved in social politics. For example, it was involved in a protest over housing commission development in Collingwood. They supported a campaign against the closure of the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and they became active in the anti-Vietnam war movement.

Trades Hall Split

In 1967 the situation in the ALP was still tense. While most of the Groupers had left and become the DLP, there was a right-wing rump left in the party whose members were still powerful in the Unions and particularly at the Trades Hall. In June 1967 the Union received notification from the VTHC that affiliation fees would be increased by 110 per cent. Their intention to protest against the increase in fees was declared by 22 Unions. At its meeting on 6 June the FFTS Branch voted to support this position.

By November a report from the Trades Hall given by delegate Ken Carr resulted in the following motion:

This committee of management directs that no affiliation fees be paid by the Society State Secretary to the THC until such times as negotiations between the THC Executive and the negotiating committee representing the Unions in dispute

have been brought to a satisfactory conclusion in accordance with the aims of the Unions in dispute with the THC executive as reported to the state committee of management. (FFTS Minutes 1964-77)

While the issue was about fees the objection was actually about representation. The bigger Unions felt underrepresented in comparison to small Unions.

Trades Hall advised in December that the FFTS would no longer be entitled to representation on the Trades Hall Council because they had not paid affiliation fees. This amounted to suspension and applied to 28 Unions. The affiliation fees included rent for the office and car parking spaces. The Branch set up a special fund in which to save the monies they would otherwise be paying to the Trades Hall Council. The Unions that had been suspended set up an unofficial but alternative peak council and became known as the Rebel Unions. Ken Carr, who was an organizer with the FFTS, was made the spokesperson and this gave the FFTS a public profile it had never experienced before.

In the Office

The new Secretary—Bill Brown Senior

After Boyce retired Bill Brown Senior became Acting Secretary but the residual conflicts with his predecessor were not quite over. At the next COM meeting Boyce attended and asked if he could keep his car. From that point on the question of the car was part of what became the very contentious matter of Boyce's retirement package. Discussion raged and tempers became ragged over the next several meetings as to what his entitlement should be. Attitudes kept changing from one meeting to the next. When the Committee of Management finally settled on a figure it was doubled at the following Special Meeting that was held to ratify it. The amount proposed ranged from £100 to £420, which was the amount finally agreed to—equal to one year's salary. The conflicting views almost certainly reflected attitudes to Boyce and his politics but they took the form of propriety. On the one hand some members argued that it would be a misuse of members' money to offer too much, on the other hand it was claimed that Boyce had served the Union well and had an entitlement to a large sum. At one point one member expressed the former view by saying:

not that I am opposed to Secretary Boyce—Mr Boyce has been a white man and [done] many good turns of which the committee of management are not aware but it is members' money we are handling and the suggested amount is more than we can afford. (FFTS Minutes 1947–55)

Bill Brown shared this view and after the motion to pay Boyce £420 had been carried he wrote to the Industrial Registrar to ask if it was proper to pay so much to a retiring Secretary.

The matter of the car was also a problem because in response to Boyce asking to keep his car, Brown, not surprisingly, became edgy about the fact that he was using, and had always been expected to use his own car. After the war, cars were rare and Brown claimed that he had been offered £375 to sell his car and he intended to do that. He had expected that as Secretary he would have use of the car that had been bought for Boyce as Secretary. In the end Boyce did keep his car, and the Union bought a new car for Brown but it took over a year to agree to buy a Plymouth. In the meantime it was nearly agreed that, to save money, he should have a motor bike and side-car. At one point when the COM had considered buying Brown's car for his use, it was strongly chastised by a motion carried at one of the workplaces, which passed the following:

The members at Stockdale and Co. roundly condemn the action of COM in proposing the purchase of organizer Brown's car at black market rates. We declare that black marketing is contrary to the interests of the working class and must be rigidly opposed by all workers. (FFTS Minutes 1947–55)

In June Brown stood for the position of Secretary/Treasurer and was elected decisively by 1503 votes to 554. He immediately announced that he would reorganize the accommodation in the office and purchase some necessary office equipment. At this time the Branch had 3000 members.

Bill Brown Senior was a man of strength and conviction who had been sent off to the First World War as a young boy and come back sickly from the gases. He first went 'onto the sick' in April 1920 and then regularly for a number of years. But that did not stop him being a tireless worker for the Union. He had seen the horrors of the war and they had

helped to mould his views of the world and fed his conviction that the working class must take control of its own destiny. He was a short stocky man who liked to get his own way. Usually he managed this with persuasion, but if necessary he would raise his voice and become adamant. This usually worked. He was a hard worker and expected the same of others but was often disappointed. Apparently his favourite food was curry, which he liked hot. When his wife cooked it, she never made it hot enough. He would get up from the table to bring the curry powder back from the cupboard and sprinkle more on his food.

While he was popular among members, his strong personality was not easy to work with. Six months after he took office one of the women in the office left and another went on sick leave. Throughout his period as Secretary there was a high staff turnover. At one point, a young woman went on sick leave, which led to an investigation over her handling of money. In the end, she was dismissed and her parents gave the Branch £28 to balance the books. Brown was also involved in ongoing conflict with the organizer, Harry Maloney. Not long after Brown came to office he requested that Maloney fill in a work sheet and Maloney objected, to which Brown replied that he had designed one for himself as well so what was there to object to? At another point, Brown was taken to task at a meeting over the poor quality of Maloney's work. Brown defended Maloney's weekly work in saying:

He visited during the month 88 factories, enrolled 32 members, addressed 12 lunchtime meetings. Five new delegates, obtained. Material still short, trade is steady action was being taken with regard to some financial members. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

June 1949 the office was renovated with new furniture and a new typewriter was acquired. In June 1950 it was agreed, but not without lengthy debate, to increase Brown's salary to just over £13 a week, £4 more than the rate for a cabinetmaker. The organizer's salary was just over £11.

In June 1952 the COM agreed with Brown's recommendation that Union elections become biennial. Some members complained that their rights were being lost sight of but Brown argued that it would save expenses. When the COM recommendation was put to a General meeting they were accused of 'voting themselves in for another twelve months' with the result the next election took place within the year, but after that elections became biennial. During this debate Brown

introduced the idea of the Union as a business that needed to pay proper attention to the expenditure of its finances.

By 1952 the Union owned two cars and it was decided to buy a Holden. It was purchased in June and cost the Union £1146 14s 0d, with insurance costing £3 16s 9d.

In April 1954 Brown proposed employing a second organizer. He complained of an increased workload but also argued that engaging another officer would enable the Union to recruit another 1000 members that would more than cover the cost of a salary, car and office assistance for the new organizer. An election was held for another organizer and Bill Brown Junior, who was a cabinetmaker, won this election with 2050 votes from the 3516 ballots that were issued. But by mid-1957 the finances were in trouble, the office was spending more than it received. It seems this was the case in all the State Branches, so there was a federal decision to increase the fees. Male rates were set at fifteen shillings and female rates were set at seven shillings.

In November 1958 when Brown became sick, claiming it was from excessive strain of the Secretarial Duties, he recommended that his son, Bill Brown Junior, become Acting Secretary while he took sick leave. The Committee agreed to his taking six weeks' leave, which was later extended to another six.

At the Committee of Management meeting on Thursday 26 February 1959 business was being discussed as usual. There were decisions to support the Labour College, a housing campaign in Collingwood, notice of the passing of a member's wife, industrial strife at Gainsborough,

Secretary Brown reported that owing to the excessive strain arising out of his secretarial duties he has had a breakdown in health, and has been ordered by his doctor (certificate forwarded) to be relieved from his duties for a period of six weeks. Further he asked that Organiser Brown be appointed to Acting Secretary to operate during the absence of the Secretary. Moved Org. Moloney - That during the absence, through illness of the Secretary W.S. Brown, Mr. W. Brown Organiser, be appointed Acting Secretary with the authority to withdraw the necessary money from our account No. S.1061 to cover all the branch administrative expenses. Seconded F. Wilkes, Motion put and carried.

President F. Eddy on behalf of Committee wished the Secretary Brown a speedy recovery of health.

As no further business was before the Chair meeting was adjourned.

MINUTES CONFIRMED THIS 30th DAY OF ... c.m. Chairman 1958.

The minutes recording Bill Brown Senior's absence due to illness.

and an interpretation from Acting Secretary Brown of the progress of claims for long service leave entitlements after five years. The meeting was interrupted by the Trades Hall caretaker who handed the Chairman a note. The President read the note to the meeting. A message had been received that Secretary W. S. Brown had passed away at 7:30 p.m. that night:

President Eddy expressed regret and requested members to stand in silence as a mark of respect and recognition of sincere service rendered to the society by late Secretary W. S. Brown. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

A Special COM was called at which the younger Bill Brown was confirmed as Acting Secretary and the change over details was attended to. The Society paid the funeral expenses of £52 11s 0d and published an obituary in the FFTS *Journal*.

Great Loss to Labour Movement

It is with regret, we feel, that the first issue of our publication should record the passing of our Secretary, W.S. Brown, on February 26, 1959, at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital.

Mr Brown, who had many friends in the furniture industry, as well as in that section of it concerned solely with Union affairs, had been a paid official of the Union for 23 years and a member of it all his working life. Mr Brown trained and worked as a French polisher and was employed by such firms as Rocks, Duffs (where he served his apprenticeship) and Foy Ackman's. Mr Brown held office as a member of the Federal Council of his Union and was President of the Council in 1938. He was a delegate from his Union to the Trades Hall Council for a number of years.

He was a very active member of the Labor Party and was a close friend and associate of the late Mr Maurice Blackburn, whom he assisted in a number of election campaigns. He was also a campaign worker and speaker for the present Deputy Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate (Senator P. J. Kennelly) and for the late Mr Frank Kea, a former member for Coburg in the State Parliament. When it first started, Mr Brown conducted the Labor Hour over 3KZ each Sunday afternoon and for a long time did the whole hour session alone. Now it is conducted by several speakers.

Mr Brown enlisted in the First World War in the 21st Battalion and served at Gallipoli and in France. He was badly gassed and discharged in 1918 medically unfit. It was the after effects of this gassing which led to his death. (Editor 1959)

Mr. J. Sandell and A/Sec. Brown. A.Sec. Brown reported on inspection and proposals.

A/Secretary Brown reported on interpretation of L.S.L. received from Labour Dept, concerning claim for L.S.L. extending over period of five years.

President F. Eddy informed the C.O.M. that a message has been received that Secretary W.S. Brown had passed away at 7.30 p.m. tonight.

President Eddy expressed regret and requested members to stand in silence as a mark of respect and recognition of sincere service rendered to the Society by our late Secretary W.S. Brown.

MEETING ADJOURNED

MINUTES CONFIRMED THIS *13th* DAY OF *March* 1959.

The minutes recording the death of Bill Brown, which must have happened while the meeting was taking place.

Bill Brown Junior

Bill Brown Junior was elected Secretary in December 1959 unopposed. In stature he was large and had red hair, and in personality he was outgoing and affable. He wore flamboyant clothes and he was a passionate and expressive public speaker while also being pedantic, particularly about the Rules of the Union. Before his election, while he was the Acting Secretary, he changed over the cars, increased the salaries of the office staff, and organized a review of the officers' salaries, renovated the office to make more space for working and put out a State Branch journal. In the first issue he wrote a very formal account of the change-over from father to son:

State Secretaryship

No doubt this question has exercised the minds of members during recent months, as to what the position really was following the passing of our Secretary.

It has not been possible to make a general report earlier so I'll take the opportunity to do so now.

On November 13, 1958, Mr W. S. Brown reported to the Committee of Management that, owing to the state of his

health, it was necessary for him to enter hospital. The Committee of Management appointed W. Brown, Acting Secretary, during the absence through illness of Secretary Brown, with the authority to operate the bank account. This information was conveyed to the Industrial Registrar of the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission and acknowledged.

With the death of our Secretary on February 26, 1959, the circumstances upon which the appointment was based changed and a special meeting of the Committee of Management was called on March 12, 1959. At this meeting, the Committee of Management recommended the appointment of W. Brown as Acting Secretary until a ballot for same was declared by the Returning Officer; such declaration to be made not later than December 1, 1959.

The recommendation of the Committee of Management was endorsed by the General Meeting held on April 7, 1959.

The recommendation was again forwarded to the Industrial Registrar and acknowledged. (Brown 1959)



This photo was taken in 1970 after Bill Brown had left the Union and become a Labor Party Senator.

On 11 November 1969 Brown announced to the COM that he would be standing for the Senate at an incidental election to fill the vacancy caused by the death of the late Senator S. Cohen. If elected he would submit his resignation. The terms of Brown's resignation were clear, particularly as compared to the conflicts caused in the process of arriving at the agreement over Boyce's retirement allowance. An organizer, Ken Carr, moved that Brown receive long service leave entitlement of one week per year of service, 15 years, and the car in lieu of money. It was further moved that a new car be purchased for the use of the new Secretary. When Brown was elected

to the Senate he gave notice of his resignation as Secretary as from 6 p.m. on Tuesday 2 December.

At the December meeting the new Secretary Carr made the following statement:

This committee of management congratulates our past Secretary Bill Brown on his elevation to the position of Senator for Victoria, and records its deepest appreciation of the services rendered by him to members of the society and the trade union movement generally. We believe that the work carried out by Comrade Brown in his role as secretary of the furnishing trade society, as well as his achievements in positions such as president of the Victorian Trades Hall Council and Victorian Branch of the ALP have enhanced the standing of this Union and materially contributed to the well-being of all Victorian workers. We wish him well in his new position secure in the knowledge that the principled stand he has always adopted within the union movement will be carried on in the Australian Senate.

Speaking to the resolution Secretary Carr outlined his personal association with Secretary Brown as a fellow official and at all times found him an efficient and militant leader. (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

Maloney supported the motion by Carr and made the strange statement that:

When the relationship between the society and the employers association deteriorated, the actions which were necessary in the situations to ensure the welfare of the members was taken by him (the secretary). (FFTS Minutes 1947-55)

Brown Junior did not leave the Branch but became its Vice-President. John O'Brien remembered Bill Brown at Pilkingtons:

He was a very principled person—quite honest about how he went about things. When he negotiated with the boss he always had people with him, his father had done that as well. When I became shop steward I'd have to put up a notice of the visit of the Secretary and we'd have a meeting—Bill Brown would not tolerate any bad language at all. He demanded that

the members elected to State Committee represented others and had to understand that it was an honour and they should conduct themselves accordingly. And bad language was not tolerated ... So when Bill Brown would come down to the job—and when there was a mixture of members—in all that time he never swore. He would get carried away as we all do when we express something—he had a favourite saying—oh gourd luv a duck ... and then he'd get worked up and say 'gord luv a duck'. The workers used to laugh at that—they liked him, and they used to come to me and say, 'When is "God fuck a duck" coming down?' (O'Brien 2004)

Bill Brown's journal, *The Furnishing Trade Society News*, was a smartly produced magazine format, with black line drawings of chic 1950s furniture on glossy coloured covers. In the editorial of the first issue Brown introduced the journal with the following words:

Members, it is the intention of your Union to utilize this publication as a means to inform your minds on both industrial and political matters which have a direct bearing not only on your day-to-day living, but also the future of your loved ones. (*The Furniture Trade Society News* 1959)

A Mr Acton was employed to act as an honorary publicity officer for the Union and produce *The Furnishing Trade Society News* on a quarterly basis. The Secretary said:

We feel this is something of a milestone in the Union history and believe that a greater service can be given to the members as a consequence. (FFTS Minutes 1959)

The first issue of thirty-eight pages contained a wide range of articles including promotional articles about some furniture manufacturers, details of worker's compensation regulations and payable award rates, a number of commentaries on ALP matters, some criticism of the DLP. The very last article is an innovation in that it was printed in Italian and is about an Italian maritime strike. The following article gives us an insight into the time and its expectations.

The Ideal Trade Union Official: Modern 1959 Australian Model

He is a man that is possessed of the unruffled calmness of a suburban parson at a funeral, when he is hearing his members'

whinges and woes. But, he must be a ferocious, roaring lion when taking these problems up with the BOSS.

At social occasions he must possess the sparkling wit and humour of the late Roy Rene ('Mo'), but in other circumstances he must have the gravity and dignity of a Supreme Court judge.

He requires the mental and physical constitution of a well-trained and pampered show bull, but he must understand and listen to every ailment, mental and physical, suffered by his members, without ever contracting such complaints himself.

He must be prepared to be referred to as 'that bludger' who spends most of his time at home or in the pub, and be not one jot disturbed if he is expected to compress twenty-four hours of union work into every day of every week of every year.

He must, above all, be unhostile if wakened from his bed at home by doorknockers, or phone callers at midnight, inquiring as to 'how much an hour extra is it for dirty work?'

He must have the ability to live well on his union wage and must not work at any other job than his union position in the effort to own his own home or buy a TV or a refrigerator.

He is often labelled as 'in the pocket of the Boss', of copping bribes from this or that employer and therefore he needs to have an endless supply of 'two-bobs' for the needy or the thirsty.

He can find a job for a member where no job exists. He can win a compo claim that has no job witnesses and no medical backing.

He can be called upon, with no prior warning, to immediately make the appropriate speech at funerals, weddings, baptisms, birthday parties, political rallies or anywhere else ...

He is the ideal man. AND HE DOES NOT LIVE LONG. He lasts for a brief period in the industrial hurly burly and finally dies of stomach ulcers, coronary occlusion or just plain weariness. His grave has no flowers. His tomb has no stone ...

Whether his ultimate destination be heaven or hell, he will invariably end up elected to the 'COMMITTEE FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF OPPRESSED SOULS,' and the job will be an honorary one. (*Furniture Trades Society News* 1959)

INTO THE FRAY

Perhaps it is this spectre that most haunts working men and women: the planned obsolescence of people that is of a piece with the planned obsolescence of the things they make. Or sell.

Studs Terkel 1974

Introduction and Overview

In 1968 it seemed that the world would change—the civil rights movement in the USA exploded, Czechoslovakians rose up against the Soviet occupation of their country, Paris erupted in an attempted revolution that created new heights for joint action between students and trade unionists. People believed they could change the world and improve the lot of the masses. Poverty, it seemed was almost behind us, and equality for all was only a long march away. In Australia twenty-three years of Liberal-National Party Government was coming to an end and the country was brimming with the exuberance of an ascendant set of values.

In 1969 Ken Carr became the Secretary of the Victorian Branch—very much the man of his time. He was a passionate believer in the strength of the working class organized in unions and he believed that the role of unions went much further than the purely industrial. He summed up his position in an interview with *The Age* in 1970.

Winning people more money is useless if the union does not also act as a protector of workers in all aspects of their life.
(UMA 1969)

He saw the social movements that thrived in the time as having the same objectives as Unions and he was a staunch supporter of them. He believed that Unions needed social change and social change needed Unions. He was passionate about the democratic representation of Union members and improvements in their conditions and also in the role that Unions could play in bringing about the change of society that seemed to be on the way. He fought for Australian workers to have a greater share, not only of the economy but also education, health care and justice. He was one of the many in 1969 who believed a new world was achievable if the energy and will of enough people could be mobilized.

Carr was the first person to become a Secretary of the FFTS who was not a tradesman or a furniture-maker; he was a semi-skilled floor layer. This gave him a breadth of understanding of the developments across the industry and the new workforce it was attracting. He had no history of allegiance to the master furniture makers, his only alliance was to the equal advancement of all the members and this meant a sharp focus on the less privileged members of the Union.

The period over which Carr presided was one of the most politically turbulent periods in Australia's history. Opposition to the Vietnam War stretched and threatened to tear the fabric of conservative Australia. Demonstrations and civil disobedience were daily events, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people. A plethora of social movements



Ken Carr, Secretary of the Victorian Branch: very much the man of his times.

accompanied and grew out of the anti-war movement and became the conduit for transporting humanitarianism to Utopian Socialism. In 1972 the Whitlam Government was elected and promised to deliver Australia from the harness of the 1950s that the Menzies Government had held tight well past its time. But Whitlam became too much of a threat to vested interests and they moved against him. In 1975 Fraser came into office introducing cuts to government expenditure for the first time in thirty-nine years and in 1984 Hawke was elected on a platform of controlling the trade unions. The period saw an extension of the conditions that had been won in the post-war period, but it also saw reduced tariffs and increased imports that led to widespread retrenchment and redundancy throughout the industry.

The period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s was a period of accelerated social change and the role played by Unions in that change was significant. The changes were not easily come by. Every one of them was fought for and won by Unions and social movements where thousands and thousands of people spent thousands and thousands of hours struggling to make them happen. The Victorian Branch of the Furniture Trades Society was at the forefront of many of the battles that led to the changes. The split in the ALP had left the unions with a deep division, not just in terms of the DLP-affiliated unions, but within the ALP affiliates there was a strong sense of right- and left-wing Unions and their diverse orientations were apparent. The left of the party had a clear objective of achieving social change that would bring real fruits to the working class of Australia. This led to a split in the Trades Hall Council.

Industrial

The members used to say that they would walk over hot coals for Ken Carr. They'd looked up to him in battles, his tactics and victories, the advice that he gave members, plus he was a very compassionate person. (O'Brien 2004)

Penal Powers

A major confrontation between the trade union movement and the state took place over the jailing of Clarrie O'Shea in 1969. Carr, as the secretary of the rebel unions, played a major role in organizing the campaign and in the process the Furniture Trades Union was seen to be at centre stage. The penal clauses, which had been introduced by the Arbitration Commission to fine unions when taking industrial action,



Clarrie O'Shea is led off to jail after refusing to pay fines imposed on the Union by the Federal Court. Hundreds of thousands of workers around Australia downed tools and marched through the streets to protest his jailing.

had been used often. The union movement had always been opposed to the clauses, but until 1969 they had reluctantly paid the fines.

Clarrie O'Shea was the Secretary of the Tramways and Bus Union. They owed \$8000 in fines and O'Shea refused to pay. When instructed to show the financial records to the court he refused. Then he failed to appear in court to answer the subsequent charges, which drew another fine of \$500 for contempt of the Commonwealth Industrial Court. The Tramways Union and the Seamen's Union immediately issued press releases that they would take industrial action if the Courts moved against Clarrie O'Shea. Soon after, the rebel unions passed the following recommendation, and the FFTS State Branch COM adopted it on 1 April 1969:

This committee of the 27 unions declares its concern at the hounding and intimidation of the Tramways Union State Secretary for the purpose of enforcing the penal powers of the Arbitration Act.

We state that this is a further development in the theory and practice of the penal powers that have been demonstrated

time and again as to be intolerable to all Unions and workers trying to defend and extend their own interests and where in the final analysis the right to strike and fundamental Union principles must be defended at all costs.

We express our commendation to those members of the Tramways Union who have remained steadfast in the face of the use of the penal powers against them as individuals. We express our support of the Tramways Union in its opposition to the penal powers and determine that any act of the 'state' taking the matter any further must be met with the strongest possible action that can be mobilised.

We also determined to widely publicise what has occurred already in this case, relating it to the general trade union movement experience with the penal powers, calling upon all members to protest to the court and the Federal and State governments.

We call on all state union executives to discuss this as an urgent matter, express their support, and to call for the support of the ACTU through their federal bodies.

We further determined to form a subcommittee to formulate detailed recommendations for a campaign on the situation and for this meeting to reconvene on Monday March 31st to reconsider these recommendations and therefore meeting of the 27 unions be called in order to hear a full report. Seconded Bill Brown carried. (FFTS 1964-77)

The rebel unions were meeting at the FFTS office to plan their moves, and Carr issued media releases. This gave the FFTS a seeming prominence in the events and a public profile that it had never formerly experienced. The Unions worked hard making sure that their members were fully aware of the issues involved in the case and implications of O'Shea's actions. O'Shea was due to attend court again in May and the Unions had laid the groundwork and were ready to act. O'Shea went to court, was sentenced to jail and immediately taken away. The news reached the demonstrators outside the court almost immediately and the campaign went into gear.

In Melbourne 200 000 workers struck, causing massive disruption. Strikes followed around the country and it seemed as if the Australian working class were throwing off their chains. Out of the blue, a donor

appeared in Sydney and paid the Tramways Union fine. O'Shea was released but the campaign was only just starting. Carr told the media:

Naturally we are happy about Clarrie O'Shea's release, but this does not mean by any stretch of the imagination the end to a campaign to have the penal clauses repealed. In fact you could say that the campaign is just starting and the O'Shea jailing is virtually the first round. The issue of the unjust penal powers of the Arbitration Commission has still to be settled. (UMA 1969)

Unions estimated \$750 000 had been paid in fines. The ACTU and the VTHC threw their support behind the campaign and passed policy that no union was to pay the fine. The Government, already extremely unpopular over the Vietnam War and its general conservatism recognized defeat and the penal clauses were lifted.

During the campaign Carr had made the following point in *The Age*:

Australia has 2 million trade unionists, who, with their families are the biggest group in the country. And these are the people the penal provisions knock. (*The Age* 21 May 1969)

Furniture—Pay and Conditions

Umpire—what's he got to do with it? It's not a game—we're talking about people's livelihoods—people forget that—they talk about the umpire ... but of course on the other side are all these things lined up—the media, it creates this great thing that we're all equal—but the trouble is we do not start equal. (Carr 2004)

The Branch increased the number of organizers it employed from two to four; members spent a lot of time on the grass and officials spent a lot of time in the Commission and preparing Commission cases. The gains included four weeks' annual leave, pay rises, equal pay and maternity leave for women and broader long service leave coverage.

Two major problems faced the Union. The first was the ongoing insistence of employers to diminish recognition of skill levels and the second was redundancies caused by the reduction of tariffs on the import of manufactured goods.

In 1974 a case was prepared to vary the skill levels in the award and thereby to increase the pay rates. The case was to be heard in Adelaide,

by Commissioner Clarkson who had previously been an advocate for the employers and had a reputation for being harsh with unions. Carr was surprised when he arrived in Adelaide and was approached by Clarkson suggesting that instead of requesting the skill levels be re-adjusted in line with the metal trades award, he would look favourably on a paid rates award. That was won. The advantage of a paid rates award was that it determined that rates are set at the average paid in the industry. Over-award payments are included in the calculations to arrive at the average. The trade-off is that over-award payments cannot be made under a paid rates award. For the Furnishing Trades Union with its large numbers of small shops it would mean that the wages won by workers in the big shops would not be paid in over-award, but would influence the rate for all, thus making wages more equitable across the industry.

The process was prolonged. The 'mean' rate had to be calculated for each classification rather than a straight average. It took an enormous amount of work to find out the actual rates. The employers had to do the same. When the decision for the paid rates award came down, there was a pay rise for 60 to 70 per cent of the workers.

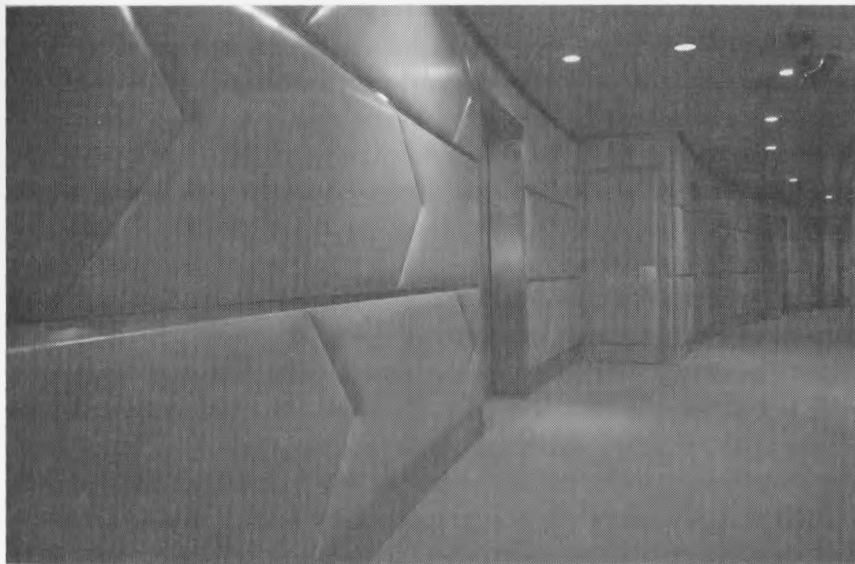
Campaign Against Imports

Once Whitlam had relaxed tariffs, the manufacturing sector was besieged with competition from cheaper imports. The furniture and glass industries were no exception. Local furniture manufacturers found it difficult to compete with imports, particularly from Asia where multinational companies were combining cheap labour with modern technology. The harshest competition was from 'piece parts' that could be assembled by unskilled labour. Sheets of glass were already being imported but the reduction of tariffs made it cheaper to import glass that was already cut to size. Almost immediately employers began to use the imports as excuses not to discuss improvements in conditions. But worst of all the Society feared massive job loss. They estimated in November 1974 that imports had increased by 500 per cent in the past four years and that 200 furniture workers had already lost their jobs and another 3000 wood machinists were at risk. (*Furnishing Trades Society News* 1974)

The Union tried banning imported products when it seemed viable: they lobbied the Federal Government for quotas restricting imports and ran campaigns to encourage consumers to buy Australian-made furniture. This latter tactic took a slightly novel turn when it was discovered that the ACTU store, Burkes, was selling imported furniture.

One situation was particularly unusual and had unexpected but beneficial outcomes for the whole union movement. In 1981 the Arts Centre was being built and the plan included a French-Canadian organ in the main concert hall. The organ parts arrived, closely followed by French-Canadian organ builders who had been brought from Canada to assemble the organ. The FFTS Branch, concerned at the work being denied to organ builders in the Union, threatened to place bans on glazing in the Arts Centre if the Canadians began work. After a few days Carr proposed a compromise. The ban was lifted when the Arts Centre management agreed to provide a free concert for all the workers on the project. The ban was lifted and the concert took place.

This created a precedent so that in 1984 when Stage 2 of the Arts complex was being completed all the workers on the site complained that they would probably never be able to afford to attend a concert in it. The joint unions claimed 'a gold pass' right of entry for each worker and their family to future performances at the complex. Bans were placed on glazing and carpet laying as well as some of the construction work. After a couple of weeks another compromise was struck. Management agreed to provide a one-off pass for each worker to take four



FFTS members were involved in many aspects of building the Melbourne Arts Centre. This picture shows the leather walls in Hamer Hall that were made by upholsterers. The floors and windows also involved FFTS members.



A dispute broke out over the installation of the organ when organ makers were brought from Canada to install the organ. This left local organ-makers without the work when such work was hard to come by.

people to attend any function at the complex. As well, they agreed that the Arts Centre Trust would provide the trade union movement with a fully operational main concert hall for one day a year for perpetuity. Labour concerts are still held every year on Labour Day.

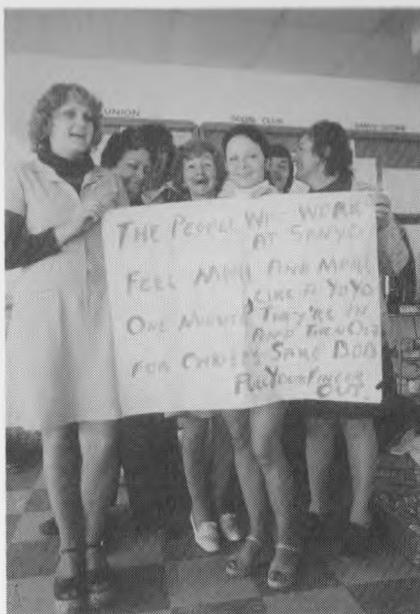
Redundancy

The fears of the Union about the threat of imports were well founded and redundancies began to take place. The Branch fought them but in the end all it could do was to make sure that workers received decent payouts as they were losing their livelihoods.

One of the first big campaigns was at the Sanyo television plant in Wodonga. The massive boom in television sets had ended as most people had bought them. Additionally, imports had started to eat into the market and Sanyo had begun retrenching. Most of the workers were process workers and a majority of them were women. The impact of the job losses was especially dramatic in a small town because alternative employment was difficult to find. There would be a couple of rounds of retrenchments and when it was announced that a further thirty people had been earmarked for job loss the FFTS developed a strategy to try to force the company to look after their workers better. They suggested they offer voluntary redundancies and see how many wanted to go; they

suggested working a short week to keep all the jobs; and they also demanded better redundancy packages. The Union decided that the company might be more compliant if they brought public attention to the redundancies and the way they were taking place.

They proposed a sit-in and 140 workers agreed to occupy the factory and deliberately make as much noise as possible to try to bring about a change. At the time this tactic was new and contentious, even among some of the officials of the Union, but Carr and the organizer of the factory, Peter Batchelor, were determined and had the full support of the workforce. Batchelor said:



Women workers become militant as they protest at the Sanyo television factory in Wodonga.

It was quite a sensation amongst the trade unions. It was one of the first times that it had happened. We said we've got a message here that we want to get out to a broader audience than just our direct employer and we set about doing that. It was difficult and we just invented it as we went along. (Batchelor 2005)

The workers who had received retrenchment notices burnt them at a press conference and then the Union announced that they would occupy the factory. It was not difficult to move into the factory and set up the canteen as headquarters. Everybody was given jobs, which often meant that people were doing things they had never done, or dreamed of doing, before. The canteen had to be staffed, rosters had to be set up and run, plus there was organizing, promotion, contacting people for support, contacting the media, writing leaflets, handing them out, fund raising, negotiating and planning.

People's horizons were stretched and they learned skills that gave them new confidence. Over the ten days of the occupation a new event was planned for each day to try to keep the media story hot. And the

media responded well—they loved it. It was an outrageous action but the media belittled its significance by making it a titillation that the male Union officials were sleeping in sleeping bags in the canteen surrounded by women workers.

One morning, after the daily meeting in the canteen, 140 workers went to the administration office and queued to see the manager. One by one they went into his office and resigned. He told them they would have to resign in writing and so they produced one 'en masse' resignation. The Union applied to the Commission, asking that the company be forced to offer voluntary redundancies and give better packages. The Commission agreed to hold the hearing in the canteen, because the witnesses could not leave it. This was another media coup. They described the Commissioner giving up his green leather chair and wooden bench for a black plastic chair and Laminex table in the canteen. Eventually an agreement was reached that the redundancies would be voluntary and the packages offered were improved.

Redundancies continued to take place from one factory to the next and the Union developed a Redundancy Agreement that they systematically tried to get accepted in all their workplaces. Some companies agreed readily but with others it took prolonged disputes. A very public dispute over redundancy involved the Myer factory at Footscray, which made furniture, curtains, blinds and mattresses primarily for the store in Melbourne but also for sale around the country.

The tariff reduction made it cheaper for Myer to import directly to the store and in 1982 they started to wind down the factory and cut back on staff. In December they announced redundancies and refused to agree to the package that the Union had developed and which had become industry norm. A picket line was placed at the factory to stop deliveries going in or coming out, but it quickly became violent when police were called in to shift the picketers. As a result of this Carr contacted the Minister for Police, Race Mathews, and threatened that if the police were not called off, bans would be put on the glazing of all state properties. Myer had a retirement scheme that became active when workers turned 60. To cover the loss of work the Union suggested that the retirement age be reduced to 58, but Myer would not agree. The picket was maintained. The next morning a strong police presence dealt violently with the picketers, forcing them back to let the trucks out and the Union immediately placed bans on glazing at all police stations and on the Arts Centre that was still under construction.



A strong picket line was maintained when the Union battled against redundancies at the Myer furniture factory.

New organizer Ian Johnston described the picket line as: a real baptism of fire for me, only three weeks into the job. (FFTS 1964–1977)

There was much disputation getting trucks in and out. Another entrance that had not been used for twenty years was opened up to avoid the picket line. To bring attention to the dispute the picket line was shifted to the goods entrance of the Myer city store in Lonsdale Street. The dispute lasted another few days and then the Commission instructed Myer to negotiate a satisfactory payment.

Leave Conditions

The Union won significant improvement in leave conditions in the early 1970s—eight days' sick leave, make up of workers' compensation and jury pay. In 1973 the Union was successful in winning a 17.5 per cent loading on annual leave and having the condition inserted into the award. This took place after a strenuous campaign in a number of individual factories. The 17.5 per cent was not to apply to pieceworkers because they already had their average piecework rates loaded for

annual leave, nor to shiftworkers unless the annual shiftwork loading was less than the leave loading.

Glass

By the late 1970s glass had become a significant part of major high-rise construction. This gave the glass workers industrial strength that had previously been unimagined. Louis Kyriacou was the organizer on the city sites. He had a strong militant approach to organizing that was well suited to the building industry. Cliff Palmer was working on the sites at the time:

When you were a glazier and you first went on a building site you felt like a second-class citizen. There were lunch rooms and sheds provided for everyone else, we used to sit on putty drums on the floor over a fire or whatever, we never used to have hot water. We were really the outcasts of the industry ... The key to start everything going would have been around when the Como Centre was being built and the Rialto building and the State Bank—we started to realize then, and not so much the Union to a degree, but people like Les Ford and myself. A few people started to think well we've got a bit of power here.

Then all of a sudden Lou could see the power in the high-rise buildings, because his philosophy was very good, you would never stop work but you'd only put every second window in. So you'd do a building but they couldn't lock up the floors so you'd put ten windows in and leave five out and put ten in so no one else could work on those floors, they couldn't put the carpet, they couldn't do the finishing.

I was the shop steward on Rialto and Les on Como—what happened there was we had 90 per cent of what the others had but we didn't have the whole lot. That's when the power of Lou and the power of the glass industry started to be prevalent. We used to get a moderate swing allowance for working on the outside of the building and we upped that—used to get seven dollars a day and we ended up getting thirty-five dollars a day. A lot of the times in the early days you were only on the job two or three days a week, not five days—but then the sheds became an issue—so when we went on a building site we would demand a shed, or the Union would demand a shed. I have to

say the Union didn't have to do much—cause the other Unions had won that—so it was only a matter of Louis coming on site and saying they need a shed (and we'd be put in the corner of someone else's shed). Or you'd get your own small shed. The first shed was probably round about 82/83—it wasn't our own shed, we'd have to go and mingle in with other people. And then there was hot water tea and coffee that was supplied and we used to use. (Palmer 2005)

Gradually the conditions were won:

The only thing we didn't get was the picnic day. We were on Rialto for three years. For the first two years we didn't get paid for the picnic day. Then we got the picnic day. (Palmer 2005)



The building of the Rialto was when glass workers found their industrial muscle and improved their conditions.

On one occasion the glaziers led the way:

The only first that they ever got, this is going back to early days, was protective jackets—that was a hard one to get—people used to get overalls and boots—we were the first to get the jackets—we probably left out every second window. We always worked on the edge of the building—in those days, we worked on the outside and always cop the weather—we still do cop the weather. They were cheap flying jackets—quilted on the inside—they're banned now, cause they catch on fire ... in those days we didn't know that ... (Palmer 2005)

\$11.90 Part 1

In line with the progressive thinking of the time the Union fought to have the new conditions of the glaziers flow on to weaker groups of workers. It was decided in August 1983 to try to flow some of the loadings that were paid to on-site workers to some of those working in the workshops off-site. In August 1983 a log of claims was presented to the glass merchants seeking an \$8.00 pay rise across the board, paid time off for blood donors and changes in the accident pay regulations. They also sought to have the 'site disability allowance' paid as an industry allowance to the inside, or off-site workers. The glass companies by and large agreed except for the big three, Oliver Davey, Yencken Sandy and T & K Glass. Several meetings took place between the companies and the Union in February and March 1984.

Negotiations dragged on until after the election of the Hawke Government and the introduction of the accord. In this new environment the companies were able to argue that the claim for the catch-up of off-site workers contravened the accord and the national wage principles. Bans, which limited the dispatch of glass from the workshops to the construction sites, were put on and the companies responded by going to the Commission. Justice Keogh ruled: 'The Society's current action is, in my view, contrary to both the spirit and letter of its undertakings and the national wage case principles. In view of this serious situation, I recommend that the Society take immediate steps to have the current bans and limitations removed'. (McCrann 1984) The bans were lifted but the glass merchants made a private agreement to pay the \$11.90 as an over-award payment.

After the election of Hawke, the Union held a Federal Council meeting in Surfers Paradise to discuss whether or not to accept the first

round of indexed wage rises with the conditions that were placed on them. Carr remembers:

On the next national wage case, the ACTU got from the Commission a big increase in wages and brought in a new system whereby every year they would reassess the national wage on the basis that Unions could only get those increases if they agreed they would not seek agreements outside the Commission.

With that position our Federal Council searched our souls and ended up agreeing that if we took the increase being offered—we would agree to that—we realized that our workers in the furniture factories could not fight the whole system, if the rest of the union movement were agreeing then we had no chance of standing out by ourselves. So we took the decision to go ahead.

At the same time we were fighting the employers for the \$11.90 increase for the glassworkers—that decision would affect that. It would have to stop. (Carr 2004)

Carpet Award

Carpet layers were largely an unprotected group of workers whom the Union decided to address. It drew up an award and tried to get the employers it knew to become signatories. Then it prepared a list of companies that had agreed to sign the award and showed it to the builders who subcontracted to the carpet layers—letting them know which carpet companies they could use without any hassle. The award was federal so the companies had to pay the same rates in other states if they had signed the agreement. They chose to break the award in the other states where there was no pressure to comply from builders. Kyriacou and Batchelor flew to Sydney to use the same tactics they had used in Victoria and again had success.

While they were in Sydney the Union office in Melbourne was contacted and asked if it would organize and address a meeting of carpet layers. Alex Findlay booked the Trades Hall and noticed a lot of advertising for the meeting in the intervening period. Over 400 carpet layers turned up but the meeting was totally unsympathetic to the Union and argued that the Union's position was illegal. The meeting agreed to set up a Carpet Layers Association that would levy each member \$50 in order to fight the Union campaign. After the meeting the Union received

numerous phone calls from confused carpet layers, who signed up on hearing the Union's position. This caused a dangerous complacency within the Union leadership. The Association that had been formed was for subcontractors who were violently opposed to the Union and any notion of being employees. They considered they were better off as subcontractors. The Union had trouble policing the award. Part of the subcontractors' campaign was to tell Union officials that they were employees if asked. This was a tactic that worked well to confuse the Union and keep them off the back of the carpet layers.

Organizing Women

Through the 1970s and early 1980s large numbers of women moved into paid employment. They brought with them lots of issues that had to be addressed in the workplace. Unions generally were slow to get started, but did take the issues up. The ACTU developed a Working Women's Charter and set up a Working Women's Centre that was responsible for implementing the charter. The issues involved: pay rates; appropriate leave provisions; child-care availability; access and training to a broad range of occupations; occupational hazards and injuries particular to women's work and representation of women at union leadership level and as officials. At the same time and closely associated was the growth of the women's liberation movement that developed a program of social changes for women to enable their full participation at all levels of society. The union movement and the women's movement had a difficult but vital relationship. The union movement was divided over support for the Working Women's Centre that had been set up to bridge the gap between unions and women. The Victorian Branch of the FFTS was one of a few blue-collar unions that was staunch in their support and prepared to embrace the need to fight for the rights of their women members.

In 1972 the Full Bench of the Arbitration Commission granted equal pay for work of equal value to women workers. While this was a significant advance for women's pay rates it had a sticky side to it. The term 'work of equal value' was open to interpretation and was, in the end interpreted in the narrowest sense—that of identical work. Many employers reclassified women workers so they were not doing the same work as men and therefore did not have to have their pay increased. In the furnishing trades though, the Union had already made inroads in winning equal pay for women working in men's jobs because the 1964 Award had allowed women to work as assemblers. The legislation

ensured that all women doing men's work were immediately put onto equal rates. However, the Society took a broader interpretation of 'equal value' than many. They managed to get agreement from the employers in the industry that all women would receive pay increases to bring them into line with an appropriate male rate. For example, female upholsterers who were paid \$50.70 a week were to be brought up to the male rate for an upholsterer second class, which was \$63.80. The increases were introduced in instalments over three years. The first instalment of \$4.00 was paid in December 1973, a further \$4.00 in September 1974 and the remainder was paid in June 1975. The FFTS had a female workforce that had improved pay rates across the industry.

Many of the women who worked in the industry were highly skilled, but their skill was not recognized in the award system, because its acquisition was more informal and through experience rather than a formal apprenticeship training. Peter Batchelor remembers some of the women members:

Those women did very good work: they were highly skilled but lowly paid with a level of skill not really recognized in the award structure. They were very conservative in the way they conducted themselves socially. The people at Ball and Welch would refer to one another by surnames, Mrs Ex, Miss Why ... (Batchelor 2005)

Batchelor also remembers recruiting many women members.

In the quest of the Union's policy of moving out and recruiting in new areas, you naturally came across concentrations of women because they had not been sought after before. They're there in the awards, it's not as if curtains were a sudden invention. They'd always been there. I guess we were able to go out and relate to them by treating them just like you'd treat the men ... in the seventies the attitudes were that you do not get the same return from women workers ... working because they have to, they're from poor families, they're hard to organize, they've got a lot of problems, they do not want to go on strike; but I found that not to be true. I had to put a lot of work into it, but I saw that as mainly a confidence thing, you had to win their confidence. (Batchelor 2005)

The Branch made another breakthrough in 1970 when Clara Cooke became the first woman to take a position on the Committee of Management. She was elected unopposed to represent the upholstery section. She kept the question of women workers on the agenda by raising questions about their conditions, pay rates and representing the Union at seminars and conferences about working women's issues.

In 1974 Carr employed Anna Stewart, a journalist, to research and write articles on the dangers of imports to the industry. Stewart was passionate about addressing the issues that faced women in the workforce and soon took many of these up in the FFTS. With Stewart making the running the FFTS became the first blue-collar union to win maternity leave for their members. The case has become part of Union mythology as Stewart ran the case in the Commission when she was heavily pregnant with her third child. Later she took the child to Commission hearings where she was advocating and insisted on taking breaks to breastfeed her baby. Anna Stewart in both theory and practice took the battle of women's rights to participate fully into the heart of the industrial relations arena—the Industrial Relations Commission.

After Anna Stewart left the Union, Carr employed Jeanette Sdrinis as an industrial officer. She was treated with respect and given lots of encouragement and support to learn the role. She remembers that the chauvinism of the times was shown in the Union, not by her being treated badly, but by the men being over-protective of her. She remembers this in particular at the Myer picket when Kyriacou refused to move as a truck was moving slowly but threateningly towards him. When the truck connected with Kyriacou, Sdrinis screamed and immediately felt that she had broken some sort of code. The men were all supportive, but decided it would better if she went back to the office.

Political Campaigns

The twenty-six rebel unions were actively involved in the political and social movements that were battling to change many parts of society. Carr, as the Secretary of the rebel unions became a spokesperson for the new unionism as this article from *The Age* shows:

Recent action by the 26 rebel unions to put the 'social' back in socialism reflects the widening gap.

For Ken Carr the latest projects—a ban on the undersea ethane pipeline in Port Phillip Bay, a short-term ban on Housing Commission work in three areas and the formation

of a price-control action committee—mean a telephone constantly ringing.

For the movement as a whole it means fresh questions on whether the widening gap can be bridged.

For while union leaders still within the fold are talking anxiously of the difficulties of reuniting the movement, because of the amount of dues owing, Ken Carr is talking of principles. Already, after the recent social action, he has found a growing interest in the union movement by young people. Young people are starting to say, 'At least the unions are doing something and not just worrying about a quid.' (UMA 1969)

Carr inherited from the Browns a view of the importance of the relationship between the Labor Party and the Union:

Union's use their funds to support the Labor Party and Brown for the last few years of his Secretaryship was never in the office ... and quite rightly so. The Labor Party and unions work together and the Labor Party is important work, a Labor Government will do ten times better for workers than any other government and that was very important to maintain a relationship with the Labor Party and influence it. (Carr 2004)

The political turbulence and activism of the period was embraced by the Victorian Branch under Carr whose philosophy was that these struggles all stemmed from the same root as the battles of the Union—the capitalist economic system. The Union supported the big social campaigns of the day—the women's movement, anti-Vietnam, anti-uranium and it also supported a myriad of smaller campaigns. Carr was prepared to offer more than verbal support or financial assistance: he offered industrial support for these campaigns as well. This had begun when he was the Secretary of the Rebel Unions, where he was a one of a handful of trade union leaders who saw that Union responsibility went further than the industrial arena or even the party political but had a responsibility to work at the community level.

In September 1970 Carr was instrumental in organizing a rally of housewives, trades unionists and pensioners at the Melbourne Town Hall to fight the rising prices of bread and milk. In November 1970 the FFTS was one of the unions that placed the original green bans on six Melbourne projects that community protest had deemed as detrimental to living standards in Melbourne. Later the same month they joined

with the Carlton Association and managed to stop the development of a warehouse on railway land in Lang Street, North Carlton. The campaign to save the land for community purposes was, with the help of the Rebel Unions, completely successful and a community park, house and bocce field is still on the land and used regularly. In February 1971 a ban was placed on beer to stop a price increase. A ban was placed late in 1970 on the ethane gas pipeline across Port Phillip Bay until a proper environmental study could show whether it would harm the marine environment. Later in 1971 the Rebel Unions supported a community campaign to save wildlife habitats in Westernport Bay from development by Lysaughts. As well, several bans over a period of years were placed on Housing Commission developments for their inadequate quality or their impact on local residents.

The FFTS initiated campaigns about the quality and pricing of furnishing products. They developed and publicised a list of stores that sold furniture and bedding which was overpriced. They said that some stores marked mattresses up as much as 90 per cent and they would keep the public informed of proper prices for products. They also brought attention to shoddy quality furniture and to cushion stuffings that were not only a danger to those working with the material but a fire hazard for consumers as well.

Fraser Island

One of the most creative of the campaigns was the involvement of the FFTS Victorian Branch in the campaign to save Fraser Island in 1975. An American company, Dillingham Construction, was mining the sand dunes on Fraser Island to extract zircon, a mineral that was used in making white lead paint. A strong community campaign claimed that this would impact drastically on the fragile environment of the island. The campaign wanted the mining to stop until a planned impact study was completed and there was an understanding of the effects of mining the sand. Because of the special features of Fraser Island the issue had come to international attention and the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers asked their affiliated Union in Australia, the FFTS, to put pressure on the company to stop the sand dune mining. The Queensland Trades and Labour Council supported the mining and not the campaign. The company, however, was also involved in construction projects in Melbourne so the FFTS Victorian Branch decided to take action. It started by placing a ban on glazing the multi-million dollar Estates House in William Street but the company ignored the

ban and handed over the unfinished building to its owners. A further ban was placed on another Dillingham project the Shell Data Centre in Doncaster. This time the ban involved only five windows, but these windows were vital to balance the air-conditioning needed to protect the delicate and expensive computer equipment. The ban lasted for three months and then the company took the Union to court. The FFTS countered by issuing a log of claims against Dillingham, arguing that the island was part of the national state, that it was irreplaceable and one of the world's last remaining wilderness areas and should remain untouched. They asked for a formal Commission inspection of Fraser Island in the company of conservationists.

This was granted and the Commissioners visited the island. Following the inspection tour, the FFTS took the unique step of serving Dillingham Construction with a log of claims that demanded environmental precautions to be taken in return for lifting the ban on the Data Centre. After negotiations an agreement was struck that the bans would be lifted and the majority of the precautions to protect the environment of Fraser Island were put into place. This was not enough for the FFTS but they realized that their small Union did not have the strength to stop the mining on its own. Nevertheless the precautions that they had inserted into the contract of mining went some way to protecting the environment until the campaign to stop it completely was victorious.

During this period the Union received correspondence and information at every meeting about campaigns that were taking place and usually they offered some sort of support.

Membership

The Federal Executive had agreed that all the Glass Awards should fall in line with the National Building Trades Award. South Australian workers were behind the national rates and in particular behind Victoria, which had recently won an extra \$19.00 a week as well as other conditions including shoes and overalls. The Glass Merchants in South Australia did not want to be brought into line with the National Award. Stewards in South Australia said they did not want the increases that had been achieved in Victoria. They had a petition signed by sixty glass workers in South Australia that they did not want any increases in pay or conditions that are awarded and sent the information to the Arbitration Commission.

Kyriacou, Batchelor and Carr went to South Australia to address a meeting of members to argue the case for the increase. Before they

arrived, the two stewards who had collected the signatures resigned from the Union and it was then realized that they were both seriously in arrears. Kyriacou and Batchelor stayed for a week organizing in South Australia. In the end, the South Australian Branch voted to support the wage increase, but not before some members had asked what would happen to their jobs if they got the increases, because much of their work was from furniture factories in Victoria, as their wages were cheaper. The Victorians, of course, were worried about exactly the same thing so it was important for them, on the basis of keeping jobs in Victoria, that the wages were equal.

The South Australian Branch did get a significant increase of \$58 that brought them up to the same level as the Victorians.

In the Office

From the time I became the Secretary of the Union I was faced with the bank manager saying, what are you going to do with the last thousand dollars of your overdraft. I said to him, 'I'm going to put on a new organizer'. He said, 'WHAT!' ...

I knew Lou Kyriacou quite well cause he had been the shop steward at Gainsborough and they'd had great battles for years. He was brash, confident, militant. I went out there and said I want you to be an organizer. He wanted to do it because it gave him power, kudos and put him up there. But economically he would have gone backwards, because at Gainsborough they worked a really generous piecework system—so he would have dropped in wages. He did that to be a Union organizer—have a bit of power, have his name up in lights. (Carr 2004)

Appointing Kyriacou was a stroke of genius. Not only did he have an acute head for money and a natural inclination for acquisition and hoarding but also he was a migrant and therefore understood many of the new workers in the growing industry who were also migrants. But the merits Kyriacou brought to the Union came with a cost. His talent with money and recruitment was an obsession and he did not share the vision that helped Carr steer his way through the period. This created a tension in the office, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, but that definitely shaped the events that would follow.

Carr worked at Myer as a carpet layer when he first came into contact with the Union. Myer was a grouper shop and one of the Union's

prominent DLP members, Hoyne, identified the enthusiasm in Carr and asked him to stand for the Committee of Management as the representative of the floor planning section. He also invited him to a Labor Party meeting in West Footscray, but when Carr discovered this was the Democratic Labor Party he quickly sought out the Australian Labor Party and joined the West Footscray Branch. Because of this, the Browns had regarded him with suspicion at first but as he became active in the COM meetings he caught their attention. He was young, enthusiastic, and energetic with a sharp mind and a thirst to learn. The Browns fostered him and he became their staunch ally. When old Bill Brown died, young Bill asked Carr to fill his position of organizer and he won the subsequent election easily. Carr went to the Labour College in the basement at Trades Hall and studied Marxist philosophy, economics, history and politics. This helped form his vision that involved mass recruitment of the thousands of workers that had come into the lower ends of the industry. Recognizing the new membership, he employed Kyriacou as the first migrant worker organizer. Later he employed Anna Stewart who took up the issues of the women members. However, in the meantime, he wanted to expand membership and knew that could only be done with a team of organizers, so he employed Alex Findlay and Peter Batchelor. When Carr took over as Secretary, Maloney and Calder were still organizers, but Maloney left and Calder died suddenly, so it was virtually a new team. That suited Carr's new broom approach. With the mixture of his philosophical vision and Kyriacou's strongman tactics they forged a new personality for the Union. Previously the organizers had serviced members that they had recruited for life but not in any particular geographical areas. Carr broke the state up into geographical areas for them to be serviced more efficiently and for recruitment to be more effective.

Cars

The post-war boom changed the spread of the industry. Many companies were opening up well out of the city in an industrial ring and even in country centres. This made the old methods of getting around the shops, on foot, public transport or bicycle very difficult. Still, recognition of the need for organizers to have cars did not come naturally. When Peter Batchelor was employed, he had to borrow a friend's car at first, and then was given a hand-me-down from another organizer who had been bought a newer second-hand car. Batchelor drove the car until, one day, somewhere out in the western suburbs it just stopped.

Decisions about buying cars were made in typical fashion for the time—everything was a political debate as the minutes surrounding one decision show. In July 1982 a new Datsun Bluebird GX manual was bought for \$8450 with a trade-in of \$4065. A couple of meetings later Alex Findlay needed a new car. He told the Management Committee that he did not want a GX model that included tinted windows, a cassette recorder and other luxury items; that a standard model was all he needed to do his job as an organizer. Carr told the meeting that the dealers had advised him that the GX model would hold a better trade-in value. Findlay reiterated that he did not need the extras and thought it extravagant to buy the GX model:

Michael Mitten suggested that choice of car be left to the individual organizer. But Brown raised a point of order that the decision-making must be left with the COM.

Moved Findlay, seconded Haritou.

An amendment to motion that in my [A. Findlay] particular case, a standard vehicle be purchased for his case in the light of members working short time and still paying the full amount of dues. (FFTS Minutes 1982)

Kyriacou, who had seconded the original motion because of a decision made earlier to purchase four-cylinder cars, said:

Originally Ken and I had six-cylinder cars and changed to four-cylinder cars to have uniformity with the rest of the Society's vehicles. Because of this, I am not prepared to support the purchase of anything different to cars already purchased if we follow this through, we may as well go back to push bikes. I believe the Society is wasting money because of this. A six-cylinder car would be more beneficial to the Society because of the work cars are expected to do, long trips and on the road all day. Further, there would be less money lost on change over. (FFTS Minutes 1982)

John O'Brien, a delegate from Pilkington in Geelong, drew the analogy between fighting for the best for the workers and therefore having the best for workers of the Union. Brown said:

It has always been the policy of this Union that nothing is too good for the workers, we have insisted drivers have coolers,

tradesmen have the best tools of the trade at his command. Because of this, I suggest the recommendation put by K. Carr and L. Kyriacou is sound.

Then Carr said:

This COM has the responsibility to look at the best deal financially to the Society. It is not a question as to what each person wants. Further, the vehicle belongs to the Union and is purchased on the basis of how well the money is spent on behalf of the membership. It is my opinion that the best deal can come from the purchase of this car and that it is also in the best interest of the Union.

Amendment lost.

Motion carried. (FFTS Minutes 1964–77)

The office of the FFTS was still in the Trades Hall Council, but the building had deteriorated by 1970. When an *Age* journalist did an interview with Carr, he reported:

Rebel Union Secretary Ken Carr does not have far to go to be reminded of the split in the Victorian trade union movement. The evidence is there on the ceiling of his dingy, crypt-like office in the great, grey mausoleum that is the Trades Hall. Two cracks run from one wall to another. (*The Age* 8 July 1970)

Ian Young also remembers his first visit to Trades Hall and the shock he and his fellow workers had when they saw the state of the old building. He said they left making jokes that they hoped the Union was more 'able' than the building led them to believe. (Young 2005) It was decided to look for new office space, which was found just around the corner from the Trades Hall in a new building that was owned by the Vehicle Builders Union. Kyriacou and Findlay worked over a weekend to prepare the office space for work to start. The move out of the Trades Hall building was another break with the traditions of the past.

The End

Carr believed that the question of job losses from imports in Australia was the beginning of a trend that could not be stopped and that it would be up to workers in different countries to unite around equal conditions

to stop unfair competition from one country to the other. He became an active member of the international organization, the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW). In early March 1984, Carr reported to the COM that he had been asked by the IFBWW to implement education programs and requested that he take the six-months' long service leave he was owed in three blocks of two months starting in a few days. His request was granted and he set off to start the work with the IFBWW.

When he returned from the first trip, his car had been impounded by the Union office. At work, he was met by Bill Brown, who was the President, and asked for his resignation. Brown presented evidence of a new auditor's report that had been done after Carr had left, and after the COM had approved the regular report when Carr was present. The questions involved some unauthorized spending on an Amex card, some personal phone calls to the Philippines and some money that had been spent on an international conference that Carr believed was legitimate expenditure. In fact, although it was presented to Carr as problematic, the auditors report only raised questions. Carr said:

I went round to the Union solicitors and I said, 'What's the score?' and they said, 'Do not resign, because they cannot legally make you resign and all the stuff that you've got there is legitimate expenditure except for the credit card stuff, but there's no argument' and anyway I had the numbers on the Federal body.

But I said to myself, how can I continue to work with people who are so disloyal and so I said, 'I've got no need to resign, I've done nothing wrong and I'm sure I had the numbers at a Federal conference, but I'd just lost the heart for it.' So I gave it away. (Carr 2004)

In the end the amount that the auditors could establish needed to be repaid was \$330.82, the amount of personal spending on the Amex card. Carr paid back the money, resigned and asked for his entitlements. But Kyriacou and Brown prevaricated and checked with the auditors until in the end they were instructed to pay \$2975.52 in long service leave and \$1900 annual leave.

TRICKY AMALGAMATION

*It is the nature of ambition to make men liars and cheats,
to hide the truth in their breasts, and show, like jugglers,
another thing in their mouths, to cut all friendships and
enmities to the measure of their own interest, and to make
a good countenance without the help of good will.*

Kenneth Tynan 1967

AS THE NEW leadership of the FFTS was settling in, another new regime was taking its seat in Canberra and would change the way union business was done.

The new leadership of the FFTS in 1984 came as the Hawke Government was settling in. Neo-classical economics were emerging as the only rationale needed for government policies. In Australia this was dubbed economic rationalism by its opponents and the tag seemed to last longer than the opponents. All around the world this resulted in the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. In this atmosphere, a rash of brash young millionaires took the spotlight and the Labor Prime Minister seemed to make no secret of his admiration of them. Individualism rampaged across every stage and collectivity was left hiding in the wings.

Bob Hawke had won the election by promising to use his special relationship with the union movement to ensure industrial peace and harmony through consensus. This involved agreement from trade unions to support an Income and Prices Accord. They agreed to hold down wages if prices were also kept in check. Unions could deliver on the first

but who could ensure delivery on the second? Within the first month of his government Hawke held his famous tripartite summit where union leaders, business executives and government officials strove to find areas of common ground. Unions agreed to accept wage restraint and employers agreed to return to centralized wage fixation. To receive the centralized wage increase, each union had to present to the Commission, promising not to make any extra claims in conditions or wages, restricting the ability of unions to take measures of particular interest to their members and organizing militancy amongst their members.

In this environment Louis Kyriacou took over the job of leading the FFTS. He was a strong leader who believed absolutely in his own abilities. Having effectively been the chief organizer under Ken Carr for fourteen years, he knew the industry and the membership inside out. He was confrontational and militant. Where Carr's militancy came from an ideological viewpoint, Kyriacou's came from his need to have power and control of all around him. Carr fought to have the strong drag up the weak, and Kyriacou's obstinacy and intractability in the face of anything that tried to stand in his way had stood the Union in good stead. For such a small group of disparate workers they had amazing strength—a strong militant workforce and significant funds. However, once the political vision from this partnership was gone, it became imbalanced; the leadership lost direction and lacked purpose.

When Kyriacou became Secretary, Alex Findlay moved into the vacated position of Assistant Secretary and Michael Haritou into the vacated position of organizer. These three would dominate the Union through the last years of the twentieth century. Kyriacou and Findlay had very different personalities as well as very different skills and abilities, but they worked hand-in-glove behind a screen that kept their internal dynamic hidden from everyone, although Findlay was obviously subservient to Kyriacou.

Throughout the Kyriacou period the COM minutes became increasingly dominated by financial matters and, in particular, the financial entitlements and allowances of the paid officials. Kyriacou had already shown his antagonism to Carr's political involvements and right from the start he made it clear the Union would separate from the community political groups that had been supported. At the very first COM after Carr's resignation the Trade Union Committee Against Poverty and Unemployment, which the Branch had helped establish, requested \$100 as an affiliation fee but it was rejected. When they were asked to give \$500 to support a video being made of the first Anna Stewart Memorial

Project, despite the fact that Anna had been an important part of the Furnishing Trades, Kyriacou said that was much too much and only \$100 was donated. The Trade Union Migrant Resource Centre, Australia Asia Workers Links, Women's Occupational Health and Safety Forum, Community Radio Stick Together Show, all asked for money or participation and all were turned away, usually with Kyriacou commenting that it was too expensive. Nor was he prepared to participate in forums that had no immediate impact on his membership. For example, he refused to send a delegate to the ACTU Migrant Workers Committee, and refused to renew membership with the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers.

The minutes of the COM took on an air of self-congratulation and show the draining of the lifeblood of the Committee. Issues were no longer brought to the Committee for discussion and decision-making, rather 'decisions already made by the officers' were presented for endorsement. For example, on the very simple matter of a staff members leave, the COM was not given the option of making the decision. The minutes record:

Kyriacou reported: 'after discussing J. Sdrinis's situation with the officers they all agreed to the proposal, and that her leave will be reviewed in June '85'. (FFTS 1982-86)

Cliff Palmer was a glazier who worked on the big city construction sites and was invited to join the Committee just after Kyriacou became Secretary. He said:

On COM you were really only a number—you're here because they had to have a quorum. A lot of people did not want to do it. Meetings were on Tuesday nights and used to start at 5.00 in the afternoon, so if people were out of town, they'd have to come into town, they supplied tea and I think you got \$10.00 allowance—but you might be here till 10 o'clock at night. Lou or Alex used to have to go through everything. (Palmer 2005)

Industrial

Style of Organizing

In the period of the Accord, Unions were assigned a central role in the industrial landscape. This role was set so that, on the one hand, it tied the hands of unions from taking independent action but, on the other,

it provided a framework in which they could deliver regularly and organize widely. In the building trades 'no ticket no start' had become absolute and the FFTS was therefore in a position to capitalize on that. However Kyriacou lacked the foresight to take real advantage of this period and his lack of judgement led to a number of bungles. At the same time much was achieved in the period. Kyriacou emphasized recruitment as the prime task for organizers who were thrown in and left to sink or swim. Those who managed to keep their heads above water were able to recruit large numbers of members from the vast pool of unorganized workers in the smaller shops in the industry. Subsequently many workers with sub-standard conditions saw hefty improvements as they became unionized.

Kyriacou's organizing style was controversial and there were mixed opinions about the relative merits of his methods and his motivations. One thing he was not, was grey or dull. Universally, he was regarded as larger than life and he stirred extreme passions in people's regard for him.

He kept bragging about what the Union could do for us ... He promised us higher wages, and superannuation and redundancy, they were important in those days ... He came in there. This little guy, who seemed to be quite pleasant when he first started, but once he got fired up, he said if you guys don't join, I shall make sure that you won't get a job in this industry again. (Connor 2005)

But Jeff Connor remembers once people had signed they did not see an organizer for months, until they rang the office and asked for one to come out. Others had a very different experience.

Louis came in to McKenzie Glass one time and he said; I'd like you to join the Union ... I said; what's the advantage of me joining the Union and he said, well you get this and you get that ... I said to him; so why are you in the Union. He said; I give my life for the Union. I was so struck by that. I said, well if that's good enough for you, that's good enough for me. Sign me up. (Pepas 2005)

He had very little fear of anyone or anything—he was fearless as an official and as an organizer. I've seen him stand under a

forklift with aggressive workers threatening to drop it on his head and he just said: 'Drop it you ...' in front of a group of about 100 and the big 6' 5" person who was driving the forklift just let it go and that was it, all the workers signed across. (Kirner 2005)

Lou's personality gave me the strength to fight a tough fight and we did. (Young 2005)

Kyriacou confronted bosses aggressively and, using the strength of his personality, with the threat of industrial action spoken or implied, he demanded that conditions be granted. While this often saw results, it did not empower the membership or educate them about the need for solidarity, rather it kept them at the mercy of their Secretary. During the period, large numbers of members were recruited and many disputes were won. Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) were introduced in the early 1990s. In 1994 Frank Vari was taken on specifically to organize EBAs in workshops where conditions had fallen far behind. In a time of EBAs these companies were still working under awards that had been unchanged for years. From November 1994 to March 1995 Vari had about 60 EBAs signed and in all cases the conditions of the workers were improved significantly. At the same time many members were recruited.

\$11.90 Part 2

The flow-on that had been extended to off-site glaziers was now demanded for window makers. Although the work of window makers seemed, on the surface, similar to glaziers, subtle differences in the processes involved meant that this work was covered by the Furnishing Award not the VGMA. Also, because a lot of window making involved aluminium, many conditions were covered in the metal trades award and the majority of the employees were in the Federated Ironworkers Association (FIA).

In April 1984 the demand for the increase of \$11.90 was taken out to the factories. Remcraft in Bayswater was visited by the new organizer, Michael Haritou. Ian Young had just started working there at the time. He had recently been a glazier, working on big construction sites with Oliver Davey and had experienced the many struggles and victories won by the glaziers. He remembers the first time Michael Haritou visited the factory:

A very young Michael Haritou walked around the corner talking to the workers. I remember him saying that the manager told him to get —— and shut the door in his face. At that time the guys except for myself ... were going to walk back in the door because they said there was nothing they could do about it.

I said, we cannot do that, they'd have no respect for us. I also told them that if they did not stand up to this —— they would be ridiculed by the rest of the glazing industry who had fought hard to get them better conditions in the past and they were letting that industry down. (Young 2005)

At the time Ian believed that all the other window-making companies had already been granted the \$11.90, although that was not the case. The FFTS members decided to strike and a picket line was set up on 11 April to stop supplies being delivered and products being dispatched. Bans were put on deliveries of glass to all of the Dowell group, of which Remcraft was a member.

It was not an easy picket line to maintain. The FFTS members were a minority of workers in the plant. Other workers were coming and going to work and were mostly unsupportive and unhappy to have to walk past a picket line. The small group of men had to look after two gates and the picket line extended through the Easter holiday period. Nevertheless, it was a picket line that was well supported and eventful and the exploits of the picketers live on in the mythology of the Union. There are reports of windows being smashed, timber being set on fire and vehicles being parked across the driveway of the company. The police were called on several occasions. Ian Young remembers one of these occasions:

Michael Haritou was the main organizer. I thought at that time he did a wonderful job—we forged a strong friendship. I totally supported him and he supported me. One day we were confronted by the police—him and I were on the front line. The police tried to set up a barricade to let the trucks come in. Michael took on the police on his own—I jumped in behind him—along with others. The police took Michael away in a divvy van—I still remember he was yelling as he was being taken away, 'Leave them alone!' (Young 2005)

After a week the case was taken to the Industrial Relations Commission where Justice Keogh lambasted the Union, saying that its actions showed 'blatant disregard' for the requirements of the Accord including the agreements that had been entered into to receive the centralized wage increases. The FIA attended the case as observers and indicated that if the FFTS got the increase they would press a claim for a flow-on.

The picket line continued nevertheless for another two weeks when management approached and asked to speak to Michael Haritou.

He was gone for about an hour and he came back to the boys on the line and said—you've won the dispute. He rang Lou and Alex—they all came out and asked us what we wanted to go back to work. Then they went in for discussions with management. (Young 2005)

When they returned to the picket line they had good news. As well as winning the \$11.90, they were to be back paid for the money lost while they had been on the picket line, they were granted protective clothing, including jackets, and would be supplied with tools and tool-boxes instead of having to supply their own.

The company in the meantime had been making pleas to the Federal Government and the ACTU requesting that they control the FFTS and force it to abide by the regulations of the Accord. An article appeared in *The Age* by Terry McCrann on 12 May, complaining that the Government and the ACTU had let the FFTS get away with breaking the Accord. He suggested that the Government prevent the FFTS from collecting the next instalment of 4.1 per cent of the National Wage Case, due in June. His article concluded, 'Mr Hawke, Mr Willis, Mr Simon Crean and Mr Bill Kelty have some solid thinking ahead of them'. (McCrann 1984)

Once the increase had been won at Remcraft the Union attempted to have it granted at other window companies. Another dispute broke out at Stegbar, which refused to grant it. This time the FIA was more actively involved and argued that the increase should flow on to its members.

The Federal Government and the ACTU made contact with the FFTS to bring them into line. The Minister for Industrial Relations, Ralph Willis, rang Kyriacou, who seemed more concerned about what the meeting would cost him, than what its outcome might be. He said:

Willis rings me up and tells me to come to Canberra to talk about it. I insisted that he pay the fares for three people, plus a car to take me to and from the airport—he hung up. A few minutes later his secretary rang and said a car would pick us up from the office and take us to Parliament. We discussed it, we did not get very far—he only gave us ten minutes. (Kyriacou 2005)

But in that ten minutes Willis threatened that the FFTS would be charged under S142A of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which would result in them losing coverage for the window-making area. Kyriacou tried to bargain. He said they would drop the \$11.90 claim if the members received strike pay and \$100 bonus payment. Willis refused.

Back in Melbourne, the trouble at Stegbar was worsening and the ironworkers were becoming snitchy. The ACTU Secretary, Bill Kelty, called a meeting. The ACTU had agreed with Kyriacou to support strike pay being awarded. Kelty held a meeting behind closed doors with the employers and then presented an ultimatum to Kyriacou. The company would make a deal with him and pay strike pay to the workers for the time lost, but only if the deal was kept confidential so there could be no risk of flow-ons to the other unions involved, and only if they dropped the claim for the \$11.90 and gave it back where it had been granted. Further, if Kyriacou did not agree to this, they would face de-registration; they would be denied the 4.1 per cent indexation rise that was due later that month; and their members would be covered by the FIA.

Kyriacou met with Stegbar employees who reluctantly agreed to accept the deal. Then he visited factory after factory explaining the situation and telling the men that the Union was at risk if the money was not handed back. He promised that one way or another, he would get the money back for them.

Ian Young remembers Kyriacou coming out to Remcraft:

Lou came out with Michael and addressed us at Dowell to tell us that Ralph Willis from the ALP had threatened to de-register the Union if the \$11.90 was to continue because he saw that as a sweetheart deal, outside of the wages and incomes accord and we had to give the money back. Of course we were upset, but we didn't want to see the Union destroyed either. And Lou promised us that he'd get the money back one way or another. (Young 2005)

The Union had to make a claim to the Commission to have the 4.1 per cent increase granted. At that hearing the Government opposed its application on the grounds that the FFTS had broken its commitments to the wage indexation guidelines. The Union sought support. The ACT Branch threatened to leave glass out of some of the windows of the new parliament house that was under construction. The ACTU supported the FFTS, and the Glass Merchants' Association, afraid of the unrest that a denial of the wage rise would cause, supported the application. Eventually, the 4.1 per cent increase was granted to the entire membership.

This was a harsh lesson for the new leadership. As an organizer, Kyriacou was used to stamping the industrial boots of the Union to get what he wanted, but as Secretary he had made a decision that involved taking on the Government and the ACTU. But the climate had changed. Kyriacou did, nevertheless, win the \$11.90 back for the workers in other ways. At Remcraft it happened three years later, when another dispute broke out—it was not major, but the men felt sufficiently provoked to walk out the gate and set up the picket line again. They demanded the \$11.90 and they won it again, but this time they kept it.

Carpet

The Union had been unable to police the carpet award. Most of the workers in the industry were still subcontractors and therefore the award was redundant. In Victoria in 1985 there were 1500 carpet layers, 800 worked in Melbourne, 85 per cent were self-employed and the rest worked in retail stores. The organization of carpet layers, formed in December 1983, was led by G. Bullock. At first the Union believed that it had cooperation with this group. This was partly because of the tactic of the group to pretend cooperation to keep the Union out of its members' business. Things came to a head at the Rialto construction in August 1984 when the Union was disappointed to discover that subcontractors had done the floor laying. The Union decided to draw up a new agreement and get builders to employ only carpet layers who were members of the Union and who were employees, not subcontractors. It applied its old tactics, but this time the subcontractors had prepared for a fight. Several milestone cases had been held in the building industry over the issue of subcontract labour and the unions had lost most of them. Bullock and his organization took the FFTS to Federal Court for unfair trading under the anti-union sections 45d and 45e of the Trade Practices Act. In February 1985 a levy was placed on members to cover costs

of a federal court case. The first hearing was before Justice Grey. He found in favour of the Union, but an appeal before the full bench found in favour of Bullock and several injunctions were placed on the Union leadership. Kyriacou and Findlay went into hiding for several months to avoid having writs for contempt served on them. The contempt cases were eventually brought but they failed. In the end Bullock joined the FFTS but the problems in the industry did not end.



Lou Kyriacou and others making their opinions known.



Workers from the Rialto site taking to the streets.

By 1993 when Leo Skourdoumbis started working as an organizer, the industry was still de-regulated and full of subcontractors. Skourdoumbis said:

They'd negotiated a peace treaty that had meant that for the next 10 years carpet layers were treated like cowboys. When I saw this group it sticks in my head—they are workers but I saw them as a group who saw themselves as businessmen. By this time Louis was very hands-off with organizing and some of us were beginning to realize in the early nineties that we could use the EBAs as an opportunity to re-Unionize that part of the industry and regulate it. I saw this as an opportunity to get them into the Union, to re-organize, through the EBA process. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

At this time building sites were beginning to have EBAs that covered all the workers on the site. The carpet-laying companies were happy to sign the EBAs because without that agreement they would not be contracted for the work on a particular site. At first it was easy to get them to sign but the conditions were not being adhered to, and so the second stage was to make sure that the workers were getting the conditions outlined in the EBA. That meant that they would be entitled to the conditions of employees, not sub-contractors, including sick and holiday pay.

A little later Skourdoumbis would go out to the sites and ask the workers if they were receiving the sick pay and holiday pay and other conditions. Most of them were not. Skourdoumbis would talk to the site steward and the builder and tell them that the company was undercutting the EBA conditions; then he'd talk to the men as they turned up for work. He would tell them that they were not receiving their rights and that the company owed them thousands of dollars. A meeting was called at the plant involving both the on-site and off-site workers. In the end the company was forced to accept the terms of the EBA and the workers received thousands of dollars in back pay. To accommodate the history of the industry the workers were titled 'regular daily hire'—this gave them the status of employees but allowed them to be paid the daily rate, which was the traditional payment method. As time went by the industry went from being one of the worst paid on building sites to being one of the groups with the best conditions. It is now virtually impossible to work as a floor layer on any site without a Union ticket.

Pilkington Glass

The workers at Pilkington Glass were consistently militant and, during the eras of Brown and Carr, had regularly won conditions that were a long way ahead of the rest of the industry. They had continued to fend off attempts by Pilkington to introduce an incentive scheme. They had won their own superannuation scheme that was equalled only by the public service scheme. They had occupied the factory in the Carr period for thirteen days to extract a redundancy agreement. In 1982 they had won the thirty-five hour week.

However, things started to change at Pilkingtons under the Kyriacou leadership. Until then the workforce had been permanent. In the early 1990s management got agreement from the Union to introduce six casuals for six weeks, promising that if they were needed for longer they would be made permanent. The six workers were made permanent. Similar arrangements were made twice in the next twelve months and each time the casuals were given permanency. In 1993 a new EBA was being negotiated. The delegates from Geelong came to Melbourne for a meeting to finalise some of the detail. Damian Cooke was one of the delegates and he described the meeting:

There was a chap by the name of Bill Weeks, the plant manager, an American—brought out from America. He was a toe cutter. His job was to cut the numbers and negotiate the next EBA ... There was a delegate Peter Smith and myself. When we arrived at the Union office Louis and Michael were sitting in the boardroom with Bill Weeks and they had these things written up on a whiteboard which included the use of 20 casuals per day. I went berserk. I said to them, 'How can you bastards do that?' Louis' exact words to us were, 'You can't do anything about it; it's already been to the Commission and it's been ratified.' That was it with Louis for me. Eventually Louis and Michael convinced everyone that it was agreed to and been ratified by the Commission, but the blokes down there never forgave him after that. (Cooke 2006)

Insult was added to injury when it was realized that the casuals to be used were labour hire workers. Cooke understood that the company would pay for 20 Union tickets for the casuals but as they started to come in to the plant it was obvious that there were more than 20 individuals involved, with different people turning up on different days.

It turned out that they were being sent in from Skilled Engineering, a labour hire company. At one point Cooke checked the books and there had been 70 different workers employed over a one-month period. This created a serious inroad into the solidarity of the workforce at Pilkington Glass but it also created friction and mistrust between the Union Branch and the State leadership.

Organizing Women

By the mid-1980s women had become a significant proportion of the workforce and their presence was accepted. It was becoming more usual for married women to work than not, and their presence in the workforce was accepted. Nevertheless, women were still considered to be industrially weak and their conditions still lagged behind those of men. This was nowhere more obvious than in entitlement to superannuation. Therefore, when 50 women members of the FFTS came out on strike at A. E. Hoad in Benalla demanding the same superannuation entitlements as men in the industry, it was a vanguard action in 1988. Dave Kirner remembers that people had thought the women might be hard to get out the gate, but once they were out, they were as solid as could be and they stayed solid for five days until the company agreed to give them the same package as the rest of the Union.

In the Union office too there was recognition that the Union needed to employ a female organizer. Lily D'Ambrosio was excited when she heard about the job. As a feminist working in trade unions she was aware of the lack of women organizers. So when she started work she expected an environment that would show some support for her as a woman. She was bitterly disappointed. She felt forced to fit into a culture that was not supportive of her. She found Kyriacou's aggressive recruitment strategy antagonistic to her way of doing things. Also, the only training that organizers received was in the pub after work



Unknown women picketers at a factory in the 1980s.

and again D'Ambrosio found this environment unsympathetic to her, as a woman. She only stayed in the job for four months and left feeling that she'd been through a nasty ordeal. The Branch replaced her with Jane Calvert who stayed for longer and who was eventually replaced by Ann Fraser. Once Fraser left the Union did not pursue the aim of having a female organizer.

In the Office

Employment conditions at the Branch under Kyriacou were inconsistent: some people were employed on half-pay until they could prove themselves able to recruit; others were told that they would have to recruit enough new members to pay their wages; still others were given targets of how many new members they were expected to recruit a week. Those employed reacted in different ways to these demands. Some believed this was a reasonable way to make sure that the Union stayed financially viable and active, others found the tactics abhorrent and mostly did not stay very long.

Josh Borstein was employed as an industrial officer. He found Kyriacou extremely difficult to work with. He felt that he was not respected and that he was being undermined. Even when he resigned Kyriacou was abusive:

I found the internal atmosphere very disagreeable. I decided it was not for me so I went to tell Louis that I was going to resign. Louis went berserk, started yelling that he would not tolerate people leaving and threatened that he would throw me out of the window. (Bornstein 2005)

Dave Kirner was one of the survivors. He said:

Louis was supportive of any organizer who could sign up members—make sure they picked up Union fees—make sure members were financial and he would then assume you were doing the right thing. (Kirner 2005)

However, he did comment on the number of people who did not survive under the conditions.

Thirty people in the four years I was there—we had people under the desk crying—we had people called all sorts of

things—he got quite disgruntled with me once because I disagreed

People were generally doing working hours of 7 till 5, 6 and then people would go to the pub and do their training courses after work at the pub. There was no formal training in those days—organizers didn't go to the Commission. (Kirner 2005)

The normal practice seemed to be that people were employed as membership officers. If they showed themselves as able to recruit and service members and work with Kyriacou, they were made organizers and usually brought onto the Management Committee.

The office was often referred to in the union movement as 'the revolving door' of the Furniture Trades Union because so many people started work and left.

People came and went on the COM as well as on the staff—Cliff Palmer now believes that if people asked awkward questions they would not last long—he remembers that often there was trouble getting a quorum.

In 1987 the office moved again. But this time, they bought a building. Kyriacou's financial prowess was making the Union rich. Not long after being in the Errol Street building, a house two doors away was purchased. The back of the building was extended to create more offices for the growing number of staff members.

Kyriacou employed his son and then his daughter. The employment of his son was fairly straightforward. George Kyriacou had been employed in the Carr period under a government training scheme. The Federal Government provided \$10 590 for his wages while George was working as an assistant research officer. When the industrial officer went on maternity leave Kyriacou proposed that his son be given training to take over as industrial officer, and that his wages be increased. Some years later, the employment of Julie Pagonis, Kyriacou's daughter, as a consultant industrial officer was much more controversial. Dick Lowe had been the industrial officer for some years, when Kyriacou decided that the Branch no longer needed an industrial officer. Soon after the dismissal of Lowe, Pagonis was brought in as a highly paid consultant industrial officer with travel expenses paid on a weekly basis from interstate.

The transport of the staff and officials took a different turn in May 1998, just before Kyriacou resigned. The Union cars were replaced with new single-or double-cabin utilities. However, the organizers were

unhappy with the safety of the utes because they were unstable without a load in the back:

They would bounce and skid on the tram tracks. The officials raised it with Louis but his response was to tell us to go down the market and buy potatoes or concrete to put in the back. That's when he said he had saved \$60 000 in fringe benefits when he bought the utes, but we thought it was really closer to \$16 000 that was saved and our necks were being risked. Michael Haritou took the position that the Union had made the decision and that we all had to go with it, but not long after he arrived with a brand new Camry sedan. (Vari 2004)

Politics

In 1993 a Federal election was imminent, which was a major concern. The State Government had dismantled its industrial machinery leaving those covered by State conditions with only very minimum coverage. A Liberal victory was expected federally and people feared that this would mean the dismantling of Federal Industrial Relations machinery, leaving workers and unions with very little protection. The Australian trade union movement had watched in horror as New Zealand's system was deregulated and the unions' hands were tied, meaning that many of them disappeared. The 1993 March COM meeting reflected these fears. Item 7.2 under Branch Reports stated:

L. Kyriacou advised the Branch of the need to be fully aware of what has recently occurred in New Zealand and to learn from the response of the union movement to the Draconian measures introduced by the Conservative Government. Such detail could only be provided by a study tour of New Zealand from which the Union will be able to learn firsthand by observing and discussing the situation with our comrades. (FFTS 1993)

The next item discussed was the 'Reimbursement for Officers re Cost of Transfer of Property'. There was an expectation throughout the union movement that a Liberal government, if elected, would introduce penal clauses, as had happened in New Zealand. There was a fear that individuals would be held responsible for the payment of fines and so there was a general flurry for officials and COM members to protect their personal assets by having them changed into the names of family

members. Kyriacou made a report, there was general discussion about the problem for officials and then it was moved and seconded that:

The report be received and the Secretary authorized to reimburse paid officials of costs incurred resulting from the transfer of assets. (FFTS 1993)

Neither the discussion nor the motion had recognized that the COM members were also at risk, but they had been excluded from the discussion. This point was raised by one of the COM who was not a paid official and, as an afterthought, it was moved by Bill Brown and seconded by Michael Haritou that the position be investigated by the Secretary and a report made to the next meeting.

The ALP, under the leadership of Paul Keating, narrowly won the election. But it was to be only three years before John Howard won government for the Liberals. Howard introduced legislation that attacked working conditions, forcing secret ballots and limiting the accessibility to legal industrial action. The legislation encouraged workers to favour individual agreements over enterprise bargains, and undermined the role of the Unions by making it possible for 'anyone' to represent groups of workers. Unions prepared to fight the legislation. Kyriacou chartered two planes to fly workers to Canberra to a rally that had been called by the ACTU.



The FFTS flew members to Canberra to participate in the rally against the Howard Government's first round of industrial relations changes.



Branch President John O'Brien (in white) at the Canberra rally.

The End

At the COM meeting of February 1998, after Alex Findlay reported on the overseas trip that he and Kyriacou had taken, Kyriacou announced his intention to retire in July that year. Immediately afterwards, Alex Findlay made the same announcement. While on the surface this may have seemed like a harmonious and symmetrical conclusion to a productive duet of joint leadership, the truth was that Louis and Alex were embedded in a deep and public conflict that nobody seems to have fully understood.

The rift is understood to have begun with the sacking of Dick Lowe and to have been heightened by accusations against Kyriacou made by workers at the factory where Findlay's wife was the shop steward. Frank Vari said:

We do not know what the spat with Alex and Lou was about. All we know is that one day, the organizers were here in the office and there was a lot of shouting in the front part of the office and we saw Lou and Alex fighting. Lou had him in a headlock at that time and was giving him a couple and we attempted to intervene and Michael Haritou stopped us. Put his arm out and stopped us. That made us very suspicious about Michael's role. I think Michael inflamed the situation because he wanted to get the Secretary's job. (Vari 2004)

The July 1998 COM meeting was the last before the retirements were to come into effect. Six members from Vita Pacific attended but when Findlay tried to have the matter raised, the Chairman, Michael Mitten, informed him that they had received legal advice that the issue should not be raised at the COM.

A motion was carried that Haritou be appointed Acting Secretary until an election for the position of Secretary was called. At the end of the meeting Mitten thanked Findlay and Kyriacou for their long service to the Union and:

Paid tribute to L. Kyriacou and A. Findlay for their outstanding contribution and service to the Union over many years. (FFTS 1998–2000)

Kyriacou then:

Thanked and acknowledged the support given to him by the COM, M. Mitten, M. Haritou and Organizers J. Patti, F. Vari and L. Skourdoumbis.

There was no recognition of Findlay who had worked hand in glove with him, and supported him against Carr and then against anyone who challenged Kyriacou's authority for twenty-five years.

Amalgamation and Integration

Background

Throughout the 1960s to the 1980s the Victorian Branch had increasingly become the dominant Branch in Australia. In the early days, when the majority of the Society worked in small craft shops supplying furniture to a local market, New South Wales and Victoria competed as the two largest Branches. The federal leadership shifted from one to the other. But the shifts in the industry towards larger workplaces involved producing for wider markets. Victoria had the lion's share of this development and became the manufacturing centre of Australia. The Victorian Branch was quick to make the most of these changes whereas the other Branches were not so farsighted. The Victorian Branch was also significantly strengthened by its coverage of glass workers who brought with them the industrial strength and muscle of the construction and the car industries.

Throughout the 1950s to the 1970s the Victorian Branch had been one of the leading unions in the fight against the remnants of the groupers. While the Victorian Branch had grown and developed a broader role for itself under the two Browns and Carr, the New South Wales Branch, in the same period, had become increasingly inward looking. It had been unable to merge with the glass workers; its post-war leadership had been unable or unwilling to grasp the political and industrial opportunities of the time. Part of the political vision of the Victorian leadership was to understand the importance of a national organization to standardize conditions across the country. In fact, Carr's vision extended beyond the nation to the world.

When Kyriacou took over as Federal Secretary he worked hard to boost the Branches in other states. His method was to take over when things were not going well, rather than trying to encourage a solution from within. This did not leave room for the other Branches to develop strong leaders to stand on their own feet. When he became Federal Secretary none of the other Branches were as strong as the Victorian Branch but they were viable. The Victorian Branch had always given support to help the smaller state Branches to survive, not through altruism, but to ensure their conditions were protected in the other states. At the time Kyriacou took over as Federal Secretary, both the ACT and the Tasmanian Branches had received support and funds from the Federal Branch.

Just after the election of the new leadership in July 1984, the delegates returned from a federal conference, effusive in their self-congratulations. Findlay told the COM that:

The new Secretary had been a great asset, it was clear that new blood had brought new life to the Federation and there was more participation from Branches than any of the delegation had seen before. (FFTS 1982-86)

Apparently the 'new life' was a feeble infant that did not last the year. The report from the next conference in 1985 was in stark contrast and Findlay struck a different chord:

The Conference was a bitter disappointment in comparison to the 1984 conference. The reasons for the disappointment was because the 'camp was divided'. South Australia, the ACT and Tasmania versus Victoria, NSW and Queensland. Alex stated

that there was no future for a Federal Union, especially the way things are, i.e. bitterness. (FFTS 1982–86)

This had proved to be an early portent of what was to come and certainly the first hint of the attitude of the new leadership to the national organization.

The Committee members asked Findlay what the division was about but his answer was oblique: 'Power and politics'. (FFTS 1982–86)

In 1989 things had deteriorated to the point that the SA Branch tried to bypass the Federation by getting coverage under state awards. Dave Kirner, who was an organizer at the Victorian Branch and later became SA State Secretary, described the situation:

The SA Branch decided that it wanted to leave the Federation because most state Branches did not like Louis one little bit. That was Paul Dunstan, Don Dunstan's son who started a campaign to bring the workers off awards and bring them under state awards. It was decided then, by the Union, that that was unacceptable and they should not be running the Union, and indeed they were taking people onto awards that were not as good. We exposed that. We went over to SA. We visited all the worksites ... We said we'd get Victorian conditions over there. Largely we did. (Kirner 2005)

The same year, at its biennial congress, the ACTU decided on a policy for the future structure of trade unions in Australia. The new policy was based on a vision of a limited number of super-Unions, to be brought about by amalgamating smaller Unions into large industry groupings. It was argued that this was the future of Unionism and would benefit Unions by consolidating their human and financial resources.

As craft and skill was being replaced by technology and work was increasingly broadbanded across occupations, strength was increasingly found in industry Unions. Up to this point, the FFTS had grown by merging and amalgamating different craft groups into the furniture and glass industry organization. It sat at an interesting juncture. It straddled the broad industries of manufacturing and construction, but because a great deal of its product was made from wood, it had historic links and rivalries with the timber industry. As early as 1920, John Curtin had talked about the benefits of the furnishing and timber workers amalgamating, and throughout their history merger and amalgamation

talks have been held numbers of times, but there has never been enough agreement or impetus to take the next step.

John Sutton, the National Secretary of the CFMEU Construction Division, remembered the environment as one where there was tremendous pressure to amalgamate:

You had a Labor Government in Canberra, you had an ACTU leadership that was hell-bent on amalgamation ... There was a prevailing theory that had great currency that we had to rapidly amalgamate if we were going to be able to defend the trade union movement. I think with hindsight we can all see that it was overstated and the whole amalgamation process was rushed, probably obscenely, and political amalgamations occurred that weren't necessarily ideal. A whole lot more care should have been taken, but in any event, the environment of the day was, you had to amalgamate, you were almost a pariah if you tried to stay out on your own ... everyone had to take up their pozy in whatever camp they wanted to go in. (Sutton 2005)

Demarcation disputes down the years in various combinations between workers in the building, timber and furnishing trades created deeply ingrained rivalries, so on one level it made sense to try to end the potential for those rivalries and demarcations by having all three groups of workers in the one Union, but on the other it made the practicality of amalgamation tricky.

The timber workers were keen to have an early amalgamation with the Furnishing Trades and the Australian Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASC&J). However, the FFTS believed it had a greater affinity with the construction workers and, a few months after the ACTU Congress, formally decided to work towards amalgamation with the Building Workers Industrial Union at its Federal Council meeting in 1989:

That this 1989 Federal Council of the Federated Furnishing Trade Society of Australasia, having heard comprehensive Federal Secretary's and Federal Awards reports, supplemented by additional reports from the Federal President and Federal Secretary following full and serious consideration of the Federation's position Council determines:

That the Federal President and Federal Secretary be directed to enter into discussion and negotiations with the Building

Workers Industrial Union of Australia at the earliest opportunity with the objective of achieving ultimate amalgamation between the respective organizations by the year 1993 or earlier if feasible.

Any agreement preparatory to, and as an integral part of the amalgamation proper shall provide for a transitional period which guarantees all current office holders of the Federation and/or its Branches, with a suitable minimum tenure of office (e.g. 2 × 4-year terms), subject to normal electoral procedures consistent with the Federation's rule prescriptions.

The Federal President and Federal Secretary are instructed to periodically report progress to members of the Federal Executive on the discussions and negotiations with the BWIU thus enabling the Federal Executive to monitor developments. (FFTS 1989)

It is perhaps a sign of the priorities of the leadership, and perhaps of amalgamations in general, that this motion does not once mention the benefit to members of amalgamation, nor the need to protect members' rights and their 'place' in the industrial landscape. Rather, it sought to preserve the tenure of office of paid officials.

While the FFTS were passing motions to amalgamate with the BWIU they were also talking to Trevor Smith about amalgamating with the timber workers. Smith hoped the three Unions could amalgamate early so they could enter the CFMEU as a block with a stronger bargaining position. His plans were thwarted. The discussions did not lead to concrete agreements.

Albert Littler remembered attending very early meetings between Kyriacou, Findlay and Trevor Smith at the request of Kyriacou. Smith was always very keen to have the two sections join in one division and Kyriacou always said that if that were to happen, he had conditions that must be met, which were to do with the leadership of the Victorian Branch:

He was also concerned about the money. He was suspicious that the Forestry Group that were basically in financial straights would get their hands on the money that Louis had so carefully grown. Louis did not seem to have his eye on the main game here—he let the Branches go and that left the Victorian Branch vulnerable to takeover from the national Branches of the Forestry group. (Littler 2005)

For Trevor Smith, the money became just one more reason used by Kyriacou to prevent amalgamation:

There is no question that the FFTS had the money—in fact it became an ongoing issue in relation to often clouding the issues and the goodwill in the amalgamation process. I basically said to Louis as far as I was concerned he could do what he wanted with his money because we needed to take the money out of the equation. We didn't have any money—never had had. By 1989 I'd been an official of the timber workers Union for sixteen years and we always fought above our weight, we always got by without it.

There was never any intent or criteria that we should have any influence over the money, have access to the money—could not give a toss about his money.

Basically Louis would run the ship—it was put to Louis—it was recognized that he was senior, he had a great track record of industrial outcomes, he clearly had financial security—we didn't want to interfere with any of that. But ultimately in any amalgamation you have to have some transitional periods and transitional arrangements before you ultimately get the intended outcomes into place. On the national level they could have had equal numbers with us in the senior positions of our National Conference—but he had this bloody mind-set about his friggin' money which I could have choked him with and his mood swings and his demeanour about things changed dramatically. You sat down at one stage and believed that you had some clear understanding or some agreement—he'd come back with a totally different view, or write back changing the general principles that we had developed. That was disappointing because you would never be certain about the extent [to] which you could go forward. Or something would happen between meetings—there'd be a demark somewhere and amalgamation would be off—we'd say—you can't do that, we have to develop a set of principles to take the thing forward. (Smith 2005)

Kyriacou's view was expressed somewhat differently:

We tried to amalgamate when we saw the Government, the ACTU pushing for amalgamations to have fewer unions, which

I don't agree with. We tried to amalgamate with the Associated Carpenters & Joiners, we tried at the same time with the Timber Workers Union, but no ... these people didn't have any money and they wanted to be on the top. I said, 'Get lost—you want us to put our money down and then you're going to tell us what to do. We want to run it.'

And then the AC&J went with the Federated Ironworkers Association, the timber workers went with the then BWIU and they approached us many times, again we had the argument and they wanted to put us with the Timber Workers Union. 'Do we want to go with the Timber Workers Union?' I said, 'They're broke, they've got no members, they've got no money, they don't own the building, why do you want us to go with them, we want to go with the Construction.' In the end we amalgamated, we said, 'We want to stand on our own rights, we don't want to go with nobody.' (Kyriacou 2005)

After the ASC&J amalgamated with the Ironworkers, the BWIU in Victoria developed a strategy to recruit the members in the workshops that had been covered by them and this involved forming an alliance with the FFTS.

At a Special General Meeting in August 1990 that began at 5.45 p.m. and closed at 6.05 p.m. Findlay moved a motion that was seconded by Bill Brown and carried unanimously to change Rule 38. This enabled:

The Federal Council to disband a Branch and attach the members of the Society presiding in, or employed in, the area of the disbanded Branch to another Branch, where it determines that the Branch which is to be disbanded is not viable and that this will provide an appropriate means for members of the Society residing in or employed in the area of the disbanded Branch to participate in the affairs of the Society and will promote the efficient management of the Society ...

Funds and property of the disbanded Branch shall thereupon be transferred to and be under the management and control of the other Branch in accordance with the Rules. (FFTS 1989–91)

The timber workers had more success in amalgamation discussions elsewhere. In 1991 they formed the Australian Timber and Allied Trades Union (ATATU) when they joined with the Pulp and Paper Workers

Federation of Australia and then with BWIU. In 1992 a further amalgamation with the Miners created the Construction Forestry & Miners Employees Union.

The FFTS had prevaricated for too long and been left behind. Now, the timber workers from within the CFMEU, with Trevor Smith as its National President, were involved in developing the Scheme of Amalgamation that formed the official and legally binding plan for the next round of amalgamations. This plan incorporated the timber workers' aspiration to have the FFTS within the same Division. The bigger plan within the CFMEU involved the eventual creation of two Divisions within the building industry, an off-site Division and an on-site Division. The timber and forestry workers, now inside the CFMEU, formed the basis for the off-site Division, called the Forest and Forestry Products Division, and the old building workers Unions became the on-site Division. The FFTS had members that were involved in both on-site and off-site work. Arguments could then be made that supported integration into either division for the FFTS and also that the membership of the FFTS should be divided between the two.

The FFTS agreed in principle to amalgamation with the CFMEU. In the Scheme of Amalgamation they were to be de-registered as an independent organization and would become the Furniture Division of the CFMEU but only for a limited period. The FFTS was destined to be integrated into the Forestry Division:

Structure

Point 11

It is proposed that subsequent to amalgamation the Union Divisions (i.e. Building Unions Division, UMW Division, ATAIU Division, FFTS Division) will be restructured into Industry Divisions (namely, Construction; Forestry, Forest & Building Manufacturing Products; Mining; and Energy Divisions). The FFTS Union Division shall have eight (8) years in which to reach agreement on the way in which that restructuring will occur, during which time the FFTS Union Division will be autonomous in those matters that relate to members of that Division only. (CFMEU 1992)

While in the Scheme of Amalgamation it was clear that the FFTS were destined for the Forestry Division, the FFTS itself was not. Most members at the time were unaware that amalgamation into the CFMEU

meant becoming part of the Forestry Division. Kyriacou tried to leave his options open by insisting that a Sunset Clause was inserted that gave him eight years of independence before the integration. The reasons for this were not clear. John Sutton believed that it was to give Kyriacou room to move and said that in the early discussions it was clear that he wanted 'wriggle room'. (Sutton 2005)

Kyriacou had agreed that the FFTS would become part of the Forestry Division but he had secured a sunset clause that ensured it would not take place until he had retired. Despite the word in the Scheme of Amalgamation Kyriacou spent the next years discussing integration with the Construction Division. His actions seemed to be avoiding integration. He seemed more concerned with control of the money than anything else. It is likely that his disinterest in integration involved his own personal need to remain independent. He was well known for being unable to work closely with others, unless they were prepared to submit to his will, and he maintained a rigid control over the affairs of the FFTS.

The vote of FFTS members to amalgamate took place in 1992. They were provided with leaflets that simply said Vote Yes—Strength in Numbers and showed diagrams of three Unions, including the FFTS entering the CFMEU. However, what this leaflet did not make clear was that the plan included integration into the Forestry Division. A document was circulated from the Electoral office entitled: 'Official Outline of the Scheme of Amalgamation', which told them which unions were entering the CFMEU and how the CFMEU had developed, but again, failed to mention the integration with Forestry. It did advertise in very small writing that the full details of the amalgamation could be obtained from the Returning Officer of the Australian Electoral Commission and it gave his address. (Nellor 1992)

This hardly made it easy for rank and file members to check the details and, in any case, their Union officials would have guided most of them—after all, that's what they paid them for. Joe Patti said:

To be quite honest with you it was not really put across when I had a vote. I was a shop steward then and I had to inform all the members in our factory ... we would have had a meeting and said, 'Well, we are amalgamating with the CFMEU thinking, it's the building group.' Unless it's explained very clearly, people are not going to understand it. The CFMEU was known as the building union. As well as that the Furnishing Trades

has always been, in Victoria especially, closely aligned with building. We've got the glass, carpets, cupboards, everything to do with building, very little to do with chopping down trees. So when we spoke about amalgamating we just thought we were amalgamating with the building division, it was said that way—by whoever you talked to. The paperwork might have said something else. Louis and Alex must have known but I think it needed to be spelt out in the most simple language—you know—there are three divisions and we're going to be part of the Timber Workers Division. If you said it that way people might have understood it. (Patti 2004–05)

Patti expressed what was the general perception at the time: that the CFMEU was the union of construction workers; that miners and forestry workers were also in the CFMEU was much less understood. It was therefore incumbent upon the leadership, if it wanted the membership to understand that they would end up as part of the Forestry Division, to provide adequate information and it seems that they did not. Kyriacou himself seems to have agreed to the clause on integration with Forestry without ever really intending for it to happen. The sunset clause allowed Kyriacou time to remain totally in control till his retirement. Nothing would need to change: there would be no increased scrutiny of his regime

The Australian Electoral Commission's returning officer, who had conducted the ballot, issued a report that showed 86 per cent of members voted to support the amalgamation. A leaflet to members declaring the result was typically self-congratulatory:

Such a degree of support speaks for itself. Clearly FFTS members understood and supported their officials' recommendation that the best interests of members and the future of the Union lay in amalgamation ... (FFTS 1993)

It is now clear that members did not understand, even though they did support their officials' recommendation. The leaflet continued:

thereby joining forces with other like progressive organizations to mutually form a larger more effective Union. One which through integrated operations has the capacity to

generate the staffing and resources that are increasingly going to be required in these difficult times. That is, if the Union is to meet the legitimate expectations of its membership. (FFTS 1993)

Kyriacou had sent Mick O'Connor, who had been working in the Victorian Branch as an organizer, to South Australia as the Branch Secretary. O'Connor wanted to return to Victoria but Kyriacou would not allow it. Shortly after that, O'Connor challenged Kyriacou as the Federal Secretary. Kyriacou won the election but it was a bitter pill. Dave Kirner saw it as leading to a period of antagonism between the Victorian Branch and the other states. Talking about the Federation, he said:

It became very Victorian-centric. Official after official was denigrated, vilified, sacked, there was no process of support and development, there was a lot of money thrown at Queensland in the cases but there was a lack of the development of the infrastructure and of workers on the ground. (Kirner 2005)

Once the amalgamation came into being, the manoeuvring of Kyriacou continued. The officials of the CMFEU generally saw him as a wily player who played the Divisions of Forestry and Construction against one another so he could maintain independence for the Furniture Division. Sutton said:

Louis was always approaching us, asking if he could come into our division, but we never agreed. I think he tried to keep his independence by playing us and Forestry off against one another. (Sutton 2005)

The 1993 minute book of the Committee of Management opens with a special note:

The meeting of the Victorian Branch Committee of Management in the month of March 1993 was its last meeting as a part of the Federated Furnishing Trade Society of Australasia.

From March 26, 1993, the Federated Furnishing Trade Society of Australasia became the *Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, FFTS Union Division*.

On and from March 26, 1993, the former Victorian Branch of the Federated Furnishing Trade Society of Australasia became the *Construction, Forestry, Mining And Energy Union, FFTS Union Victorian Divisional Branch*. (FFTS 1993)

The minutes of the final meeting of the independent FFTS Victoria Branch make no comment or give no hint whatsoever of their significance. They are very much focused on 'normal' business.

Kyriacou and Trevor Smith were often at odds, and the results on the shop floor were frequently intense and sometimes dangerous. When tensions rose particularly high, Leo Skourdoumbis said:

Forestry and us got involved in a big battle out in the field and it was precipitated by a breakdown in communications between Lou and Trevor Smith probably. They attempted to pinch our members, we retaliated—with a lot more success cause our product is a lot better than theirs. I did that at a factory ... called Big J windows out in Springvale. All forestry members, about 20 or 25 of them, signed over to us, and that precipitated an almighty blue. Their Secretary, Jane Calvert, and probably about 20 or 25 others, lured me to the factory the day after I pinched all her members. I drove through the gates and unbeknown to me they padlocked the gates behind me. I parked my car and they immediately descended on me, heckling and pushing. I went to see my members and it became pretty clear during the course of that day that they weren't going to let me out. I was being baited to go to my car, go on walk to your car, why don't you walk to your car. I'm all on my own except for my shop steward and I didn't want to get him into any fisticuffs. He rings the Union office to let them know what's going on. They were giving me a hard time and I was giving them lip as well. Louis, Alex, Michael and Dick Lowe then came to that factory and there was a bit of push and shove. And some of that was in the factory where the glass was so it became quite dangerous. In the end the workers had to separate us. When I did go to my car—I walked to the car with Alex Findlay, they'd smashed the windscreens and windows and let down the tyres. Tony White, one of their organizers, was standing there with an iron bar. I thought he was intending to hit me. So if I'd taken the bait and gone to my car to

escape I wouldn't have been able to go anywhere and I was parked round the back so I was out of view of everyone.

This caused a massive blue; we thought about pursuing it legally but I think it got raised with Stan Sharkey who was then the National Secretary of the CFMEU.

Bill Kely would have said that amalgamations would stop demarcations, but it certainly didn't, not in this case. (Skourdumbis 2005)

A similar incident took place at another workplace, involving Joe Patti. The two incidents caused enormous hostility between the two Branches, which already had delicate relations.

In 1997 the details of the rules of the amalgamation were still not known among the membership, or even by most of the officials. Frank Vari had started working as an organizer in 1994, one year after the amalgamation, and he assumed that at some point the FFTS were to be integrated into the Construction Division:

One day I was out on a job where there were a whole lot of forestry members and their official said to me, 'Well, one day we'll all be in the same Division anyway.' I didn't know what he meant so I came back to the office and asked Michael. He pulled out the Rules and then said, 'You'll just have to trust us and the legal team.' I told him I never would have worked here if I'd known we were going into Forestry. I was only here because I thought we were going into Construction. (Vari 2004)

The February 1998 COM meeting was a major turning point for the Union in several ways. First, Kyriacou and Findlay returned from an overseas trip and resigned one after the other. At the same meeting, Kyriacou reported that the NSW Branch was insolvent and that discussions were underway regarding the future restructuring of the Branch. Then he reported that the Queensland Branch was currently being restructured to reduce the expenditure of the Branch and improve its current financial position. In both cases, for Kyriacou, the causes of the problems were monetary.

There was a lot of background to this situation. Relations with the interstate Branches had continued to be problematic. One after another the Branches conflicted with the Federal and Victorian Branch leadership over coverage, service, and financial management. Kyriacou tried

to control the other Branches in the way that he controlled the Victorian Branch. He and other Victorian officials regularly visited other states to give assistance when a crisis arose. Such crises were frequent. This situation had become a drain on the personnel and financial resources of the Victorian Branch as it was, in effect, through the Federal Branch, holding the other Branches up. A number of Secretaries in a number of states had been removed from office. Kyriacou had become practised at removing people through threats of misconduct. The first had been Ken Carr, but several Secretaries of other state Branches fell by the same sword.

In Queensland and NSW, the Branches were accustomed to operating on state Awards but Kyriacou wanted them to shift to federal Awards. This was difficult to achieve because the Secretaries of the State Branches were not convinced of the merits of such a shift and were, at times, obstructive.

In 1998 Kyriakou and Findlay travelled to NSW and Queensland and the effect on both Branches was enormous. NSW Branch administration was handed over to the Divisional Office and Kyriacou became the signatory of the NSW Branch accounts. Also Kyriacou was empowered to negotiate with the Construction Division 'on a range of issues pertaining to improving the industrial management of the Branch'. (FFTS 1998–2000)

The fate of the Queensland Branch was much the same: the Secretary resigned and the administration of the Branch was taken over by Victoria. The vehicles were sold and discussions were held with the Construction Division to arrange for an organizer to service the Branch. Kyriacou described both of these events as if he were the grandfather of misbehaving children, but in the end he forced both Secretaries to stand aside with threats of exposure for misconduct. Although there was no proof to support these allegations, they did step aside.

In August 1998 an Agency Agreement was signed for the members of NSW. A few weeks later one was signed for the Queensland membership and this was followed in December for Tasmania. It is interesting in light of the Scheme of Amalgamation that in every case the agency agreements were brokered with the Construction Division, giving support to the perception that the FFTS was closer to them than to Forestry.

While Kyriacou was concerned to be 'on top' in any amalgamation scheme, in the end the FFTS were left in a state that made them vulnerable to the ambitions of the Forestry Division. When Kyriacou resigned as Federal Secretary there was virtually no federal organization—just

two state Branches, Victoria and South Australia, and South Australia had become very close with the Forestry Division.

Albert Littler believes that Kyriacou could have controlled the Forestry Division. He said:

The Furniture [Division] was stronger than the Forestry [Division], the Furniture [Division] was certainly richer—what Forestry had in its favour was that state Branches were intact, whereas Furniture's [state Branches] were not. (Littler 2005)

SCHISM AND INTEGRATION

Greed, for lack of a better word, is good! Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed—in all of its forms.

Gordon Gekko 1987

MICHAEL HARITOU TOOK on the job of Divisional Branch Secretary in an acting capacity. His first COM meeting in the position took place without a quorum. This did not bode well. Michael Mitten, the Chairman ruled: 'with the concurrence of the members, the meeting would go ahead so the Branch could continue to function and operate.' (FFTS 1998–2000) This ruling was in contravention of the rules—not a good omen at all.

Despite the unconstitutional nature of the meeting and the 'Acting' capacity of the new Secretary, there was no hesitation in pushing through some hardcore changes. The first was the composition of the Branch. The position of Assistant Secretary was abolished. Alex Findlay had occupied this position. Second, Lou Kyriacou was made Vice-President, ensuring his position on the COM would continue. Third, the Acting Secretary was granted the authority to develop a new classification and wage structure for staff and subsequently gave himself a 19 per cent wage rise, increasing his salary to \$74 000. Fourth, the COM agreed that the Branch would pay Kyriacou for ten hours a week to organize the regional areas around Mildura.

Michael Haritou had been a COM member and just before Carr's resignation he was appointed as a membership officer and subsequently

elected as an organizer. From the start he was close to Kyriacou, and Kyriacou was enthusiastic about him. Kyriacou was quick to report to the COM that Haritou 'had performed very impressively' after his first organizing work. (FFTS 1998–2000)

He was thrown into the deep end of the \$11.90 dispute and Ian Young remembers him being very effective:

Michael Haritou was the main organizer—we forged a strong friendship—I thought at that time he did a wonderful job. I totally supported him and he supported me. (Young 2005)

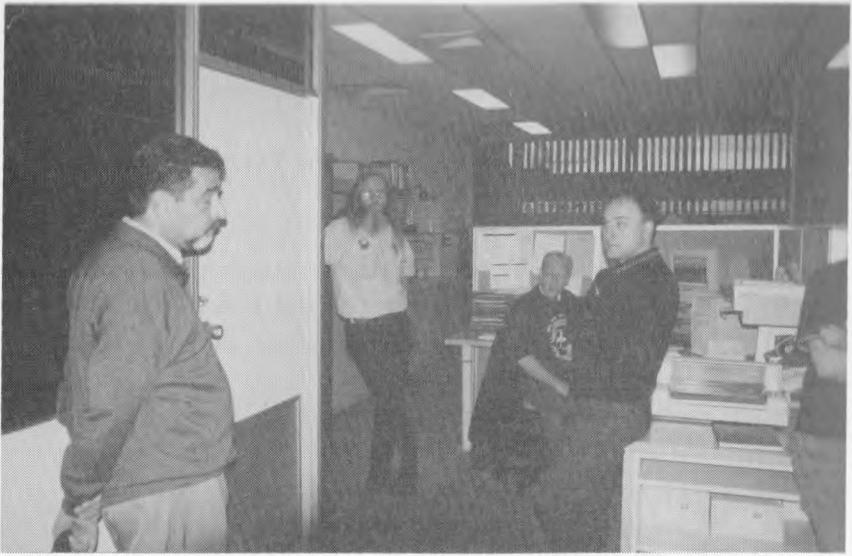
But others thought he was not good at the job.

He wasn't liked by the membership from the beginning. I always thought he was all wind and no action. The members didn't trust him. (Pati 2004–05)

As Haritou settled in as Secretary, it was not long before it became evident that his leadership was uninspired and uninspiring. It was difficulty to get quorums for the COM meetings. The August meeting took place without a quorum, and there was no meeting in September for lack of a quorum. The October meeting took place but the November meeting was cancelled. After the December meeting, there was not another until the following March. Haritou, it seemed, had learnt from Kyriacou that the most important thing was to keep the Branch funds buoyant but, without the drive of Kyriacou, his inclination was to do this by cutting costs. He kept office costs to a minimum; stopped production of the newsletter/journal; did not replace staff who left, forcing others to take on extra work—in particular, when the WorkCover officer left, he gave all of her work to Skourdoumbis and Vari, who already



Members' views about Michael Haritou as an organizer varied.



Leo Skourdoumbis, Dave O'Brien and Mick Doran ask Michael Haritou for clarity over the corruption charges.

had full loads as organizers. In April 2000 he increased union fees. (FFTS 1998–2000)

Skourdoumbis remembers looking forward to the new leadership and hoping that the new broom would sweep life and incentive into the Branch. The situation at DMS glass had always been a thorn in the side of the organizers. It was obvious that the members had lost trust in the organization and believed that any issues raised with the Union got back to the boss. Skourdoumbis suggested to Haritou that he could rebuild trust by calling a special meeting to reassure members that there was a new leadership. This did not happen and confidence in the new leadership started to fade. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

This was a difficult time for all unions. The Liberal Government was determined to undermine the ability of workers to organize and the political climate was one of right-wing ascendancy, not only in Australia but also around the world. It was as if a deadening cloud had descended that obscured vision and dulled inspiration. This was apparent in the minutes of August 2000 when Haritou gave the following report:

The ACTU Congress itself welcomed the new leadership team and apart from the normal reports at the Congress there was little to be reported. (FFTS 1998–2000)

It is a sad state of affairs when the report from the peak council cannot raise a flutter of interest in any matter except that there is a new leadership team.

Industrial

Right of Entry

The federal legislation of the Howard Government in March 1998 was beginning to have an effect on organizing in the furniture industry. It was making right of entry difficult. Some employers took advantage by raising questions with organizers when they tried to enter workplaces. Regular reports came to the Union of employers refusing organizers right of entry onto premises and the right to carry out inspections of the time and wages' records. In one factory, employees were sacked because of their membership of the Union.

A legal battle broke out in the middle of 1999 and once again the FFTS became the first Union in the firing line from federal regulations. The Howard Government had introduced the first round of its industrial legislation, which included the appointment of industrial advocates who had the power to bring charges against trade unions.

A company called Australian Timber Blinds Group was the first to access this legislation and its target was the FFTS. The legislation had forced Union organizers to carry permits to enable them to access members at their workplaces. The company tried to have organizers banned from the workplace by applying to have their permits revoked. This action did not come out of the blue—this company had a long history of non-compliance with industrial regulations and attempts to deny its workforce Union representation. In the late 1980s the Union had been called in to represent workers who were not receiving award wages. A couple of years later the company went into liquidation and closed down, refusing to pay the due entitlements to any of their employees. This left workers with many years of loyal service without a job and without the leave and redundancy entitlements that they had believed they would receive in compensation.

One year later the company re-opened under the name of Royal Image Pty Ltd, trading as the Australian Timber Blind Group. It continued to produce the same product with the same operating methods and even had the same foreman as the old company. Anonymous complaints from workers at the factory began to arrive at the Union office and in February 1998 organizers from the FFTS visited to try to find out

what was happening. The owners tried to stop the Union from talking to workers or obtaining any information about pay rates, so the Union got an order from the Commission to enable the Union organizers to examine the books. The owners made this difficult, and Joe Patti spent many hours trying to establish what had been paid and what was owed. He ended up convinced that the workers were owed somewhere in the vicinity of \$100 000. Joe Patti said:

We kept having to go back—the lawyers would always say—get more information and it was so hard to get because the company made it so difficult. Each time you'd go there, they'd not let you in, they'd call the police—sometimes you'd get three cars come down, the police would just laugh—instead of thinking it was a Union official, they thought it was a robbery or something, they'd been told on the phone it was urgent ... The company complained to the Employment Advocate who decided to make their first case against a Union. They applied to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to have the permits to attend the premises of myself and another organizer revoked. The case was thrown out because it was so weak. One of the directors claimed that I had called her a 'stupid Greek lady'; that I had said this in Greek to her. A lot was made of that in the case, but as I said: 'I stayed right through the court case. I could hardly hold my breath, because obviously, I don't talk Greek and they were making a big deal out of it that I had called her this in Greek. Obviously I couldn't have talked to her in Greek and that could be proven.' (Patti 2004–05)

The Employment Advocate had not checked its facts. Not only was the information about the use of language wrong, but also the company owed the workers hundreds of thousands of dollars, and had a long history of putting obstacles between the workers and their Union.

They picked a real bad one, because if they had bothered to check they would have found that the company was doing absolutely everything wrong. They didn't even ask us. In court the Advocate said—the unions don't like to talk to us. (Patti 2004–05)

During this period the membership became disenchanted with the leadership. It became evident that Haritou's decision not to have an Assistant Secretary left a vacuum and often Skourdoumbis was called on to play the role, but on top of his existing load.

Some members found Haritou inspiring industrially but they seem to be in the minority. A more typical view is that expressed by John Pepas. He remembers conditions slipping away as the negotiation around a new EBA became fraught:

He'd (Haritou) let the EBA run well over the time that it is supposed to finish. If it was a twelve-month EBA it'd be 18 months before we'd be anywhere near finishing the next one. This suited the company, they just used to drag the EBAs out all the time further and further so in a two-year period they'd be getting a three-year EBA.

If you disagreed with him, he'd start screaming and carrying on and getting very defensive. If you just took it, he'd keep going, but he'd calm down if you said something to him. We thought he was all bluff and bluster and that's the way he was. If the boys got a little bit ambitious with their requests he'd come back with negative things like—if you insist on this—be prepared for a big battle because they're going to dig their heels in, they wouldn't do this and they wouldn't do that. That used to frighten the shit out of everybody because nobody wants to lose time and money over a strike. (Pepas 2005)

The outbreak of redundancies in the early 1980s had led to the ACTU developing policy for shorter hours. At Pilkington Glass the 35-hour week was won in 1982 and was celebrated as a victory. It had been argued for not only as immediate benefit to the workers at the plant but also to help ease the rising levels of unemployment which was being felt bitterly in Geelong. The company agreed to the demand in return for some cost offsets; in this instance it was the changeover to electronic payrolls.

In the negotiations for the EBA in 1998 Kyriacou proposed to the workers that they accept a pay rise in exchange for their thirty-five hour week. This was rejected avidly. However Kyriacou was persistent. His argument was that the company was refusing to agree to any pay rise unless the 35-hour week was sacrificed. Union members argued against

that. They believed that even if they did not get a pay rise in the current EBA, they would get one in the next EBA, whereas if they gave up the 35-hour week, they would never get it back. Several meetings were held at the factory and a motion was passed that the 35-hour week was not up for negotiation. Still Kyriacou continued to bring it up.

After several meetings with the same outcome, a meeting was held at seven one morning. This was normal. The night shift were coming off, the day shift stopped work to attend and the afternoon shift was also able to attend. Louis Kyriacou and Alex Findlay ran the meeting. They said at first that it was an information-and-report-back session and would not involve any voting. The report of many issues in the EBA dragged on, and several of the night shift left the meeting. The timing of the meeting became very important. The longer it dragged on, the more men who had stayed on after night shift drifted off home. After all they had already been working all night and had to be back at work that night again, so sleep was a necessity for them. It was known at Pilkington that the night shift was the most militant; the weakest shift in Union terms was the afternoon shift. As time dragged not only did the numbers decline but also the balance between the night shift and the afternoon shift changed. Damian Cooke, the shop steward, was shocked:

Then it got to about 1 o'clock and this 35-hour week came up. I was arguing then, they can't be talking about that—people have gone home. (Cooke 2006)

Discussion dragged on. Kyriacou argued that there would be no pay rise unless the 35-hour week was given up. Others argued that even if that were the result, a pay rise would happen next time round, but once the 35-hour week was lost, it would be lost for good. Cooke remembers:

It was around about 20 past two, bearing in mind that the meeting started at seven o'clock in the morning ... it was decided that there would be a vote. No work was taking place. People knocking off at seven o'clock in the morning they're sitting there all day, after work, after working eight hours, they've been on since eleven the night before. At 2.20 in the afternoon 90 per cent of those people had gone home because obviously they were coming back in at 11 that night. There was

Steve Dodds and myself; we were the last two that were on night shift to stay there. I argued very aggressively that we should not be discussing it—the members have said at every meeting we've had we do not want nothing to do with it ... It's not fair, there's people that have gone home, the afternoon shift, some of them had not even come in—at 20 past two in the afternoon a vote was declared and the 35-hour week was voted out. (Cooke 2006)

Despite the delays the vote was close and Cooke called for a division, but Kyriacou refused to accept the call:

Louis and the organizers said it wasn't that close—I still reckon that it was. And they must have too, or why wouldn't they let us split the room. (Cooke 2006)

Workers at Pilkington Glass were also disadvantaged in the 2000 EBA over an income protection scheme. In general it had become evident that the FFTS had fallen behind in providing their members with income protection after the Kennett Government had scuttled the State WorkCover legislation, leaving workers with little income protection after any workplace injury. The ACTU and other unions had responded by developing income protection schemes to cover the losses. In 1998 Frank Vari began discussions with an insurance company to develop an income protection scheme tailored to suit the membership and then to have the scheme included in the next round of EBAs.

The one exception was Pilkington Glass in Geelong, which was organized by Haritou. The Pilkington workers were already disillusioned with the Union leadership in 2000 when they were in the Commission in 2000 finalising some sticking points in their EBA. The Geelong workers overheard discussion among the Laverton workers about income protection and they asked Frank Vari what it was. When he explained they asked Haritou why it had not been included in their EBA. It had not been put on the table, it had never been asked for at Geelong and now it was too late. The workers were furious, they were used to being leaders in the field in terms of the conditions that they won and they were not at all impressed to have missed out on an important condition that had become standard throughout the rest of the industry.

Membership

Amalgamation

Even after Kyriacou had retired he was still trying to organize integration into the Construction and General Division. The April COM report said:

M. Haritou reported on the progress of discussions between the FFTS Division and the Construction and General Division at a national level. M. Haritou announced that the outcome of these discussions has provided a break through in that the FFTS Division will now become a Branch of the Construction and General Division. He made it clear however, that the FFTS Division will continue to have independence especially with respect to financial and industrial matters. Discussions will continue throughout the year 2000 with a view to finalizing the structure prior to the end of the year. (COM Minutes April 2000)

In August Haritou reported that an agreement with Construction was completed and that the next step would include three-way discussions with Forestry. (FFTS 1998–2000)

Kyraicou said of this:

And we did try in the end, before I left, me and Michael, to convince the Construction Division to go with them, not with the Timber Workers Union. We reached an agreement, but of course the Executives had to support it, but then I left, and when I left that was the end of it. I don't know what they've done now. (Kyriacou 2005)

An agency agreement was made with C & G in NSW. Brad Parker had been working with the NSW Construction Branch as an education officer and was asked if he would take on the organizing of the FFTS NSW members. When Brad started it was some months since the Secretary, Sid Wales, had resigned from the Branch and the membership had fallen away. Those remaining were not enthusiastic about the Union because they had not seen an organizer for a very long time.

In the Office

The high staff turnover during the Kyriacou years had settled and there was a stable team of organizers. Three of the survivors began to become

involved in the leadership of the Branch. Each person had been reluctant to take on and to continue the job. But each had done the job with zeal and enthusiasm and developed solid relationships with the members.

Leo Skourdoumbis had begun working at the Union in 1992 as an information officer with responsibilities to produce a journal and answer telephone enquiries. Taking the initiative to follow up telephone enquiries Skourdoumbis quickly became involved in organizing work. After twelve months Skourdoumbis was ready to move on. He had enjoyed the work; he felt that he had been given the chance to develop a range of new skills, but did not believe that the Branch was being run with members' interests uppermost, as he believed they should be. Kyriacou accepted his resignation, shook his hand and said he hoped they would always be friends. But once Skourdoumbis had left Kyriacou, Haritou and Findlay pestered him so doggedly that he agreed to continue as an organizer.

Frank Vari was content playing football for Port Melbourne and doing odd jobs until, with a mixture of serendipity and intention, Vari became an organizer with the Miscellaneous Workers Union. In 1994, after five-and-half years he left that job because he felt he needed a break from the rigours and long hours of organizing. He was asked to come and work at the FFTS. At first he was reluctant, but Kyriacou and Findlay promised it would be different at the FFTS so Vari hesitantly agreed.

Joe Patti was a furniture machinist who had been a shop steward for many years when he agreed to come into the office and take up a position as an organizer. During his time as a shop steward he had been asked many times to take on the position of organizer but he had always refused. Eventually he became dissatisfied with the service that the Union was providing its members and decided perhaps he could do a better job of it, so he agreed to come into the office and work as an organizer.

Kyriacou had left the shop in the hands of Haritou who he thought would continue to do his bidding. But as Haritou settled into the job he started to want more control for himself. Haritou began to resent Kyriacou's continued interference in the running of the Branch. He also resented the high costs involved with employing Kyriacou's daughter, Julie Pagonis, as an industrial officer. Not only was she was on expensive consultancy rates but also she was flown in and out of the state to work. She lived in NSW and Tasmania and was provided with a living-away-from-home allowance even though she stayed at her father's house.

Tensions began to emerge between Kyriacou and Haritou. At the same time Haritou took the reins, the more dissatisfied other staff

became because he seemed only interested in saving money and tried to do it at the expense of service to members. Joe Patti felt that he was unable to provide the best service to his members because Haritou would not allow money to be spent on court cases when they were needed to support members. Others were unhappy about the lack of a journal and general information to members.

In mid-2000 Skourdoumbis resigned again. Kyriacou called a meeting with Haritou and the three senior organizers. It was agreed there would be more involvement by the officials in the direction and running of the Branch. Vari suggested that Skourdoumbis should become the Assistant Secretary. He said:

For a long period of time Leo had been given the job, he was the guy that was selected to do a lot of the shitty jobs, the jobs that Michael did not want to do himself ... so Leo had earned his stripes. He was assisting other organizers in difficult places, in factories where the boss became aggressive, in politically sensitive places, it was normally Leo that drew the short straw, so for me it was a no-brainer that Leo was the guy that should get the nod. (Vari 2004–05)

It was also agreed that Vari would become the Assistant Federal Secretary and Patti would become the State Vice-President.

Allegations

On 1 November 2000 an impromptu meeting took place that would change everything. As six men prepared to meet, none of them had any idea of the gravity of the next hours or the Pandora's box that was about to be opened and the firestorm that would be unleashed. Kyriacou may have resigned from the position of Secretary but he still walked into the office and commanded that the senior officers attend a meeting. Kyriacou, Haritou, Mitten, Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti sat around the table in the front office and Kyriacou immediately started to accuse Haritou of being corrupt. Patti remembered that it was about travel expenses and said:

They didn't tell us how it worked. You might be here a long time but I'd never understood how it worked. (Patti 2004–05)

Vari remembered:

He said, 'You've been double dipping.' I don't remember him [Haritou] responding to any of the allegations. But what I do remember is Lou was getting angrier and angrier. The more Haritou refused to respond, the angrier Lou got until in the end he stormed out, slammed the door and then I remember Leo turning to the President, Michael Mitten, and asking him, 'Well what do we do now? We haven't been involved in anything like this, you're the President of the Branch—give us some guidance.' And he [Mitten] basically said, don't worry about it, sweep it under the carpet—let's go and have some lunch. It's just Lou blowing off steam. (Vari 2004–05)

During the meeting Mitten also told Kyriacou, 'Don't go there,' implying that if accusations of corruption started flying they would not stop with Haritou.

Skourdoumbis said:

The two Michaels were going, let's go to lunch, let's go to lunch. I was the opposite I did not want to go to lunch with them. I wanted to continue the meeting, but they all got up and walked over to The Limerick. Louis was already there, sitting behind us.

Michael says, 'What are you having for lunch?' I said I don't want fucking lunch; I want to continue this meeting. They ordered lunch and I said, 'I don't want lunch!' I actually leant forward so my arms covered the table and I think he did order lunch, I think he ordered another plate and they ate it.

I got up and walked out. My recollection is they had lunch. As far as I was concerned the gloves were off after that meeting. It was just their behaviour, the way the two Michaels behaved at that meeting—let's just sweep it under the carpet and go and have some lunch.

Louis was there too—so they all went to have lunch at the same place and it just struck me that they were all the same. I suppose I didn't want to have lunch, partly because I was trying to say that I was nothing like them. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

The three organisers then went to a coffee bar to discuss among themselves, and agreed that they could not ignore the allegations nor walk away from them. They all had close relationships with the members and felt strongly that for the sake of the wider Union they had a responsibility to follow the matter through and uncover the truth. Their discussion was interrupted by the appearance of Haritou who asked them to come back to the office and let him prove that the allegations were baseless.

But back in his office Haritou began to dig his own grave. He showed them a folder that contained requisition orders that he had signed as the Secretary to authorize the payment of invoices. He flicked through the papers, turning from one invoice to the next. Vari was impatient to hear Haritou say something that would prove his innocence and remembered:

Michael said, 'No, it's all bullshit, have a look at all these requisitions.' He showed us one, then he showed us another. We weren't really interested in looking because we wanted to hear from him. Then he flicked over the third or fourth page and I stopped him. I said, 'Hang on. What's that?' He said, 'Don't worry about it', and flicked to the next page. I said, 'Hang on—you can't call us in here, ask us to have a look at these requisitions and then say don't worry about it. What's that page?' It was a speeding fine—I can't remember the exact amount—it was a speeding fine incurred by Michael Haritou that he'd authorized a cheque to be written and for the Union to pay on his behalf, which was clearly incorrect. It was wrong. Everyone knew where you stood in respect to that stuff. Everyone knew what the Union's position was with respect to traffic infringements—you paid for them yourself ... that alone made us very suspicious about the goings on. (Vari 2004–05)

There had been a motion on the books since February 1985 that said:

L. Kyriacou replied that there is one policy now for parking fines and that is if an organizer no matter who he is, will pay their own parking fines. (FFTS 1986)

The next Committee of Management meeting was two weeks later on 14 November. Kyriacou had written two letters to the COM to have

the financial accusation raised and he brought his concerns up at the meeting. He outlined the documents he wanted to see: petty cash, Visa card statements used on behalf of the Union, requisition accounts, petrol and maintenance/service records of all vehicles, insurance money for the members, the Eureka Fund account, Glass Strike Fund, Glass Picnic Account, rent money paid by FIRST Superannuation, money received from the FIRST superannuation for the wages and expenses for Lou Kyriacou, money from the EBAs paid by the employers, full details of the companies and amounts received, and account deposits and withdrawals.

This caused lengthy debate but in the end Haritou took control by having a motion passed that seemed to address the concerns, but actually flouted its intention. The motion called for an auditor's report that would be delivered to Haritou. It also said it was inappropriate for Kyriacou to use the Branch's auditor as he had proposed. The motion also called for all the correspondence to be kept confidential.

Kyriacou had raised questions about the Glass Strike Fund and the Glass Picnic Fund. Questions had been asked about these funds for many years. Workers who had been at Yenckens in the 1980s when the Glass Strike Fund had first been set up were aware that the money had not all been spent settling strike pay and had never been satisfied as to where the money had gone. He had also raised questions about the Eureka Fund, which, at the time most people had never heard of.

In the next weeks the organizers continued to question Haritou, trying to gain assurance that the accusations were groundless, but the more they questioned him and the more oblique he became, the more they became suspicious. Patti remembers staying back late with Haritou, trying to convince him that it was all conjecture. Patti, at the time, would have liked to believe this, but he could not get past the fact that Haritou was refusing to open the books:

That made it worse for me. I said we'd order the employers to open their books. It was a normal thing to ask if there were questions. (Patti 2004-05)

Vari also remembered:

We spent the next three or four Friday afternoons in his office, continually asking him the questions. I remember Leo kept

asking. 'Have you done this Michael? You're the State Secretary. We don't know if we can be comfortable with a State Secretary who's got his hand in the till. Have you done it?' And he'd keep denying it. Then I would say to him, 'Well, it's no good denying it—you need to clear your name. The only way you're going to clear your name is to open up the books and show everyone that Lou is talking shit.' But he wouldn't do that. (Vari 2004–05)

Vari phoned the Union solicitor, Ryan, Carlisle & Thomas. He told Phillip Gardener, who handled the Union's account, that serious allegations had been made and they needed assistance to determine a proper process. Vari was disheartened and disappointed when Gardener replied that he was only responsible to the State Secretary and refused to discuss the matter with Vari. Soon after, a meeting was held between Haritou and his solicitors with Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti. Skourdoumbis's impression of this meeting was that it was designed to convince the organizers that there was no basis for their concerns.

Picnic

The depth of the problem in the Branch was reflected in the annual picnic held on 4 December 2000. Greg Wheeler was the shop steward at Pilkington in Oakleigh and thought it was the 'worst picnic ever'. He remembers talking members into attending and ending up being so disappointed and embarrassed that he wished he hadn't. He felt so strongly that he wrote to the COM and perhaps unwittingly created a metaphor of the Branch at the time:

There was not enough food for everybody ... soft drinks were not cold, steaks and sausages were not cooked properly, not enough bread rolls, one selection of salad, no dessert, no fruits, no lollies for the kids. (Wheeler 2000)

If the food was scarce and lacklustre there was no shortage of drama and speculation. It began when an anonymous young boy dumped a bag full of numbered envelopes in the middle of the picnic area. The envelopes contained leaflets that accused Haritou of mis-doing. It exposed his salary as \$76 000 a year; it accused him of using Union funds and equipment for personal use; it alleged that the Union bus had been used to take his family camping and much more and

ended with: 'Now you know why Haritou increased your Union dues!!!!' It said that it was 'Authorized by: FFTS members for financial accountability'. (Miscellaneous 2000)

As people pulled the leaflets from the envelopes and read them, they yelled out to Michael asking him to explain.

I was sitting at one of the tables and then the leaflets sort of appeared, like by magic. Everybody started reading them and everybody started, of course it was getting later in the day and everybody was a bit primed. People were singing out, 'Hey Michael, what about this?' He would not elaborate at all. He went to water. (Pepas 2005)

Skourdoumbis was standing next to Haritou when the leaflets surfaced. He said:

Michael didn't do anything, he didn't try to deny the accusations, and so I asked him about it. That was a key moment because Michael didn't deny anything that was in it. He didn't stand his ground to reassure members, to reassure us. He just pissed off. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

The picnic was later referred to in the February COM minutes as 'that inglorious day'. (FFTS 2001) The leaflet was destabilizing. Wheeler felt the pressure at his workplace. He was afraid the leaflet would disillusion members and cast aspersions on the credibility of the Union so he told members not to take any notice of it. (Wheeler 2005)

The December COM meeting was a turning point in the history of the Branch. The meeting started with hostility between Haritou and Kyriacou making veiled accusations and counter accusations against each other. Haritou had been in touch with the auditors and was trying to show that Kyriacou's financial management was less than transparent, in particular regarding two funds known as the Eureka Fund and the Glass Strike Fund. Kyriacou insisted he wanted to examine the books to show that his accusations against Haritou and Mitten were accurate. The auditors had written to the Committee asking that they be able to examine the finances to make the required reports without hindrance from either Haritou or Kyriacou. At this point Frank Vari intervened and moved a motion that shifted the control of the investigation from Kyriacou, to Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti. Vari moved:

Due to the fact that it is deemed inappropriate for the Divisional Branch Secretary M. Haritou or the Divisional Secretary L. Kyriacou to act on behalf of the Branch in relation to this matter, this Branch Committee of Management resolves that:

As per Rule 42d, the Branch Assistant Secretary L. Skourdoumbis shall, on behalf of the Branch, seek advice from and assume the responsibility for liaising with the Union's lawyers and auditors. Further, L. Skourdoumbis may, if he deems necessary, seek the assistance of senior officers, Joe Patti and Frank Vari in exercising this duty. (FFTS 2001)

Haritou moved an amendment that John O'Brien be included in the team and Vari accepted the amendment. At that point the minutes record:

The debate becomes rowdy here, with accusations and assertions flying backward and forward without reference to the chair. (FFTS 2001)

Haritou had one parting shot at Kyriacou. He moved:

That the Divisional Branch auditor be instructed to audit the Glass Strike Fund and Glass Picnic Fund commencing from 1 July 1988 to 31 December 1997. (FFTS 2001)

The significance of this order only became evident later.

The investigating party went to Pratt Peterson where they were able to view the financial statements that had been moved there sometime in the past weeks. They felt that the auditors were cordial but unhelpful. The Board Room was made available and the financial statements were brought in bit by bit. For a day and a half the books were inspected, despite obstacles that were raised from time to time by the auditors. Kyriacou seemed to know exactly what he was looking for and went straight to records that proved his allegations.

After a day and a half the auditors had been contacted by Haritou's lawyers advising them that the inspection would have to be abandoned. Even so plenty of evidence had already been seen to make it clear that both Michael Haritou and Michael Mitten had been in receipt of monies that they were not entitled to. There was also evidence that Kyriacou had

been taking money to which he was not entitled: this included money for accommodation expenses when travelling to Mildura where he stayed in his own house.

But that was not all. Vari explains the point at which things took a shift:

We were going through the records and there were a number of things being picked up regarding Michael Mitten and Michael Haritou. Then I noticed that Lou was claiming overnight expenses for his trips to Mildura when he had a house there. When I questioned him about it he flew off the handle and said: 'What you think I'm going to do, stay in my fucking house for free?' (Vari 2004–05)

Haritou had stopped coming in to work during office hours, but would appear at 4.30 in the morning and sign cheques and remove documents from the office. This left an easy situation in the office and Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti were left to take over the day-to-day running of the Union, although without any real authority. Early in January Vari and Haritou met and Vari believed that they had reached an agreement about Haritou offering a resignation, but soon after Vari was told by a COM member that Haritou was now demanding \$100 000 to leave quietly.

Advice was now sought from another legal firm, Maurice Blackburn Cashman Lawyers. One of their solicitors, Josh Bornstein, had worked at the Branch under Kyriacou, so he was familiar with the people involved and the Union structure. Bornstein suggested that his firm undertake a preliminary inspection of the accounts, the Rules and the COM minutes. The investigation was not easy. First, they had to get hold of the accounts; then they had to match them to COM meetings to see if any of the dubious transactions had been authorized, then they had to study the rules to see in what ways they had been infringed. This was difficult enough but made more so by the barriers that were erected by the auditors and accountants of the Branch, who saw the investigation as extraneous to their briefs.

There was an abundance of evidence that suggested that Haritou had learnt more from Kyriacou in financial management than how to keep the Union books in the black. The double dipping had been going on for much longer than Haritou's period as Secretary. A meeting with

Kyriacou was called on 23 December. At this stage, the greatest anomaly seemed to be the existence of an activity on an account called the Eureka Fund account. It was a fund to which Haritou and Kyriacou were the signatories, but the fund was outside the control of the COM so it operated like a secret account. One of the difficulties was establishing how money went into and came out of this fund. Bornstein questioned Kyriacou about the fund. Kyriacou tried to brush off the questions, and finally commented that the account was for political purposes. However the Rules of the Branch were clear: money used for political purposes must be authorized by the COM. Kyriacou was unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for the existence of, and the transactions on the Eureka Fund. As the questioning continued Kyriacou complained that he felt sick and left the meeting. In a rather bizarre twist the group received a phone call later that day. Kyriacou was in hospital after having a heart attack.

The confusion felt by the organizers at this time was immense. They all visited Kyriacou in the hospital but none of them felt comfortable. Vari did not stay:

I walked in and walked straight out and then went for a walk around Richmond because I felt so uncomfortable. (Vari 2004–05)

As the officials started talking to other staff members, Union members and COM members about the events, it became apparent that there was only one person who supported Michael Haritou, the organizer Rick Maher, who said that Haritou was the best Secretary he had ever had.

The solicitors had completed their investigation by early January. A special and unofficial COM meeting was called to show members the report. It detailed breaches of several rules by Haritou, Mitten and Kyriacou; in particular Rule 42 that dealt with the fiscal responsibilities of the Branch Secretary, and Rule 49 that set out the authority required by the COM for the operation of bank accounts. The investigation had found that the Eureka Fund did indeed exist without ever having been authorized by the COM. Withdrawals and deposits had been made without reference to the COM: it was never audited; it existed without the knowledge of the COM or without any accounting records being included in the financial reports to the COM—yet it contained large amounts of money and from May to October 2000 over \$25 000 had been withdrawn.

The report also detailed double dipping on travel expenses and the Rules that had been infringed.

It showed that in breach of Rules 51(a) and 44(d) Haritou had authorized the payment of travel expenses that were not incurred and the beneficiaries of these expenses were Haritou, Kyriacou and Mitten. The amounts detailed were Haritou \$1944, Kyriacou \$1134 and Mitten \$810. It also addressed Rule 44 (d) that specified that no salaried official should receive payment except salary and, when necessary, travelling expenses on account of any duties performed by him during the usual office hours. Yet Haritou had paid himself honoraria on two occasions worth a total of \$3727.

Rule No. 51(a) allowed for payment of lost wages for members or delegates taken away from their employment on Union business. Sums paid to Mitten for lost wages of \$4183.60 were detailed and these were compared to the books from his workplace that showed that he had not lost wages and in any case his wages were significantly less than the amounts he had claimed from the Union. The report also outlined unauthorized payment of traffic infringements and petrol expenses to Michael Haritou between December 1998 and March 2000 and unauthorised use of monies from the Glass Picnic Fund. This fund was established to pay for the annual Glass Picnic and any excess monies were to be transferred to the Glass Strike Fund. There had been withdrawals from 1996 that were not transferred into the Strike Fund including one payment of \$10 000 to the mysterious Eureka Fund. The report recommended that:

Charges of misappropriation of funds of the Union be brought against Haritou. Notifying the police of the misappropriation to determine if criminal charges should be laid against Michael Haritou. And that all monies that had been wrongly received should be repaid. (FFTS 2001)

Bornstein said:

I remember it quite vividly because ... at the Ringwood meeting I had a document that I'd prepared and I spoke to. I found that quite a traumatic meeting because I was shattering these people's faith in their leadership. It's upsetting even to remember it still ... I remember the shocked looks on their

faces. It was quite confronting. I just went through, this is what we've examined, this is what we've concluded. They were quite stunned and very upset. One in particular, I remember a number of them saying, 'I'm staggered and disgusted and I cannot believe this.' (Bornstein 2005)

Greg Wheeler remembers the meeting also. It was his first COM meeting but as it had been called at short notice he had no choice but to take his young daughter with him. He recalls the gravity of the report and the heavy emotions that hung in the air, but he also remembers with some embarrassment that in complete contrast his young daughter stood on the table and sang and danced. She was perhaps the symbol of hope in that meeting that seemed so gloomy as those around the table talked about how they could drag their Union out of the pit into which it had fallen. The first thing they needed to do was to inform the membership. The information would shake the trust of the members and so it was vital that the officials and Committee members delivered it directly. Skourdoumbis and Vari began visiting the workplaces to explain what had happened.

As Kyriacou recovered from his heart attack he rang Skourdoumbis continually:

Louis was pestering me over the phone—incessantly from the time he had his heart attack in December into early January. I was starting to get a clear picture that what Louis had told me was lies and he hadn't told me the full truth of his involvement ... One Saturday morning he rang asking me what was going on and I started to question him, quite directly asking what his involvement was, what he had done. I'd heard that Michael was mounting some allegations about him. About brown paper bags of money ... I gave Lou a mouthful about all this sort of stuff and made it clear to him that if he wasn't clean—and it was becoming apparent that he wasn't—we were going to lump him in the same boat as Michael and he could fuck off as well.

When I finished speaking I didn't hear anybody at the other end. I thought he'd hung up. I said, 'Lou, Lou, are you still there?' He said, 'Yes I'm still here. I'm going now. See ya.' And he hung up. And I've never spoken to him since. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

Kyriacou ceased phoning and sent a written resignation from his position as Federal Secretary. However the emerging leadership of the Branch had no intention of leaving allegations hanging in the air without evidence to determine whether or not they were accurate.

The next point of contact was the National Secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union (CFMEU), John Maitland. Skourdoumbis and Vari had barely spoken to the CFMEU leadership and had trouble getting hold of Maitland, although they knew he was in town that day. They eventually tracked him down at the Canada Hotel in Carlton. They explained the situation in the Branch and asked for assistance. Maitland was surprised that he had not heard about this situation from Haritou, Kyriacou or Findlay, all of whom he knew. At the time he thought the situation was serious but straightforward and simply required adequate proof that the allegations would stand up. Vari was confident that the CFMEU would deal with the issue expeditiously because Reg Coates, from the Miners' Division, was with Maitland and walked away in disgust when he heard the allegations. Skourdoumbis, however, felt apprehensive.

Michael Mitten chaired the February COM. A large number of resolutions were passed to enable the continued running of the Branch and the investigation of the finances to continue. Vari, Skourdoumbis and Patti were to run the Union, litigation was to be initiated on 14 February, a number of motions were passed that spelt out processes required for expenditure to be authorized, and the rules that had been infringed by the financial mismanagement were identified.

Haritou's offer to leave quietly if given \$100 000 plus entitlements and the car was rejected. He was instructed to attend the office during business hours. It was reiterated that officials and employees of the Union were entitled to ten days' sick pay a year. The former leadership were present at this first of the post-Haritou meetings. Kyriacou sent a letter offering his full cooperation with any resolutions of the Committee. Alex Findlay attended in person as a visitor with a long list of matters he wanted raised. The meeting was intent upon establishing a forward path that involved identifying and rectifying the mistakes of the recent past; it had no time for the complaints of someone they saw as part of the problem and who did not appear to be addressing a solution.

March 2001

The effects of the crisis were showing in the membership. At the March meeting there were 78 resignations and 69 new members. This was the

first time since the membership numbers were recorded in the minutes that there were more resignations than recruitments.

The March COM maintained focus on the task of continuing to uncover the truth behind the allegations of financial misconduct and setting up structures that would enable the continued functioning of the Branch and place proper checks and balances on financial transactions. Documents had been disappearing out of the office so the locks were changed to stop unauthorized people entering. It was decided to appoint Ernie Landers, an accountant with a background in forensic accounting, to help establish the full financial situation. He began to go through the books systematically and discovered significant gaps in the documents. He was convinced that someone had taken material out of the office. In particular, he noticed that the year 1998 was missing. He found a lot of irregularities in the books and recommended that Sims Lockwood who specialized in forensic auditing be appointed to report on the finances.

The Committee also decided to dismiss Julie Pagonis, Kyriacou's daughter, as the Committee was outraged when it realized how much money she was being paid. She was sent a letter in March 2001 but refused to accept the termination, claiming that her contract was valid for two years from 1 July 2000. She produced a contract that contained amazing conditions. Her pay rate was \$250 a day, and she was to get \$232 a day for overnight travel stay, plus \$70 per day travel allowance. On top of that there was a clause that she must receive 12 months' notice and that if the notice was not given the FFTS was to compensate her for the remaining period of the contract. Pagonis claimed that the CFMEU owed her \$211 250 for breach of contract. (FFTS 2001-02) During this dispute it became evident that when Pagonis was in Melbourne and claiming overnight accommodation allowance, she was staying with her father and that they were joint directors of her company.

While the Branch was moving towards resolution at that level, Haritou was still the Divisional Secretary within the CFMEU and changing that situation required action within the CFMEU. Nothing seemed to have happened at an official level after the meeting with John Maitland. The Branch officials began to make personal contact everywhere they could, trying to understand what was causing delays and asking how they could move to get something done. They received little help: some sections of the organization were supportive without any concrete assistance, but others acted as if the problems of the Branch were insignificant.

Haritou was trying to work the numbers in the CFMEU. He had some advantages. He had a certain amount of respect that came from his association with the strength and wealth of the Victorian Branch and he was known in the wider national CFMEU circles whereas the new team were not. He also had some friends and supporters within the CFMEU. From the time of the earliest allegations he had been in touch with close associates, such as Brad Parker in NSW. Parker and Haritou had consulted almost daily about the work in the NSW Branch. At first Haritou passed the allegations off as being unimportant and suggested that it was Kyriacou letting off steam. As the evidence became more substantial he claimed it was Kyriacou's fault and that he had only doing what he had been taught and that if he got some crumbs, Kyriacou got the bakery.

Haritou's friends and contacts would have been insignificant without the fact that in the CFMEU itself hostilities and divisions were rife. The FFTS matter became contaminated with much bigger blues than those dominating the CFMEU. Skourdoumbis said:

We were unaware, at the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, that the fight that we had undertaken, that we thought was about cleaning up corruption and corrupt officials was also going to take in the issue of internal CFMEU politics.

We only became aware of that when we spoke to John Maitland and I don't remember the specifics of what he said to us at the Canada Hotel, but I got this feeling in my gut, that for them it was going to be a bigger issue than just Haritou. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

Alex Bukareka, the Assistant Secretary of the Construction Division challenged the National Secretary, John Sutton. The NSW and Queensland Branches supported Sutton. The WA and Victorian Branches supported Bukareka's challenge. Sutton made accusations, shown on television nationally, on *Four Corners*, of corruption in the WA Branch that led to extreme bitterness. This battle had begun to brew in December at the very same time that the Victorian FFTS had been dealing with allegations of corruption. Underlying the allegations made by Sutton were longstanding and extremely bitter rivalries between the two major unions in the construction industry, the Builders Labourers Federation and the Building Workers Industrial Union. The challengers realized that they were unable to change anything with the current rules, which

favoured the incumbent leadership, so they made an application to the Federal Court to have the rules changed.

While the case was proceeding, the battled raged. The numbers in the Construction Division were all-important. The dispute led to accusations, and counter-accusations, and bitterness, rancour and vitriol became commonplace. On the one hand some people were being accused of involvement with organized crime and on the other an incumbent leadership was being threatened. This was not an environment that enabled anyone to sit back calmly and objectively examine the pros and cons of the Victorian Branch situation. Rather, it was a situation where everything was measured according to how it would affect the line-up in the Construction Division.

The allegations against the Victorian Branch leadership were dragged into this quagmire and dealt with along factional lines rather than being taken as an issue in its own right. The members of the Victorian Branch of Construction were vocal in supporting a proper investigation and outcome. Martin Kingham said:

The dominant factor was our vision of a more effective Victorian CFMEU, a more effective structure that maintains higher standards is the driving thing because we have had an alliance with the Furnishing Trades since way back from the start.

Also because of the scrutiny, in particular about the CFMEU in terms of the royal commission, we had to deal with this matter very seriously. We have a documented code of practice in our Branch that is applied all the way through to honorary officials, shop stewards. Allegations are investigated and, if appropriate, action is taken under the rules. And so when allegations erupted over there, of course, it was an internal Union matter and that should be investigated by the Union and dealt with and not blocked or hidden or prevented from being dealt with, so we were supportive of what Skourdoumbis and Vari were doing to pursue the investigation of it and to deal with the people and determine the level of proof. (Kingham 2005)

John Maitland saw it this way:

John Sutton was courting Louis Kyriakou and Michael Haritou. They were the incumbents. He signed a memorandum of

agreement that they would go into construction. That was never implemented because the internal enquiry into the irregularities actually led us to make a decision on what would happen with that particular situation ... That was a long and bitter struggle to get to that situation which was very much caught up with the power struggle in Construction ... You can say that in Victoria the Construction Division was more willing to listen to the new leadership coming through and essentially dismiss the other leadership as corrupt, they were willing to do that ... I think they'd built up a relationship over a long time. Working with each other on construction sites, trust had developed and so they were prepared to listen. Whereas the leadership of NSW in Construction were less critical of Kyriacou and Haritou saying essentially, 'Ah, people make mistakes.' (Maitland 2005)

At the same time the Forestry Division had seen the crisis in leadership as an opportunity to force the integration they had been trying to get for over ten years. A number of factors came together that worked in favour of the Forestry Division being able to push for the integration. The conflict in the Construction Division in 2001 meant that numbers were viewed as all-important and the respective sides identified with sides of the FFTS dispute. The new leadership were seen as close to the Victorians and the Western Australians, and if they became part of the Construction Division they would boost those numbers. Haritou, on the other hand, was likely to support the incumbent leadership, especially if he felt that he owed favours. John Sutton became the ally of the Forestry Division in that it suited him, at the time, for Furniture to be safely tucked away with Forestry and leave the balance of power within the Construction Division untouched.

While the Victorian Branch was in crisis, the other state Branches had been rendered virtually defunct—except for South Australia, which had a close relationship with the Forestry Branch and the divisional leadership. Forestry, on the other hand, had a national structure with a small but functioning Branch in each State.

It was frustrating for the Victorian officials because they thought at first that their issues were not being taken seriously. However, once they fully grasped the situation, they realized they were fighting on two fronts: the first was to clear corruption out of the Furniture Division and

rebuild it; and the second was to save it from disappearing altogether by being swallowed up by the Forestry Division.

Haritou had become obdurate and determined to deflect the charges. The Branch was determined to prevent him from ever coming back and to make him pay retribution. Feeling unable to access the structures of the CFMEU, the FFTS team started to look for other tactics. The team had begun legal actions against Haritou in the Federal Court. The Branch was financially well-off, so if it could not access the CFMEU internal structures, it had the capacity to access the courts—and it did. Litigation became a strategy. This made the Victorians unpopular in some quarters where the preferred tactic would have been to sweep the matter under the carpet completely. If the CFMEU was not prepared to listen to the Victorian FFTS, then the Branch would have to draw more attention to itself and force the issue. It took action wherever they could. It was not afraid of altercation and welcomed confrontation if it would help get the matters settled.

The FFTS team also began litigation against the CFMEU. In fact, the team decided to take the same case against the CFMEU as the challengers to Sutton had run: that is, that the proportional representation for conferences and committees within the CFMEU was unfair. If the team could change the representation it would be able to successfully vote out the rules that required the integration to occur. In the end, both the Construction Case and the FFTS case were lost.

Haritou also tried to cause as much mischief as he could. His position kept changing: he would agree to go, he would be on sick leave, then he would claim to be better and want to return to work. He informed the bank of the dispute and it froze the Branch's funds, making the day-to-day running of the Branch difficult. At another time he claimed that his expulsion was unconstitutional and that he was entitled to come back to work. He called a Divisional Conference to consolidate his support by having his 'friends' voted into official positions. However, the Branch obtained an injunction to stop the meeting going ahead.

The Branch members solidly stuck to their convictions. They had lost confidence in Haritou and believed he was unfit to lead it or be trusted in the office. But it had become a David and Goliath battle. Three organizers of the Victorian Branch of the FFTS had to learn quickly: their antagonists were the National President of the CFMEU and the National President of the Construction Division.

In June 2001 the Sims Lockwood report was received. If there were any remaining doubts about the truth of the allegations the report set them to rest. The auditors had been asked to inspect the records provided, highlight any irregular or dubious financial transactions, identify those involved in these transactions and comment on these practices.

The report comprised forty pages and was very detailed and damning in its findings of Haritou, Mitten, Kyriacou and Pagonis. It listed items that it found as 'irregular, dubious or clearly inappropriate'.

These included: double dipping on travel expenses; reimbursement of unidentified expenses paid on personal credit cards, payment of parking fines and license renewal fees; reimbursement of lost wages; irregular honorariums; transactions where there was no substantiation, and other one-off payments that appeared unusual. Checks and balances were missing, enabling Haritou to authorize cheque requisitions and sign cheques for which he was the beneficiary. Reimbursement on credit cards for Haritou totalled \$46 640.70 in expenses during the period 1998, 1999 and 2000. The auditors also found that Haritou had received honorariums on four occasions. There were twenty-seven occurrences of travel double dipping and on one occasion Haritou received \$476 in cash for an airfare to Canberra, then drove there in a Union car, purchasing petrol on the Union account. (Lockwood 2001)

The report recommended that criminal charges be laid. The fraud squad were brought in to investigate. While the report had focused mainly on Haritou, many records had gone missing from Kyriacou's time, which suggested that they may have been deliberately destroyed. The Fraud Squad showed special interest in Kyriacou's affairs. In particular, they were interested in a battle for a federal award in Queensland that had cost the Union a fortune—some say millions of dollars—but with little to show for it. The investigation dragged on but eventually it was dropped because the squad did not believe it had enough evidence to get a conviction.

Haritou was ordered by a court to return to work. He came to the Errol Street office but was stopped from entering. He was then given an office at the State Branch of the Forestry Division. The Victorian Branch was outraged and tensions between the two Branches were inflamed. The Victorian Branch officials were unable to understand how anyone could provide support to Haritou at this point, when his corruption had been set out by an objective auditors' report. What should have been a

straightforward exposure and a clamp down on corruption had become a wrangled mess that caused stress and ill will in many quarters.

John Maitland was aware of the escalation in the feelings of rancour and saw the structure of the CFMEU itself as partly to blame. He said:

So while the founding fathers might have had a great vision of what this organization should be, the work that they left to be done, when you look back on it, was just too much ... there should have been a lot clearer and more specific commitments, rather than vague notions that later on yes, we'll go into industry divisions and they should go here and they should go there ... So it was left to people who really had a lot of self-interest in it. So therefore it started to bring in these things, like where's my place in the sun, and how I react with this person a lot of personality stuff came into it. And it was just too big for us. (Maitland 2005)

The atmosphere in the office was always highly charged. Battles raged on a number of fronts and every day one or the other of them went through crisis. Ernie Landers said:

I found it draining—emotionally draining because it was conflict, pure conflict. If it's not this, what is it now? The day-to-day work of the Union had to continue to make sure the Union did not collapse. But on top of that there was a constant barrage of crisis. The next you'd know your stomach would sink. I was office-bound, I'd come in here on a three-day thing. I'd be organizing the accounts and the next thing the police would turn up ... You never knew what was going to happen next. Police would turn up to serve writs ... (Landers 2005)

In the middle of 2001 the CFMEU National Office sent its solicitor, Bob Whyburn, to Melbourne to arrange a settlement. Whyburn believed he had been successful. He had agreement from both parties. However this peace plan fell apart when Haritou received new legal advice that the charges against him were insubstantial.

It was back to the drawing board and further frustration. The trouble in the CFMEU had led to a royal commission to investigate allegations of corruption. This made it especially vital, from John Maitland's point of view, that the Victorian FFTS matter should be dealt

with in the most transparent and straightforward manner. CFMEU lawyers were unsure whether the Sims Lockwood audit was objective enough and advised that another audit be taken—this time by the NSW company Daley & Co. At a cost of \$35 000 to the Victorian Branch a team of auditors from Daley & Co. spent two weeks in the Melbourne office revisiting the books.

A decision was taken at the October National Executive Conference that the Division had become dysfunctional and an administrator, Rick Fowler, who was the Executive Officer of the CFMEU at the time, was put in charge of the Division. At the same time a decision was made that the FFTS would forcibly be transferred to Forestry. The Victorian Branch was absolutely opposed to these developments and determined to take action to defend the Division's independence. John Maitland believed that there was no real choice:

There was never any indication from Leo and Vari that they wanted to go into Forestry—they were always saying we want our autonomy, we want the opportunity to think about what we're doing. So to some extent I think they'd been influenced by Louis saying well, it's not all cut and dried that we're going with Trevor ... whereas I went through the records of the discussions to put together the recommendation and it was very clear right from the very beginning, the BWIU Division, this is Stan Sharkey, had no interest in having Furnishing within Construction. (Maitland 2005)

During the investigation of the finances another issue came to light that broadened the case against Haritou. He was accused and charged with fraudulently lodging an agreement in the Industrial Relations Commission. It was alleged that the EBA between the Union and DMS Glass had not been lodged without the employees either sighting or agreeing to the final document. The relationship between DMS Glass and the FFTS had always been fragile since it was suspected that Kyriacou was a shareholder of the company and, as a result, the workforce was not confident that the Union gave it full service.

Six statements were supplied as evidence in a case that was based on allegations that Haritou had failed to observe the rules of the Union and had committed gross misbehaviour and/or gross neglect of duty under the Rules of the Workplace Relations Act. The Act requires that agreements are approved by a 'valid majority of the persons employed

at the time whose employment will be subject to the agreement'. The EBA at DMS was up for renewal.

The witness statements concur that there was a meeting of DMS Glaziers at the Union office in Errol Street. Haritou circulated a draft EBA at that meeting. The glaziers discussed it, although some felt they could not examine it in as much detail as they would like:

Some of us wanted to go through every clause, but Michael Haritou said he didn't want to do it that way, saying that we'd be there all day if we did. He gave me the impression he didn't want us to go through the EBA he just wanted us to get on with it. (FFTS 2001)

Nevertheless five conditions, mostly allowances, were identified as needing to be included. Haritou was asked to contact the employer, Don Matheson, by phone while the glaziers waited. Matheson refused to agree to the added claims. The workers decided to strike for the rest of the day and Haritou was to go back to the employer to get the extra claims included. Two days later there was another meeting at which Haritou reported that DMS would not agree to the claims. Witnesses felt that he was angry with the members and his behaviour was inconsistent. On the one hand he criticized the strike action they had taken and on the other he told them:

that we, the glaziers, were all 'girls' and that if we were serious about our claims we would not muck around and just go out on strike. He kept saying that DMS would not agree—we would get nothing. (FFTS 2001)

By the end of the meeting a decision was taken by the glaziers to take further strike action. The employer took the matter to the Commission and the men were ordered to return to work. After that the workers were not consulted again about the EBA. In their statements, the witnesses all claim that they had no idea the document had been lodged and they certainly had not seen or signed the final copy.

Victorian Branch Expulsion

On 1 November 2001, exactly one year after the allegations were first made, a special executive meeting was held to hear charges against Michael Haritou for fraud over the DMS Glass EBAs. Adam Wallace laid

the charges. Wallace, Skourdoumbis, Haritou, Vari and Patti attended the meeting. The charge was:

failures to observe the Rules and gross misbehaviour and/or gross neglect of duty under the Rules. (FFTS 2001)

Haritou claimed the meeting should disband because he had not been properly served. This was rejected and he left. Despite this, the meeting re-affirmed its confidence that he had been properly served. Several witnesses from DMS Glass were called to give evidence. They were asked whether they had seen final copies of the EBA, whether they were aware that a final copy of the EBA was available to read prior to certification, and whether they voted for the final copy of the agreement. Wallace claimed that as a result of the EBA negligence members had not only lost confidence in Haritou but they had also lost confidence in the Union as well. Wallace was asked to leave the meeting and the executive voted on six resolutions.

The first found Haritou guilty of the charge of failure to observe the rules of the division in regard to the lodging of EBAs for DMS Glass; the second resolution was that therefore he would be dismissed from the office of Divisional Branch Secretary of the Victorian Branch immediately; the third was to expel him from membership of the CFMEU-FFTS Union Division. Part 2 included four resolutions pertaining to the charge of gross misbehaviour and gross neglect of duty and for these additional reasons Haritou was dismissed as Branch Secretary and expelled from membership of the Union.

The COM endorsed the decision of the Executive. The rules required that Mick Doran became Acting Secretary until February 2002, but in name only. In reality a new leadership had emerged—Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti. The task ahead of them was to rebuild the Branch.

NEW DIRECTIONS

*Life could not continue without throwing the past into the past,
liberating the present from its burden.*

Paul Tillich 1963

AS THE ATTEMPTS to have Haritou charged and expelled from the CFMEU were obstructed, the frustration with the wheels of power within the Victorian Branch was increasing. It was becoming clear that more cards were on the table than the straightforward stamping out of corruption from one of the Branches. In the tough mean corridors of the CFMEU the crisis in the Furniture Division had become a pawn in a battle being played for bigger stakes than the Victorian FFTS Branch. A power struggle gripped the mighty Construction Branch and the Forestry Division saw this as an opportunity to take over the Furniture Division once and for all.

The members of the Committee of Management of the FFTS had been absorbed by their need to have their Branch cleaned up and so the dangers that threatened in the greater league of the CFMEU had not at first been obvious. By the November meeting of the COM in 2001 it was understood that the Forestry Division was preparing to strike. The COM emphasized its opposition to any forced integration with the Forestry Division or any other Division. Cliff Palmer moved and John O'Brien seconded a motion that included:

This COM wants the principal officers of the CFMEU to acknowledge and confirm that the current position guaranteeing autonomy for the FFTS until March 2005 will remain in place.

It also stressed that any:

decision regarding integration will be done in conjunction with the COM and the Branch's members. (FFTS 2001)

A leaflet was produced and distributed to members detailing the events of the past months and informing them of the difficulties being faced in the CFMEU. It was unequivocal in its position:

No shotgun wedding for the FFTS

The dispute has now boiled down to one thing: principle against political opportunism. The expulsion of Haritou should be given effect to by the CFMEU, and should not be used as a catalyst for integration, which isn't due until 2005 anyway. (FFTS 2001)

A couple of weeks later a CMFEU National Conference took place in Launceston. This conference unleashed all the acrimony within the organization. All parties were present and their views were robustly expressed. The members of the Victorian Branch delegation were no exception; they made their views with regards to Haritou clear and were appalled at the words of support for Haritou they heard from his advocates. They could not believe their ears. It was beyond their comprehension that anyone could defend him after all the evidence against him had been laid on the table. They also made it abundantly clear that they had no intention of being forced into the Forestry Division.

For some time the media had been ranting about the strife in the CFMEU. After the Launceston conference they became interested in the FFTS battles as well. A number of articles appeared in newspapers, on television and radio about the allegedly corrupt CFMEU official who was fighting to keep his job. The media were also keen to air the conflict over integration and the way it was being played out. One article published on 3 December 2001 in the *Herald Sun* claimed that the national officials of the CFMEU were backing a plan for its Forestry and Forest Products

Division to take over the divided Furnishing Trades Division early the following year. The article claimed that Trevor Smith, the National Secretary of the Forestry Division, had hatched a plan to force the FFTS to integrate with the Forestry Division in February.

In a report to the National Executive this month, Mr Smith described the FFTS as torn by internal conflict. (Phillips 2001)

As well as media coverage becoming more intensive, police activity over the fraud accusations, which had been slow to get started, was beginning to escalate. It appeared likely that charges might be laid against Kyriacou, Haritou and Mitten.

The media attention put pressure on the CFMEU. The Construction Division was facing a high profile royal commission over corruption and now another Division was raising the question of long-standing corruption in its leadership. Interestingly, those in the CFMEU leadership who were supporting Haritou were also the people who were accusing other sections of the Construction Division of corruption. Some of them believed that the allegations against Haritou were insignificant compared with the allegations against the old BLF sections of Construction. They therefore claimed that the charges against Haritou were overstated. However, at the same time, it was clear that support for Haritou also meant hostility towards the Victorian FFTS Branch and its perceived closeness to the Victorian Construction Branch.

By mid-December the tension was rising. John Maitland and Frank Vari reached a broad area of agreement on the phone. The main points of their agreement were faxed to Vari by Maitland. John Maitland said:

I did feel a degree of frustration. Under normal circumstances, when these things are raised you say to people, good work, you've done the right thing by the Union, but here was a situation where the people who raised these concerns may have been the victims in the end. (Maitland 2005)

Dave Kirner, the Secretary of the South Australian FFTS Divisional Branch, was nominated to be the spokesperson for the CFMEU. He and Vari met in Williamstown to draw up a peace plan based on the agreement that had been discussed between Maitland and Vari. The main features of the agreement were: that Haritou and Mitten be expelled

from the CFMEU FFTS Division; Mitten to repay misappropriated funds and Haritou's accrued entitlements to be used to compensate the FFTS Victorian Branch; and Haritou to apologize to members through a major daily newspaper and membership bulletin.

The Victorian Branch agreed to the immediate integration of the Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmanian and South Australian Branches with the Forestry Division but the Victorian Branch would maintain 'autonomy on a stand-alone basis and shall not form part of any division'. (FFTS 2001)

The Branch capitation fees were to be paid to the National Office and an agreed sum forwarded to the Forestry Division by the National Office for the maintenance of awards and so on. The statement was clear:

There shall be no integration of the FFTS Victoria Branch without agreement of the Victorian Branch COM and all funds and assets currently with the FFTS Victoria Branch shall remain the property of the FFTS Victorian Branch. (FFTS 2001)

The meeting in Williamstown started at three o'clock in the afternoon. There were two main sticking points: the insistence that Haritou apologize in a major daily paper, and the continued independence of the Victorian Branch. In return the Victorian Branch offered to drop all of its court cases. Finally, at ten o'clock that night, a plan was agreed. Vari lost no time in phoning Maitland to give him the news. The next day Kirner came into the Victorian FFTS office, shook hands with everybody and typed up the document. But the peace deal disappeared as soon as Kirner was out of the office. Maitland said, sometime later, 'as far as I understood, Dave Kirner wouldn't confirm the deal.'

Vari was unable to contact Kirner in the next weeks despite many attempts. He suspected that other hands had been at work and convinced Kirner to retract the agreement. He said, 'I suspect that Smith and O'Connor scuttled the whole deal.' (Vari 2004-05)

One more attempt at resolution had collapsed and in its wake pressure continued to build. By the time of the February CFMEU National Executive meeting preparations to have the matter settled were in place. Ernie Landers believed that the CFMEU was forced to act because of the police and media attention that the case was getting. He said:

You had police and media looking at what was going to come out of that meeting. And I think it was even mentioned in

the meeting that we better get this right because if we don't the whole world's watching us ... and what was seen to be done had to be correct. (Landers 2005)

In February 2002 the CFMEU National Executive Committee was to meet at Surrey Hills in Sydney. When the agenda arrived in Melbourne the Branch was excited to see its items listed for the second day of business. Because most of the delegates were not paid officials it was decided that they would miss the first day of business and fly in on the Tuesday morning for the FFTS business. Vari and Skourdumbis, who were full-time officials but were not delegates to the Committee, attended the first day as observers.

As Frank Vari perused the agenda items for that day he was horrified when he saw that the Victorian FFTS Branch integration had been shifted forward and was now listed as the first agenda item of the first day. As soon as the meeting opened he tried to object on the basis that Victorian Branch delegates were not present. He asked if the meeting could return to the original agenda. Martin Kingham, from the Victorian Construction Branch, moved and Kevin Reynolds, from Western Australia, seconded a motion in support of Vari's point. But it was unsuccessful and the first business of the meeting was the integration of the FFTS into the FFPD Division.

John Maitland, the National Secretary spoke. He said the four principal officers of the CFMEU supported the motion; that there had been a long history of trying to reach a settlement that had involved the two divisions along with the Construction and General Division.

Trevor Smith, the National President, and also the National Secretary of the FFPD as the prime supporter of the integration, spoke after Maitland. He gave an historical overview of the amalgamation process from 1992, outlining meetings conducted between the Forestry and the Furniture Divisions. He advised of an agreement being reached with all FFTS Divisional Branches except Victoria. He said:

Debate centres on the need for integration and the requirement for an active role to be played between the Forestry Division and FFTS Victorian Divisional Branch. A compromise must be reached. (CFMEU 2002-03)

At the lunch break, pandemonium broke out. The Victorian officials were furious. Although they knew the deal made with Kirner had come

to rest on rocky ground, they still thought that Maitland would agree to it. Now they felt betrayed by him too: he was supporting the integration to which they were so opposed. Skourdoumbis said:

I was furious. I said to Maitland, 'You know the truth, why don't you put your cock on the block.' He threw up his hands in exasperation and said, 'What do you think I've been doing?' I felt betrayed by him. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

An informal discussion took place between Skourdoumbis and Vari with some of the Victorian Construction delegation. They insisted pragmatically that the Victorians would not be able to maintain independence and would be advised to accept a compromise. They suggested that the Branch agree to drop all the court cases, that the Furniture Division should be integrated with the Forestry Division, but to leave the Victorian Branch as an independent Branch within that Division and not be integrated with the Victorian Forestry Branch. With nowhere else to turn it seemed Skourdoumbis and Vari accepted that this was the best deal that they were likely to achieve—at least the Victorian Branch could maintain its independence. After lunch the minutes record:

That the FFTS and Forestry Divisions integrate and become one Division called the 'Forest and Furniture Products and Manufacturing Division' to be known as the FFPD Division. NSW, Tasmania and SA Branches were to fully integrate with the respective Forestry Division Branches as that had been supported by those Branches. The Queensland Branch will retain its current structure until the integrated division establishes a fully integrated Branch in accordance with the Rules ... (CFMEU 2002-03)

Point 5 referred to the Victorian Branch:

- i) The FFTS Victorian Branch shall be known as the FFPD Victorian Furnishing Branch within the Integrated Division. This Branch shall continue to have a separate existence up to 26th March 2005 unless otherwise agreed by the Victorian Furnishing Branch. The Victorian Furnishing Branch will continue to administer, operate, organize and represent Victorian Furnishing members

in an autonomous manner in respect to matters that only affect members of the Victorian Furnishing Branch.

The Victorian Furnishing Branch shall have representation on all FFPD peak decision-making bodies in accordance with the FFPD Divisional Rule. (CFMEU 2002–03)

Vari was able to have two changes made to the motion: that Skourdoumbis would take Kyriacou's place on the NEC and secondly that the Branch was to be called the FFTS Branch and not Forestry No. 2 Branch.

The members of the Victorian Branch COM felt that they had been 'stitched up'. They had to swallow the bitter pill of being integrated with their long-term rivals—the timber workers. Kyriacou may have believed that his agreement in the original Scheme of Amalgamation would never be realized, but in the end, the seeds were sown when the FFTS first amalgamated and the Forestry Division was able to reap the rewards.

The following day the first agenda item was the charges against Mitten and Haritou. The National Conference had decided to commission its own auditors' report, which upheld the findings and recommendations of the Sims Lockwood report. In summing up the situation, it said:

Notwithstanding the above, we consider that the officials referred to in our report (Mr M. Mitten, Mr L. Kyriacou, and Mr M. Haritou) and in the Sims Lockwood Report, have nevertheless gained financial benefit from using their position as senior Union officials of the FFTS Division and the FFTS Branch. We consider their actions were deliberate over a long period of time. We concur with the conclusion reached in the Sims Lockwood Report in that these officials have been involved in dubious practices which are, or may be in breach of Union Rules and which are, or may be illegal. (Daley 2001)

The minutes record:

The National Secretary opened by taking delegates through the Daley and Co. report that was a result of the resolution passed by National Conference.

Then the national Secretary laid the charges and took the National Executive through the charges as forwarded to the

National Executive prior to the meeting. Further supporting evidence was distributed. (CFMEU 2002–03)

Mitten was charged first and responded, reading from a written submission and an affidavit. When Haritou was charged he requested an adjournment, which was refused. He then requested legal assistance and that was also refused. Haritou had then distributed a submission and an affidavit and read from the documents. Once the statements had been read the two Victorian officials were requested to leave the room.

After heated discussion the following resolution was moved and seconded:

The National Executive, having considered Michael Haritou and Michael Mitten's response to the charges made against them, which are contained in the summons dated 24 January 2002, and having considered the financial documents and reports of Daley and Co. Accountants and Sims Lockwood, decides as follows:

- the charges relating to the receipt of travel allowances covering accommodation when no expenses were incurred has been made out;
- calls upon the Principal Officers to examine the outstanding documents and prepare a recommendation regarding appropriate penalties for consideration of the National Executive. Such recommendations should be developed within a two-week period. (CFMEU 2002–03)

The charges were minimal compared to the findings of the auditors' reports but the CFMEU leadership believed that it would be difficult to substantiate any larger amounts. As it was, there was strong opposition to the charges. After lengthy and heated debate the motion was carried, but the vote was close. The matter that seemed so clear to the Victorian Branch had become murky in the waters of the CFMEU. John Maitland thought it would have been disastrous if the vote had been lost:

We're being accused of corruption, we're in the lead up to the real game, the royal commission, [so] we had to be as clean as [we] possibly can, cleaner than anyone else. My view was—

well, look if Construction says \$7000, [that] is not too bad. In my view \$7000 is \$7000—we can't be seen by the public to be condoning any form of corrupt behaviour. (Maitland 2005)

Cliff Palmer represented the Committee of Management when he said:

The worst part about it all was—after all the dust had settled and Michael Haritou and Michael Mitten went to an NEC Conference in Sydney ... they more or less believed that Louis and them weren't corrupt. Well, they knew they were corrupt and they weren't going to charge them ... we weren't allowed to speak—I got up a few times and I said, 'I pay my six bucks a week and I don't want any pricks taking my money. People said, 'Ah, bullshit' and that ... was the worst of our fears ... All the Suttons in the world have no idea where a Union bloke's coming from. Even though it was proven there on paper and they admitted that they did it. (Palmer 2005)

The matter was finally resolved at the May 2002 National Executive meeting, held in the ACTU boardroom, when John Maitland moved:

Having considered the serious nature of the charges and Mr Haritou's guilt, the National Executive resolves that Mr Haritou be dismissed from all offices held in the Union, effective immediately. (CFMEU 2002–03)

John Sutton moved an amendment calling for the replacement of 'dismissed from all offices' to: 'be suspended without pay and conditions for a period of 6 months.' It was seconded by Greg Williams and defeated. (CFMEU 2002–03)

A further resolution then called for the repayment of monies of \$5038. This amount was a bitter pill as it was much less than the amounts outlined in either audit report. The next motion was another bitter pill. Haritou was to be paid his outstanding wages from 29 January to 17 September 2001, even though he had not worked since December 2000. He was also to receive outstanding annual leave that totalled \$85 634. Similar motions were moved regarding Michael Mitten who was ordered to repay \$1230.

This meeting also finalized the integration plans:

In relation to the above, the FFTS Division shall on and from the 11th February 2002, be restructured in the first instance into the Forestry Division to form 'The Forestry, Furnishing, Building Products and Manufacturing Division: (FFPD)' which shall result in:

- abolition of full time national FFTS divisional officers
- allocation of divisional/Branch office holders of the FFTS
- continued operation of the Victorian and Queensland Divisional Branches of the FFTS Division within the restructured Division of up to four years i.e. to 26 March 2005. (CFMEU 2002-03)

The accusations that Kyriacou had made at the end of 2000 had created a new leadership and dragged it into fields of battle it did not know existed. It had taken eighteen months of intense struggle in a range of strange and often hostile environments but finally an end had come. The results left some bitterness, but they were results. The Branch was intact and back on track.

Industrial

Despite the fact that the most experienced officials and the Committee of Management were tied up with the enormous effort of saving the Branch from corruption and keeping it independent, the work of the Branch did not let up. Employers did not stop breaching conditions simply because there was a crisis of leadership in the Branch, plus the membership was not in good shape. Service to members over the past couple of years had deteriorated because Haritou had refused to replace staff and he had also refused to spend money on journals, legal fees and other expenses, which enhance service. It takes very little for less committed, less active members to become sceptical about their Union and, understandably, members want to know exactly what they are getting for their money. Consequently news of the corruption in the Branch landed in this pool of discontent with an almighty splash. Members who do not get satisfactory answers are likely to vote with their feet and stop paying their dues. This is what they did. Also, membership numbers had declined because the groundwork to maintain recruitment levels had not been undertaken.

Getting back on track involved developing and providing a service of the highest quality. The new leadership team were keenly aware of the scale of the problems. Skourdoumbis described the situation in the Union at the time:

Michael, in particular, had let the resources and the people power of the Union really dwindle and so one of the big weaknesses was that we didn't have enough officials to go around. We were always putting out spot fires because of that. So almost immediately Michael was off the scene and we were on the scene, we were putting officials on to attend to the members. (Skourdoumbis 2005)

Vari talked about the effects of staff reductions on service and on recruitment:

That had an impact on members because you weren't able to recruit like you could in the past but at the same time servicing became a struggle—it took a lot out of the officials. Then, in November 2000, the three main officials were all of a sudden thrust into this internal corruption scandal that we had. So three officials were taken off the road for significant periods of time. That had a real effect on the membership and if we're honest about it and look at our records, you'll see that commencing in 1998 and then after 2000/2001 it dropped. It was only really after the matters were resolved in the CFMEU and we were able to devote 100 per cent of our energies to the Branch that we began to pick things up again. (Vari 2004–05)

Getting the confidence of the membership and recruiting new members was going to be an uphill battle. One issue stood out as needing to be addressed. Long service leave had traditionally been a reward for length of service: it was granted after ten years with the same company. The new work patterns of the latter twentieth century had made it difficult to accrue the time at one company. The solution adopted in other industries was to make long service leave portable—that is, time accrued could be transferred from one company to another within the industry. The new leadership took this issue on and had it introduced into all the EBAs as a matter of course.

As well as this, the work of any union includes the need to protect and defend the rights of all workers in the industry. With a decline in staff this work had also been neglected. A sure sign of this was that membership numbers had declined significantly. Not only had service to existing members fallen, but also lack of staff, and existing staff members being tired overworked had led to a drop in recruitment.

An opportunity for the new leadership to test their mettle came early in 2001. One of the organizers, Rick Maher, visited a small window-making company in Geelong where he found men working in sub-standard and archaic conditions with wages as low as \$10 an hour when the industry standard for the work ranged from \$12.90 to \$15.55. As well as the low wages, health and safety regulations were being breached, basic minimum conditions were not being met and overtime payments were not consistent with the legally required minimums. Geelong Windows was a small plant. Some of its workers were already members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU). Maher told them what pay and conditions workers had in other window-manufacturing plants in Victoria. He said that with their support he could develop an EBA to bring them up to the standards of the rest of the industry. Those who were not AWU members joined the FFTS and developed an EBA, which they proposed to their boss. He was offhand and refused to negotiate outright. He insisted that his workers should be covered under the Metal Industry Award. Bans were placed on overtime but the boss was not budging, so bans were put on the production of some products.

The dispute dragged on for some weeks and no one showed any signs of backing off. Then, one evening as the workers were leaving the factory, the boss told them not to come back the next day and added that they need not bother trying because the gates would be locked. It was now a lockout. It was a whole new ball game and one in which the Union had no experience that anyone could remember.

At the time Skourdumbis and Vari were on a plane heading back from a meeting in Sydney. They had been kept aware of the dispute, but had not played an active role. When news of the lockout reached them, they realized this was a serious challenge to their leadership abilities. It was an important issue and symbolic of the change in direction the Union was experiencing. They decided to throw everything they could behind the newly recruited members.

Some weeks earlier they had employed a new organizer, Dave O'Brien, who was known as being a bit of a firebrand, and they thought

he might breath some much needed heat into the Branch's lukewarm existence.

O'Brien had a lot of experience with disputes and activism. He'd been a delegate for the Construction Division of the CFMEU and before that he had been a stalwart in the twelve-month occupation of Richmond Secondary College when Jeff Kennett had tried to close it down. O'Brien went to Geelong and set up a picket line. He borrowed a caravan and organized delegations from the picket line to visit building sites and other workplaces around Geelong to get local support and donations to keep the picket line viable and the locked-out workers fed. The whole Union threw its weight behind the dispute and all the officials spent time at the picket line. In a time when militant Union action was limited in a lot of places the dispute drew wide support, particularly in Geelong.

A case was prepared for the Industrial Relations Commission to ask for the lockout to be lifted. It was refused. The Commissioner accepted the arguments of the company that the lockout was an appropriate form of industrial action. This was galling in an environment where the right to strike was being harnessed. But the Union was not about to back down. The members were solid. They gritted their teeth and settled in for as long as it would take. The AWU members had been locked out as well as the FFTS. An AWU organizer appeared at the plant and tried to broker a deal. He was not successful and the result was that the AWU members joined the picket line.

O'Brien's experience with long disputes came into its own. He spent almost twenty-four hours, seven days a week at the picket line, or doing picket-line business. In that environment the workers got to know him and respect his efforts. They could see that he was there for them and the AWU members could see that too. One by one they signed across to the FFTS. Support was growing for the FFTS as the dispute grew.

Another three weeks passed before the boss agreed to discuss the demands in the EBA. He agreed to everything and eventually had to pay more than the original demand. The original claim had been for 15 per cent over three years but by the time the dispute ended that had increased to 22 per cent. The workers were compensated for the lost time and income protection, which had been left out of the original claim, was now included in the EBA. The acrimony of the dispute had not left the members or the officials with sympathy for the employer. Once his resistance caved, he had no bargaining power at all. The Branch gloried in its victory. Vari said:

That dispute was very significant to me, because it proved to me, and others, that we were able to do the job. (Vari 2004-05)

Another significant, although shorter and lower profile, dispute took place that involved recruiting non-unionized workers and gaining conditions for them. At a workplace in the inner Melbourne suburbs, another new organizer, Ernie Landers, found a group of workers who were employed as casuals for \$11.20 an hour, with no holiday or sick pay, even though they had been in constant employment for a number of years. The factory was closing down over the Christmas period, leaving the workers without any income at all. When Landers questioned the workers about their conditions they told him that the previous Christmas they had all moved in together to manage without any pay between them and they intended to do the same this Christmas. Although Landers assured them that their conditions were under requirements they were afraid to take action. But the mood changed when just before the Christmas break there was an accident and a young boy lost a finger. At that point the workers contacted the Union and agreed to take strike action. It was the first industrial action ever for the workers and they grew with the experience, becoming increasingly confident and bold



The long but successful dispute at Geelong Windows gave the new leadership team confidence that they could get the job done.

with their expectations. In the end, the Union was able to deliver not only health and safety regulations, but also proper pay and conditions, including holiday pay for the Christmas break.

Pilkington Glass

Workers at the Pilkington Glass plant in Geelong were extremely disillusioned with the Union. Not only had they lost their 35-hour week, body-hire workers had sneaked in the door without the Union protecting them. When the workers had called a special meeting to ask Haritou to respond to the allegations of corruption against him, he had answered every question by saying he needed to talk to his lawyers before he could say anything. This had infuriated the Pilkington members to the extent that they had hung a noose on a beam in anticipation of his next visit to the plant.

Early in 2001, soon after the corruption scandal broke, the Pilkington delegates from the Geelong and Laverton plants were in the Commission to finalise their new EBAs. Damian Cooke, who was one of the Geelong delegates, noticed that in discussion about the Laverton EBA there was talk about income protection. In the lift, going downstairs for a break, he asked Frank Vari, whom he hardly knew at the time, about the income protection in the Laverton agreement.



The details of the EBA at Pilkington's are discussed by Frank Vari, Damian Cooke, Leo Skourdombis, and Alwin Seneviratne.

Vari explained. When the Kennett Government came into office in Victoria, it had rescinded the WorkCover legislation, leaving workers without adequate income protection in the case of injury or illness. The Union had developed a scheme and had it inserted in agreements across the industry. It was an insurance scheme tailor-made to suit the industry and included make-up pay, 24 hours' accident/injury cover, journey cover and death benefit. The development of the scheme had been time-consuming and difficult, involving many negotiations with employers, but finally, in April 1999, agreement was reached.

Cooke had never heard of income protection. When they checked the EBA, Vari, who had just taken over the organizing of the Geelong plant from Haritou, was surprised to find that it had never been included. As a new agreement was already being finalized in the Commission it was too late to have income protection included. The discovery by the Geelong members that they had been missing an important condition that the rest of the industry had been getting for two years added to their frustration and anger at the deterioration in the Union's service. It was important for the new leadership to live up to its promises of change and so Vari took the unprecedented step of instigating, with strong support from the membership, a campaign to have the new condition inserted into the EBA after it had become operational. The campaign was risky because changes to industrial relations laws made action illegal for the duration of an agreement. Nevertheless, both the Geelong and Laverton plants became involved in a long and bitter dispute that lasted for months. Bans and rolling stoppages were put on. The company retaliated, threatening legal action and the bans were taken off. But a week later they would be put back on, the company would threaten again and they would be taken off. This cat-and-mouse tactic was played for some months. One day when a rolling stoppage had been on in Laverton for six days, management rang Vari. He recalled:

We kept edging and edging ourselves closer to a deal. At Laverton we had rolling stoppages for six days: one shift would stop for two hours, go back and put bans on, then another shift would stop and it went on. We made it a very difficult environment for the company to get the product out. The General Manager rang me and told me that they would lock-out the members if I did not budge. It was a challenge but I decided to stand firm and refused. It was then they gave in. We were able to get income protection inserted into the EBA. (Vari 2004-05)

Membership: Building the Branch

By the time Skourdoumbis, Vari and Patti were leading the Union Branch they'd all had plenty of time to think about ways to improve the service to members. Each of them, while working under the leadership of Kyriacou and Haritou as organizers, had felt uneasy about some of the methods used. They all believed that their effectiveness in serving members was sometimes undermined by lack of support from the old leaderships. They wanted the changes in the Union to be obvious at every level. Although they had never sought the leadership it had landed in their laps. This now became an opportunity to introduce the changes they thought would create a Branch with the internal integrity and industrial strength that they knew was possible. To do this they strove for an open, democratic, member-based Union. The infrastructure of the Branch had dwindled or become outdated. The new leadership introduced new symbols reflecting a new vision, signals that there had been a change and cues as to what that change represented.



The new leadership wanted to show the world that they were more than a change of shift. They had this flag designed as a symbol of what they stood for.

High on the agenda was the creation of a flag. This would signal the change internally and externally. The only logo they had knowledge of was old and hardly ever used so they decided to develop a flag that could be carried on outings to give the Branch a strong and easily identifiable presence. Designing the flag became an opportunity to refine what it was they wanted the Branch to stand for and create an emblem that the Branch could rally around.

Frank Vari remembers the sentiments involved in creating the flag:

We wanted something to show all the aspects of the Union. We chose a flag because, being part of the CFMEU we wanted to identify that and so the CFMEU symbol is there. Also the Eureka flag is there because that stands for 'dare to struggle dare to win'. We wanted the two arms, one darker than the other to represent our migrant members. Most of all we wanted to preserve our name—Victorian FFTS Branch. Leo came up with the colours, black and gold, and the slogan—Taking Up the Fight. (Vari 2004–05)

An artist was brought in to design the flag and once it was produced they turned their attention to developing a regular journal called *FFTS Union News* that would keep members informed about the activities of the Branch and the issues that would affect their working lives.

The first journal was issued early in 2001 and was headed with an editorial statement that summarized the intentions of the new leadership:

A new direction at the FFTS

It would not be an exaggeration to say that 2001 has been a groundbreaking year for the Union and its members. Many positive changes have taken place—not all of them without a fight—but one thing is certain: the FFTS is now well placed to deliver the sort of service and representation that our members deserve. (*FFTS Union News* 2001)

In the journal was a manifesto that had been developed to address each issue with which the Union was concerned. The manifesto was a statement of intent and of purpose, outlining the new policies of the new leadership and emphasizing support for the rank and file to have maximum participation:

On the job and off the job the Union structure provides a means of mutual and fraternal support. Each sector of our membership—onsite or offsite, commercial or domestic, city or country—will have access to forums and services which serve to integrate the Union's collective strength.

By developing and mobilising an activist base of the rank and file through these forums, a greater collective understanding can be raised of the tasks involved in the lifting of the wages and working conditions of our members. This in turn will result in co-ordinated and co-operative efforts by all elements of the organisation. (*FFTS Union News* 2001)

Emphasis was also placed on the accountability of elected officials and an EBA was developed to ensure consistency and transparency of the conditions of staff. The number of staff was increased, a legal support team was built to encourage, wherever possible, full rank and file participation, making sure that the regional areas were adequately serviced. Occupational Health and Safety networks and training were promised as well as general training of shop stewards. The manifesto said:

We have a clear mandate to provide training to our shop stewards so they can do their job with confidence and effectiveness.

Training offers the opportunity to install common values across the representative network.

This serves to strengthen Union unity. (*FFTS Union News* 2001)

The old leadership had broken away from the Trades Hall Council and isolated itself from joint union activities. The new leadership determined to rejoin the Trades Hall Council and pledged itself to develop good relations with other unions:

Our Union has always been required to work beside other unions, particularly in circumstances where a number of unions represent elements of a large commercial workforce which may take in labour from a variety of areas.

It is also our experience that other unions may also seek award coverage in workplaces where more than one award may be in operation.

It is our position that wherever possible unity will be maintained around workplace objectives which provide the best industrial conditions for our members without sacrifice of industrial identity. (*IFTS Union News* 2001)

The new team also promised to fight for the special needs of migrant, women and young members and to encourage their full participation in all the Union's activities. New technology was embraced and a web page was designed to keep members informed. There was a new strength and a new enthusiasm.

This was important at a time when a new political agenda was threatening the very existence of unions, introducing legislation designed to destroy the conditions and abilities for collective organizing that has typified the history of Australian workers and has given them the high standards of living that they now take for granted.



The first issues of the new journal showed the new team raring to get on with the job.

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