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The Battle of Bulli: Women, Children &  
Striking Coalminers repel Blacklegs, Police &  
a Steam Locomotive at Bulli, New South  
Wales, Australia: Monday, 17th January 1887

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# The Battle of Bulli: Women, Children & Striking Coalminers repel Blacklegs, Police & a Steam Locomotive at Bulli, New South Wales, Australia: Monday, 17th January 1887

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## **Abstract**

A little known incident in the annals of Australia's industrial history occurred in the small New South Wales coastal mining village of Bulli on the morning of Monday, 17 January 1887, when a group of some 400 or 500 townsfolk, with over 150 women to the fore, confronted and stood down a group of scab labourers sent from Sydney to break a long-running strike. This incident is cited as perhaps the first united feminist action in Australian history. Its background lay in outstanding industrial issues going back to the previous year.

## The Battle of Bulli

**Women, Children & Striking Coalminers repel  
Blacklegs, Police & a Steam Locomotive at Bulli, New  
South Wales, Australia**

**Monday, 17th January 1887**

*Michael Organ BSc, DipArchAdmin*



Bulli Village, circa 1887. View from the north looking south along the main Bulli road. Bulli Public School (1869) can be seen in the right foreground, while the Wesleyan church is visible on the hill in the left background, and the Denmark Hotel can be seen by the road in the centre of the picture. The January 1887 confrontations between the local community and the blacklegs took place on the road in the middle of the image, adjacent to the two-storey buildings in the middle right of view, and near the present-day Princes Highway and Hobart Street intersection (From the R.G. Jones Photograph Collection, University of Wollongong Archives).

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### Introduction

A little known incident in the annals of Australia's industrial history occurred in the small New South Wales coastal mining village of Bulli on the morning of Monday, 17 January 1887, when a group of some 400 or 500 townsfolk, with over 150 women to the fore, confronted and stood down a group of scab labourers sent from Sydney to break a long-running strike. This incident is cited as perhaps the first united feminist action in Australian history. Its background lay in outstanding industrial issues going back to the previous year.

On 17 July 1886 a mass meeting of Illawarra coal miners, held at the Temperance Hall, Wollongong, voted to initiate a campaign of industrial action in support of a variety of conditions, including an 11 day fortnight and an 8 hour day. The miners envisaged the new shortened hours – similar to those already worked in the Newcastle district – would commence on 2 January 1887, giving the coal companies some 6 months to prepare.

When the local mine owners refused to accept the new conditions, a number of Illawarra district coal mines, including Mount Keira, Mount Pleasant and Bulli, subsequently went on strike. The industrial action began in August and September of

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Bulli Coal Miners, circa 1886. Some of these miners may have been involved in the strike of 1886–7, or perhaps lost their lives in the explosion of 23 March 1887 which claimed 81 men and boys.



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1886 and eventually extended over a period of some 5 to 6 months. It gave rise to a number of public confrontations between those on strike and the scab labourers brought in by the companies. By the end of the year both the striking miners and individual coal companies were suffering financially. Emotions were running high between the two camps as they existed within the various Illawarra mining villages, sprinkled along the coastal plain and within the Escarpment forests.

During December 1886 the coal companies began to take measures to break the strike and recommence production. Early in January 1887 the Bulli Coal Company initiated a campaign of recruiting large numbers of 'scab labourers', or 'blacklegs', from Sydney and bringing them down to Bulli to work the mine. This resulted in almost immediate conflict, with a number of confrontations taking place between the local community and the blacklegs during January. Incidents also took place at other mines throughout the district during the December – January period, the most notable being a 'riot' at Mount Pleasant on New Year's Eve.

The opposing parties in the forthcoming 'Battle of Bulli' were clearly delineated. On one side was the local community, comprising the coal miners, their families, and various supporters, including local shopkeepers and merchants. Opposing this group was the mine management, strikebreakers, and the police, both local and others brought in from Sydney. A contingent of some eight constables were stationed at the Bulli jetty for the duration of this period of confrontation.

### **Preliminaries – The Arrival of Blacklegs**

Following on the Mount Pleasant riot of 31 December 1886, events took a more serious turn at Bulli. During church services there on the following Sunday, 2 January, the intense feeling in the town was revealed when the Primitive Methodist congregation walked out upon a 'scab' preacher. The incident was reported in the *Bulli and Clifton Times and Miners' Advocate* as follows:

A very unusual and sensational proceeding is reported to have occurred on Sunday evening last at the Primitive Methodist Church Bulli. It appears that the preacher who was to have officiated that evening by some means could not come and a local preacher went into the pulpit to conduct the services. His appearance was a signal for a general exodus from the holy edifice and before the first hymn was sung by the choir the church was entirely deserted.

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The explanation of this extraordinary proceeding may be found in the fact that the person alluded to whose name it would be unkind to mention, is charged with blacklegging in connection with the strike, and the congregation could not conscientiously listen to his divine exhortation. He was forced in chagrin to vacate the pulpit, and on another gentleman taking possession, the congregation returned and the service was completed without interruption (Reprinted in the *Wollongong Argus*, Saturday, 8 January 1887).

The following day, Monday, 3 January 1887, saw the arrival at the jetty of the Bulli Coal Company's steamer Merkesworth with ten scab labourers on board. Upon unloading, the new workers were marched up to the pit, accompanied by a police escort, and safely deposited in the rough wooden huts which made up the pit top village. A description of the event was presented in the *Illawarra Mercury* on Tuesday, 4 January, as follows:

### **The Mining Difficulty**

Yesterday was the time fixed upon by the management of the Bulli and Mount Keira Collieries to commencing operations on however a small scale. .... By telegraph from Bulli yesterday, and by enquiries instituted by a representative from this office, we learned that ten men arrived in Bulli yesterday, per steamer Merkesworth, to work in the mine. It is further stated that the company expect twenty further hands this morning. With these thirty men it is intended to commence operations today.

The ten who arrived yesterday were escorted by Mr Ross (the manager), Mr Alexander Lang, and the two local policemen to the company's houses near the pit.

No interference whatever was offered to these men by the men on strike. A meeting was held in Sharples' Assembly Rooms yesterday, to consider the situation, but on our representative entering the room he was informed that it was a private meeting, and he thereupon retired. He ascertained, however, that a resolution was moved to the effect that a deputation wait upon the new men, offering to pay their expenses back to Sydney. This resolution was lost. The position of affairs there regarding the matter in dispute still assume the same aspect, the men being determined not to return to work on the terms offered by the company.

It is said that the new arrivals do not look like men accustomed to coal hewing,

and it was whispered at Bulli yesterday that several of the men are detectives or police in disguise. It was also currently reported on what should be considered reliable authority that at least sixty men have signed with the company in Sydney. As Bulli is acknowledged to be the most difficult seam in the district, it is considered that an attempt to work it by the new men at the prices offered will be sufficient to scare them away.

Be that as it may, it would appear that the company has determined to look beyond their late employees for labor wherewith to work the colliery. It is understood that Mount Keira will also follow suit. Whether they will succeed in successfully carrying on operations with foreign labour remains to be seen. At any rate, it is certain that the men now out on strike will remain in that unfortunate position for some time to come at least.

The suggestion that the blacklegs were actually "detectives or police in disguise" was additional to the rumour then circulating that those sent to quell the unrest in the Illawarra district were also armed. This latter issue was raised on the floor of the New South Wales parliament later in the month. The arrival of this group of blacklegs at Bulli on 3 January, along with notice of another group the following day, was also reported in the *Illawarra Mercury* on Thursday, 6 January:

### **The Mining Situation at Bulli**

(To the Editor of the "Illawarra Mercury")

Sir, - The village of Bulli was enlivened yesterday morning [3 January] by the advent of ten "blacklegs" from Sydney. The Company's steamer brought them from Sydney to the Bulli jetty. On their arrival here they were escorted up to the mine, and were divided there into two companies to take up their quarters in two houses. An interview was obtained with these men, and they came

down to Bulli last night and gave an account of how they had been engaged. The men say that they were not told the truth as to what they would have to do. And it would not cheer those in authority at the mine if they were to hear all that is said by their men. However, they did not start work, and left the places of abode allotted to them the same evening. This morning they were driven back to Waterfall by Mr. Glass, storekeeper, of the place.

The miners think they have some genuine friends in Bulli

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still. I cannot help thinking Mr. Editor, that this strike may easily be settled. If the masters would see the men, I think they would find that the conference would not be fruitless. Several sound remarks have been made by yourself through your paper, remarks which every honest man must appreciate. And, as far as those who manage these collieries are

concerned, I am sure they would be saved much annoyance and pain by their old hands recommencing work. I would suggest that the different lodges send into the Masters' Association a scale of prices for hewing, seeing that the conditions of getting coal vary at nearly every place.

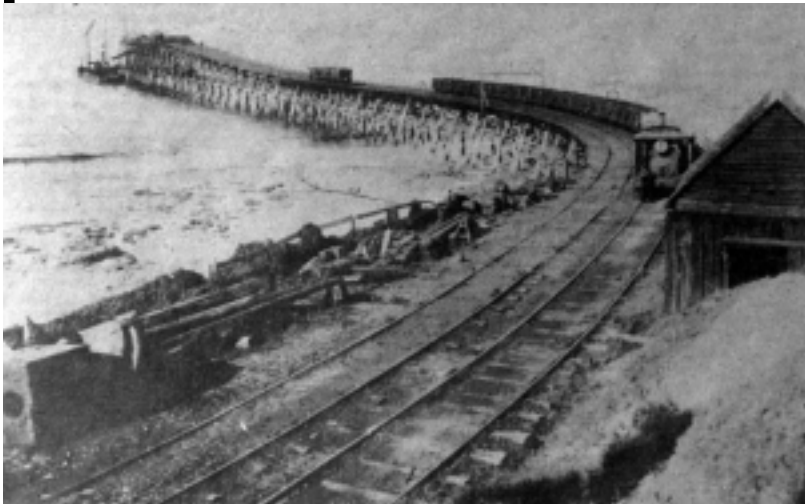
*An Old Hand  
Bulli, January 4th, 1887*

Another correspondent writing from Bulli on Tuesday [4 January], stated that eight additional men arrived there early that morning.

Two of them returned at once to Sydney with Mr. Glass and the men who arrived the previous day. At a meeting of miners held in the forenoon, the new hands attended. They stated they were Lithgow miners, and had previously been

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Bulli Coal Company jetty, circa 1887. The various blacklegs brought to Bulli during January 1887 were unloaded from the vessels which tied up off this exposed structure. They then either walked along the railway towards the mine, or were transported there in the coal wagon.



contributing towards the support of the Illawarra miners out on strike. They were told in Sydney they would be required to quarry, but finding that to be untrue, they objected to “blackleg” by going on coal, and would return to Sydney. Arrangement were made with Mr. Barker to take them to Campbelltown by coach, the Union paying expenses. A fresh batch is expected per steamer this (Thursday) morning.

The first clash between those supporting the strike, and the scabs and mine management, occurred on the morning of Friday, 7 January, when a third group of blacklegs arrived from Sydney aboard the *Merkesworth*. The group of eight was also summarily off loaded at the company’s Bulli jetty and taken by foot to the mine site. A brief account of what took place on that day was published in the *Illawarra Mercury* on Saturday, 8 January 1887:

### **The Mining Difficulty at Bulli**

(From a Correspondent)

At about half-past 5 o’clock this (Friday) morning, the *Merkesworth* was heard to whistle several times approaching the jetty. As soon as a few of the miners heard the whistle, they despatched a bellman on horseback to Woonona and other quarters to arouse their fellow miners, and soon a large crowd assembled in Bulli at the colliery gates, to have some conversation with the “new arrivals.” Only one man, however, went to speak to the crowd. There were eight in all, and the other seven were escorted to the company’s houses, near the pit, by Mr. Ross (manager), and two policemen.

The man that went to speak

to the miners stated that he had been out of employment for five months. He was engaged to make waggons for the company, and when finished that he was to have piecework to do. He said that if asked to go into the mine he would refuse to do so, and further, that if the waggon makers were out on strike he would decline to interfere with their work. A meeting is to be held at 10 o’clock today to try and get these eight men not to work. The man referred to said that four or five out of the eight men were Cardiff miners.

Luke Jackson, dubbed “The notorious blacklegger” having worked three days in the Bulli pit, getting coal, has again suspended operations. Three tons of coal were drawn out of the pit yesterday by the engineer.

*Bulli, January 7th, 1887.*

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'J. Glass Miners Store', Princes Highway, Bulli (from University of Wollongong Archives Collection). Jacob was a staunch supporter of the miners during the strike of 1886–7. This photograph shows the store at the turn of the century, with Jacob's son standing outside. The building, located adjacent to Whartons Creek, has since been extended and is at present occupied by an antique store and heritage artist Alan Upton, himself a descendent of Bulli coal miners.

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By the end of the first week of January 1887 things must have been looking decidedly bleak for the Bulli miners. Three loads of blacklegs had arrived, and the majority were apparently working at reopening the mine. However, their spirits may briefly have been raised when, on Friday, 7 January, the town saw a flying visit by New South Wales Premier Sir Henry Parkes, accompanied by the local Anglican rector, the Reverend Hugh Walker Taylor. The *Bulli and Clifton Times and Miners' Advocate* of Saturday, 8 January 1887, recorded the following brief notice of their stopover:

Sir Henry Parkes and Mr. Hugh Taylor passed through Bulli last evening by Waterworth's coach en route to Kiama, to support Mr. Cameron's candidature. As there were a large number of men in the township at the time they congregated round the coach and gave three hearty cheers for the veteran statesman, who gracefully acknowledged the compliment.

The Reverend Taylor was to play a prominent part in local industrial matters over the coming years, treading a fine line as negotiator in disputes between miners, their union and mine management, whilst ever remaining the local minister. Taylor was obviously sympathetic to the miners cause. and also interested in obtaining a political solution to this long, drawn-out dispute.

### **The Battle of Bulli**

Ten days after the flying visit by Premier Parkes, on Monday, 17 January 1887, a major conflict arose when the company landed a large contingent of 40 blacklegs at the Bulli jetty. On this occasion they were met by a large crowd from throughout the district, with women and children to the fore. A lively report of the confrontation which took place that morning between the two groups – and which is hereinafter referred to as “The Battle of Bulli” – appeared in the *Illawarra Mercury* on Tuesday, 18 January 1887. It was presented therein as if it were a report from a battlefield.

#### **A Bulli Bannockburn**

The Battle of the Blacklegs!  
The Red Flag Hoisted!  
Bulli Women to the Front!  
Repulse of the Iron Horse  
Rout of the Blacklegs  
The Whitelegs Triumphant!  
A Calm after a Storm!  
{By our War Correspondent.}

Head Quarters, Bulli  
Monday forenoon, 17th Jan., 1887.

The very air last night seemed war-like, after it had become known that about seventy five blackleg invaders were expected to arrive this morning by one of the Bulli Company's steamers, forty of the number being supposed to be special constables. Preparations were made to receive these visitors

as became their rank, smell and object, and accordingly a Reception Committee, consisting of nearly every man, woman and child in Bulli was arranged to do the amiable to them.

Bulli had a wakeful night, the motto of the men being, “No surrender,” and that of the women “Up and at ‘um.”

At about 3 o'clock in the morning, a general roll-up began, and by 6 o'clock the muster was on a good war footing, numbering as it did some 400 or 500 persons, including about 150 women. About 7 o'clock the cruiser with the invading army on board was seen bearing down from the east upon the

Bulli Jetty, on which no less than eight policemen were

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stationed, ready for any emergency. Excitement rose to fever height as the steamer came close, and several heads, which were supposed to have black-legs under them, could be seen on board.

One of the Bulli Company's locomotives with six waggons were in waiting at the jetty to convey the enemy to the "Row," and into these carriages the invaders with their swags made their way. But it transpired that the number instead of being seventy-five was only 40 – a number always suggestive of the historic "Forty Thieves." And as for policemen, the only thing in blue to be seen was the posse of eight already alluded to.

The blacklegs having boarded the waggons to "all have a ride," away went the locomotive with them towards their intended destination. On the train reaching near the township, collective Bulli was found in "solid square" on the tramway where it crosses the main road. The locomotive whistled and screeched, but instead of the square moving it became more solid and impregnable. And of the 150 women in the ranks, one, with Joan of Arc-like gesture, on top of the railway gate, defiantly waved a red flag and with desperate accent screamed out, "Danger!"

Nearer and near came the iron-horse, but closer and closer stood the stone-wallers,

in defensive attitude, volleying forth broadsides of verbal jeers, theatre, and pleadings towards the invaders. The local engineer having run the engine up to the crowd, hesitated to knock the persons down with it, who stood in the way on the rails where they crossed the main road. An engineer, from Sydney, then took charge of it, but he dared not run it into the crowd, or over the front rank of women, some of whom actually placed their feet before the engine wheels, and defied Captain Pollock, of the iron-horse, to run over them, they being on the Queen's highway, as well as fighting to the bitter end for their husband's rights.

Meanwhile, the blacklegs in the waggons became pale, with the exception of one real live blackfellow among them, and he changed into a "yeller." All their knees shook as if struck with fever and ague, and the teeth of several of them chattered like nigger minstrel bones, while most of them appeared to be saying their prayers, as probably they never said them before. But their better nature, as well as their sense of fear, was attacked.

The engine having been brought to a stand still, men and women weighed with all their might on the brakes of it, while others, like a swarm of bees, rushed the waggons in which the blacklegs were, explaining the situation, and appealing to their manhood to

clear out. At this strategy, however, the women proved themselves the best men, as their coaxings, cries, curses, and tears appeared to melt the blacklegs like ice under sunbeams.

Several other tactics were adopted by the women towards the same end. Babies by the score, that Hughey Taylor saw "on the block" at Bulli as he passed through with Sir 'Enry, were held up to the tremulous eyes of the blacklegs with such tearful pleadings as "Would you starve this poor little child?" "Can you find the heart to take the bread from that dear infant?" "Will you be the death of my child, as well as the ruin of myself and my husband?" "Look at that starving baby, and will you put it into the grave altogether?"

The women having got at them properly, in the waggons, the blacklegs soon began to scatter, taking up their swags and jumping over the sides with such remarks as - "I can stand men, but I'm blowed if I can stand them women and children," "Here goes from these 'ere women and their babies," "Let a fellow out of this, or we'll be killin' some o' their babies by being knocked over them; and then we'll be done for by their mothers," &c. And the Bulli Babies seemed to cry to order in the scrimmage, the most Highland screech of Norman M'Kinnon's

bag-pipes were nothing compared with the chorus which the Bulli Cradle Contingent screamed into the ears of the blacklegs.

The result of the battle, which lasted about half-an-hour, was that 36 of the enemy jumped out of the waggons and surrendered to the Bulli army, the engine taking the other four back to the jetty. Very shortly afterwards a flying column of women went to the jetty to capture the four runaways, but they only succeeded in bagging three of them - the 'coloured 'un' declining to capitulate on any conditions, but resolved to return to Sydney by the steamer, which he did. All the others were cleared out of the district in several coaches during the day, and that having been accomplished, the town and neighbourhood once more assumed their usual quiet and orderly appearance.

In regard to the cause of the battle I may add to this war news that only two men are now at work in the Bulli Colliery, nor are any more likely to work there under present circumstances. It was stated in the Mercury a few days ago that a steamer load of coal was sent away from the Bulli Colliery. Whoever gave that information to the paper stated a gross untruth, as not even a ton of coal has been sent from there since the strike commenced.

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“When the women stopped the train at Bulli in 1887...”  
(Undated print, possibly from the Illustrated Sydney News).  
Note that within the image the Escarpment is seen in the background and the locomotive appears to be coming from that direction, that is, from the direction of the mine towards the jetty. In fact, the engine should be shown going in the opposite direction, that is, coming from the jetty and heading west toward the Escarpment.

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A separate account of the day’s proceedings appeared in *The Bulli and Clifton Times and Miners’ Advocate* of Wednesday, 19 January 1887. It reads as follows:

### **The Strike**

Conquest of Blacklegs  
Exciting Scene in Bulli  
Danger Signal Hoisted  
Locomotive and Trams Stopped  
Appeal of the Helpless Infants  
The Enemy Routed  
Clergymen and Business People in the Fray  
Police Non-plussed  
Triumphant Cheering of Victors

Monday the 17th January 1887 will ever be remembered in Bulli, and the records of its events will form one of the most exciting chapters in the history of Australia.

Information had been received that the Bulli Coal Company were recruiting a large force of men in Sydney for employment in the Bulli mines, and when it was announced that they were to arrive on Monday morning, accompanied by a large body of police, excitement began to run high.

From early in the morning men, women and children began to assemble on the main road where the Company's tram passes, and by six o'clock there must have been between three and four hundred of all ages congregated.

Shortly after the steamer "Merksworth" came alongside the jetty, and the company's locomotive proceeded with half-a-dozen empty waggons to convey the contingent to the mine.

It was soon ascertained that forty blacklegs had arrived, also the company's consulting Engineer, Mr. Pollock, and immediately upon landing were placed under escort of nine or ten policemen. The object of conveying them up in the trucks was no doubt to thwart the men on strike in their endeavours to obtain an audience with the new arrivals and persuade them to return.

But such was the state of desperation to which the people were worked, that a determination was at once arrived at to stop the engine at all hazard, and with this purpose in view a woman with

resolution and bravery which is seldom displayed by any of the sterner sex, placed herself immediately on the tramline and hoisted a red flag as a danger signal to the advancing train.

Then the iron horse began to whistle and shriek, but continued its onward course until it literally bumped up against the woman, who by this time was backed up by a large crowd of fellow women and men, the former crying that they would die under the wheels of the engine before they would surrender and see their children starve.

The stoppage of the engine added to the reception accorded the men behind, gave rise to a series of cheers, groans and exclamations that would fairly beggar description.

Several attempts were made to force a passage with the engine but without success, the force having become so consolidated that the indomitable iron horse, whose conquests have extended almost the wide world over, and to which insuperable barriers have yielded, was forced to bow to the superhuman force and iron will of the crowd.

To make the chances of escape more remote several of the brakes on the waggons had been shut down.

While this scene was going on the blacklegs were being importuned to leave the

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waggons by men, women and children, slips being handed to them containing brief facts, children telling them not to take the bread from their mouths, and mothers clambering up and introducing helpless infants as an appeal to their better nature and asking them if they would go to work and starve those dear children.

These passionate pleas were not without their good results, as first one and then another threw his swag overboard and followed himself, to be received into the arms of grateful men and women.

Each secession from the ranks of the blacklegs was greeted with uproarious cheers, and in a very few minutes thirty-six of the forty had left the waggons, joined their forces with the triumphant multitude.

Satisfying themselves that they could not get up the line and viewing with dismay the results of the stoppage the officers of the company then reversed the engine and put back to the jetty with the remaining four blacklegs. Thence they were followed by a body of women who succeeded in bringing one, who was found lying sick on the side of the line, and the remaining three, one of whom was a blackfellow, returned to Sydney by the steamer.

The thirty-seven new

arrivals were taken charge of by the union men and treated to a substantial breakfast, after which they attended a meeting at the Assembly rooms, where they were received with enthusiasm. Several of them made statements, of which the following are extracts:

One said he went to the company's office drunk, accepted their terms, and was put on board the Illaroo. If he could have got ashore again he would not have come down, as he considered any man who worked against the working man deserved to have a knife put through him.

While they were on the steamer they were treated handsomely by the Captain, and could not have wished for better quarters. When they came off that morning they promised to have a load of coal that day, but he did not think they would find six miners in the crowd.

Another said that he read the slip handed to him, it touched his humanity and he felt for the women and children. He said he hoped the men would win the battle, and wherever he went he promised to stick up for the union and especially the miners of Bulli.

A third said that he was not a miner and knew nothing about it. The manager never told him there was a reduction in wages, but that they were starting in the old scale but would not take all the old

miners on again. He was shown the scale but of course he knew nothing about it.

Another said he was given to understand the strike was at an end, that the old men were willing to return to work, but the manager said he wouldn't have them. They were to get 8s. 6d. and 9s. a day. He was in reduced circumstances and thought if he could earn that wage he should take it; but when he saw the poverty stricken state of the place and heard the appeals of the women and children he was the first to throw his swag over and say he would not go to work.

A fifth said he was distinctly told that all the old men had gone to work, and he was surprised to find the state affairs were in. He was not willing to work under wages or take the bread out of other men's mouths, and had no intention of doing so.

Several ladies addressed the meeting and were followed by members of the union and

others, and the utmost goodwill prevailed, hopes being entertained that instead of being a death blow to the miners, that morning's work would convince the masters of their power and determination, and induce them to consider the advisability of offering terms of settlement.

After the meeting arrangements were made for the dispatch of the new arrivals, most of whom we may say were fine intelligent able-bodied men. In fact they must have been the pick of Sydney.

No less a sum than £20 was voluntarily subscribed in a very short time towards paying their expenses away, and Messrs Glass and Myles each volunteered to take a coach load free of charge. During the afternoon thirty were despatched, some to Waterfall, and some to Campbelltown, and yesterday morning six were taken as far as Dapto on their way to Kiama to seek work in the stone quarries.

### Further Conquests Old Hands Knocked Off Hope Becomes Stronger

Encouraged by the scenes of the morning a considerable number of women determined to follow up the victory by prevailing upon several of the old hands who had been working all along – non-union

men – to come over to the side of the strikers, and with this object in view journeyed to the Row.

They were stopped by the police, however, and only two of their number allowed to go

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forward; but these two succeeded in bringing three away with them, whose cooperation will add materially to the force.

Besides these several others voluntarily gave in their names, particularly those filling important positions, so that scarcely any are left, and these are expected to give over.

Such a day as Monday in Bulli has never been seen in Illawarra, and probably will never be seen again. Up to a

late hour at night crowds thronged the street, and everywhere was excitement and enthusiasm; cheers were given for the women and all friends, and groans for the enemy indulged in at intervals.

Rumours are current that the company have instituted legal proceedings for the obstruction of the locomotive and abduction of the blacklegs, but what form the prosecution will take remains to be seen.

The conflict did not end there, for the next day (Tuesday, 18 January) the women and men faced a group of baton-wielding policemen attempting to bring another group (the fifth) of blacklegs to the mine. The *Illawarra Mercury* of Thursday, 20 January 1887 presented the following account:

### **The Mining Difficulty**

On Tuesday morning, one day after the fray alluded to in the last issue as having taken place at Bulli, another commotion occurred at the same place.

About half-past 7 o'clock, one of the Bulli Coal Company's steamers was seen coming towards the jetty. A bellman was at once sent in the direction of Woonona and other quarters, to bring about a roll-up. Very soon a muster of between 150 and 200, principally women, centred on the main road where the Company's tramway passes it – the scene of the previous day's engagement.

Before long a body of eighteen policeman was seen coming up the tramway from the jetty. This appeared to be considered almost a disappointment, as "mere policemen" were "stale game" compared with what a similar number of "blacklegs" would be. In this instance too, there was no locomotive on the programme – another matter that bereft the "coming event" of much interest.

As the policemen approached nearer, however, it was seen that they were escorting half a dozen new arrivals, and on these all eyes were soon fixed.

On reaching the roadway, the police ordered the crowd to

clear the way, but the latter only stood closer round the gate and road.

Finding the state of affairs, the police, after a short time, drew their batons, but they managed to pass the crowd without using those weapons. However, just at that time, as we are informed, matters looked rather ugly for about ten minutes, the opinion of onlookers appearing to be that things were assuming a far more serious aspect than at the previous day's skirmish. Happily, however, and to the credit of all concerned, the

occurrence passed off without causing bodily injury to any one.

Whilst this commotion was at its height, the women embraced the opportunity to appeal to the newcomers, with the result that they succeeded in coaxing one of them, as our correspondent informs me, from going to work. The other five were escorted to the companies houses, near the mine, by the police, the women following and pleading with them not to go to work, out of pity for their (the women's) poor children..

A separate account of the day's proceedings also appeared in the *Bulli and Clifton Times and Miners' Advocate* of Wednesday, 19 January 1887, as follows:

### **Tuesday**

#### More Arrivals Reinforcement of the Police

After the fatigue and excitement of Monday several men and women retired for a good night's rest, secure in the supposition that no further men would be sent for the present; but to the surprise of everyone an alarm was made early yesterday morning, and six men landed from the steamer, and escorted by a posse of twenty policemen proceeded on foot towards the Row.

Notwithstanding the short

notice a crowd of men and women assembled at the crossing on the main road and the escort had some difficulty in making its way through the crowd. No violent resistance was offered but several of the new policemen drew their batons among the crowd, and but for the command of Senior-constable Henry would undoubtedly have raised a riot by their cowardly attitude towards unoffending women and men.

## Illawarra Unity

Happily, beyond indiscriminate jostling and a little uncomplimentary language, no scene of any account was created.

One man came out from the blacklegs and found work elsewhere during the day, and five made their way to the pit.

After this attempt to catch the miners napping, they are determined to remain continu-

ally on watch for the new arrivals, and it is not unexpected that some may present themselves today.

Following this incident, there were no more major confrontations between groups of blacklegs and the local community who were supporting the striking miners. Efforts at ending the stalemate continued in earnest.

### Aftermath

The "Battle of Bulli" and other similar incidents during January 1887 engendered a great deal of comment in the local newspapers. The *Wollongong Argus* in particular published a number of letters which referred to the strikers as "Loafers" and called on their immediate return to work. The Reverend Hugh Walker Taylor also published a public letter calling for a return to work, though his tone was more sympathetic to the miners.

To bring matters to a head, on 29 January the Southern Coal Proprietors Defence Association issued a public ultimatum calling on the striking miners to return to work. With that, the dispute was eventually settled during the middle of February. The Bulli mine reopened shortly thereafter, with a labour force comprising a mixture of the local "old hands" who had been on strike, and the blacklegs. The leaders of the strike and prominent unionists were not re-employed at the time.

This whole episode was to end on an extremely bitter note when, at approximately 2.30pm on the afternoon of Wednesday, 23 March 1887, an explosion ripped through the Bulli coal mine and killed 81 men and boys then at work. But that is another story...