THE late Clarrie Fallon, seventeen years head-serang of the Australian Workers’ Union, once quietly said, “I will never join a body I can’t control.” Fallon wasn’t boasting. He was simply spelling out the decades-old credo — official but unwritten — of the AWU hierarchy. Fallon’s words are a sinister backdrop to the July decision of the AWU executive council to recommend to its 1967 annual convention that the union affiliate with the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The AWU hierarchical power structure, first shaped by E. G. Theodore and W. McCormack back in the days of the amalgamation of the AWU and the Amalgamated Mining Association, is much the same today despite a nagging erosion of its base.

Power is still the biggest word in AWU top circles. And power percolates through an ugly heap of undemocratic rules, low-wage awards, “red-baiting”, strike breaking, suspect ballots and collusion with employers and governments. Ted Theodore, with a mixture of shame and pride, once described the set-up as “government by officials for officials.”

The AWU power edifice is laced together by a unique web of rules which are observed or broken according to where you sit on the heap. Ballots are farcical; upwards of eighty per cent of AWU members do! not vote in ballots, and until recently AWU ballots did not conform to the secrecy provisions of the Arbitration Act. Two-thirds of the membership are always ineligible for office because of the five years continuous membership rule. Even the eligible members can have their nominations thrown out unless passed by the officials as “fit and proper persons” to contest office.
Wide open to corruption, AWU ballots are notoriously suspect. The present General Secretary Tom Dougherty was first elected to that office in circumstances which, according to an affidavit by Clyde Cameron in the Industrial Court a few years ago, "The late Justice O'Mara found that the Queensland branch ballot . . . was characterised by corruption and breach of rules."

With nearly 80,000 members and nineteen of the forty delegates to Federal convention, Queensland is the biggest AWU branch and the real seat of power. Until recent years the Queensland secretary was the traditional king maker of the Australian Labor Party machine, inheriting without question the presidency of the Party's State Executive and enjoying such privileges as facsimile voting in ALP plebiscites. (This was the use of a facsimile of the ballot paper published in The Worker, to which the voting coupon from the AWU ticket was to be attached.)

But the heyday came to an end early in 1959 when the then AWU secretary Joe Bukowski was suspended from all official positions in the ALP and the AWU disaffiliated in retaliation. The immediate issue of dispute was the misuse of facsimile ballot papers in an ALP plebiscite, but Bukowski's suspension was really the culmination of a new stage in the struggle against "Industrial Group" influence in the Queensland branch of of the ALP. At a Labor-in-Politics convention a few weeks later facsimile voting was abolished, and Tom Dougherty, in a burst of standard AWU rhetoric from his Sydney office, accused the ALP in Queensland of being dominated by "Communists and fellow travellers."

For years the AWU has been renowned in union circles for its low-wage awards. This led the president of the Queensland Trades & Labor Council, Mr. J. Egerton, to say in 1957, "We are sick and tired of having to fall into line with sub-standard working conditions accepted by the AWU." More recently, because of rising rank and file discontent with low-wage rates, AWU officials have adopted the practice of coming in on the grouter on wage cases and awards.

The AWU hierarchy has always opposed state and national trade union unity except on its own terms. In the "One Big Union" movement during and after the first world war the AWU, in the words of labor historian V. Gordon Childe "... was the rock on which One Big Union went to shipwreck". Their hostility was dictated by their own design to make the AWU the one big union, and part of the capitalist establishment, and because they objected violently to the radical policies voiced by the OBU advocates. Speaking of the plans of the AWU hier-
archy Childe wrote, "They desire to extend the membership of their union in order to swell their own importance, but they aim at keeping the unions that they devour in the most complete subjection possible." When the ACTU was formed in 1927 the AWU stood aloof and hostile. Down the years branches of the AWU have affiliated with state Trades and Labor Councils only when it suited their purposes.

This "dominate, or disaffiliate and destroy" line of the AWU chiefs is also evident in their many bumptious withdrawals from ALP affiliation federally and in the states. In February 1965 the AWU annual convention decided to withdraw all support from the Labor Party federally because two federal labor politicians, Dr. J. F. Cairns and Mr. C. Cameron, supported AWU members who had been shamelessly betrayed by the hierarchy in their struggle at Mt. Isa.

In 1958-59 the right wing was still in disarray following the Labor Party split. Dougherty, quick to seize a chance but never good at tactics, launched an attack on the ACTU which finally led the right wing into a strategic straitjacket. Encouraged by the US-sponsored International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and on the eve of an ACTU interstate executive meeting, Dougherty, with his usual savoir faire, accused the ACTU of having no basic loyalties to Australia. In an angry and unanimous reply the ACTU executive said, "... Mr. Dougherty, in another of his typical irrational outbursts against the ACTU, has endeavored to question the loyalty and besmirch the character and bona fides of the ACTU... Mr. Dougherty's reference to basic loyalties could be very well tested in his own behavior in the labor movement. He loses no opportunity to be a disruptor."

Several months later the 1959 AWU annual convention, on Dougherty's initiative, decided to sponsor a rightwing confederation of unions to rival the ACTU. This move came immediately in the wake of a visit to Australia by Mr. David John McDonald, conservative president of the American United Steelworkers' union.

ACTU president Albert Monk, commenting at the time on the AWU plan, said, "The role of the present AWU leadership has been confined for years to union splitting. The constant attacks at AWU conventions on the ACTU and its officials has been simply a means of endeavoring to cloak the ineptitude of the AWU leadership to perform positive industrial work and formulate effective industrial, economic and social programs."
The extreme right flirted for a time with Dougherty’s breakaway plan but, failing to rally significant support, shifted their attack to the issue of reciprocal visits to socialist countries. Throwing grist to their mill the journal of the ICFTU publicly and insultingly rebuked the ACTU by using the epithet “blackleg” (the American equivalent of “scab”) for unionists who visited socialist countries. Albert Monk had visited the Soviet Union and China in 1957. The reciprocal visits dispute resulted in the rout of the extreme rightwing at the 1959 ACTU Congress, and then their further isolation through their non-attendance at the 1961 Congress. The rightwing had reached an impasse, and painful reappraisal of their positions was the big order of the day.

Meanwhile Australia was assuming key importance to United States strategic planning in Asia and the western Pacific. Because of this and the increasing inflow of US capital investment the US started to take a keener interest in Australian political and industrial institutions. The Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement were singled out for special attention.

The importance of this decision was later underscored by the decision of the Australian Government to allow the US Navy to establish a nuclear submarine radio control base in Western Australia, and the stepping up of US military activities in Vietnam.

Thereupon the US labor attache and his staff became the busiest team of men in Canberra, and by mid-1962 the extreme right had acquired a new ACTU strategy — stay in and turn it on a new, rightwing, course. The first major victory for this plan was the surprise appointment of Clerks’ union federal secretary, J. Riordan, to a vacancy on the ACTU interstate executive in May 1963 following his rejoining the Labor Party. Riordan had previous long associations with NCC-DLP policies, and less than two years earlier had led the small group of unions that boycotted the 1961 ACTU congress through their refusal to pay a levy to finance reciprocal visits. The old-guard rightwingers on the ACTU executive were deeply implicated in Riordan’s appointment and in events since then to keep Riordan on and alter the composition of the executive.

Stage two of the new rightwing strategy was to get the powerful but obstreperous AWU into the ACTU and so consolidate the putsch. It wasn’t easy to get an AWU change of mind because the hierarchy was still obsessed by the notion of getting separate ICFTU affiliation as a “pure” trade union centre “free of communist influence.” But heavy pressures and enticing terms had
started to bear fruit by the time of the 1966 AWU convention when several members of the hierarchy spoke of possible ACTU affiliation on the right terms.

The chief source of pressures for an AWU-ACTU rapport was revealed obliquely by Charlie Oliver when speaking of his 1965 visit to the US. Oliver told convention of the growing chagrin of American AFL-CIO leaders, who have long-standing associations with US State Department planners on international trade union matters, at the continued fragmentation of the rightwing forces in the Australian national trade union framework.

More recently the labor movement has been hot with rumors of US interference in union and political affairs, and on July 10 the Mirror newspaper Brisbane Sunday Truth carried an editorial headed "The CIA and our unions". (CIA being the US Central Intelligence Agency.)

The Truth editorial referred to high-up labor circles crediting the CIA "with having had a hand in encouraging the powerful AWU to link up with the ACTU", and went on "... there are vital reasons why the CIA ... should be vitally interested in Australian political and union trends. More and more we are becoming enmeshed in American affairs. More and more United States capital is being poured into Australian development. We are one of the few stable nations left and the United States naturally would like to see us stay that way ... both as an outlet for American investment and a bulwark against communist aggression in the South Pacific."

This assault on the Australian trade union movement is paralleled by a similar offensive, in which the NCC-DLP plays a prominent part, against the Australian Labor Party. The motives in both spheres are rightwing control and domination at the top to thwart the rank and file striving for better living standards and national independence.

The nature of the affiliation terms offered the AWU are still the property of a very small group. For its part the ACTU will gain $16,000 annually in affiliation fees. But the AWU hierarchy, and those behind them, traditionally extort a terrible price for their favors. Dougherty gave a clue in his words of July 6, "When we join the ACTU we will be closer to one big union movement in Australia than at any other period of our history." "One Big Union" AWU style is perhaps the price he is asking; with nawab Dougherty proposing and disposing.