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Abstract

Peak union councils have had a lasting impact on society in New South Wales (NSW). The pre-eminent council in the state has been the Labor Council of New South Wales (Labor Council of NSW), which has functioned for well over 100 years. At the regional level the Barrier Industrial Council at Broken Hill, the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council and the Western District Labor Council at Lithgow have been in existence for most of the twentieth century. In fact, the Barrier Industrial Council has dominated day-to-day life in Broken Hill. Regional peak councils have also been formed throughout the state in a host of towns and cities that include Albury, Griffith, Leeton, Young, Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Bathurst and Tamworth, and in regional areas such as the Manning, the Richmond-Tweed and the Shoalhaven. These regional councils have never enjoyed the success or longevity of their more illustrious counterparts due to the interaction of local, national, and international factors. For these councils, the early years were characterised by high levels of activity and enthusiasm, but each soon entered into a cycle of inexorable decline that eventually led to moribundity and, finally, closure. After varying lengths of time, in some cases many years, they were reformed and the cycle of growth and decline would begin again. There was little long-term stability for these councils, which has had a detrimental impact on rates of unionisation in regional Australia. This paper is an analysis of the factors that led to the formation of the Wagga Wagga Eight-Hour Association (EHA) and the Wagga Wagga and District Trades and Labor Council (TLC) and the activities they pursued and the problems they encountered as they passed through their many cycles of growth and decline.

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Peak union councils have had a lasting impact on society in New South Wales (NSW). The pre-eminent council in the state has been the Labor Council of New South Wales (Labor Council of NSW), which has functioned for well over 100 years. At the regional level the Barrier Industrial Council at Broken Hill, the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council and the Western District Labor Council at Lithgow have been in existence for most of the twentieth century. In fact, the Barrier Industrial Council has dominated day-to-day life in Broken Hill. Regional peak councils have also been formed throughout the state in a host of towns and cities that include Albury, Griffith, Leeton, Young, Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Bathurst and Tamworth, and in regional areas such as the Manning, the Richmond-Tweed and the Shoalhaven. These regional councils have never enjoyed the success or longevity of their more illustrious counterparts due to the interaction of local, national, and international factors. For these councils, the early years were characterised by high levels of activity and enthusiasm, but each soon entered into a cycle of inexorable decline that eventually led to moribundity and, finally, closure. After varying lengths of time, in some cases many years, they were reformed and the cycle of growth and decline would begin again. There was little long-term stability for these councils, which has had a detrimental impact on rates of unionisation in regional Australia.

This paper is an analysis of the factors that led to the formation of the Wagga Wagga Eight-Hour Association (EHA) and the Wagga Wagga and District Trades and Labor Council (TLC) and the activities they pursued and the problems they encountered as they passed through their many cycles of growth and decline. The 'theory of peak body formation' proposed by Bradon Ellem

and John Shields in their excellent study of the formation of the Barrier Industrial Council, is used to analyse the attempts to form the respective peak council.¹ Ellem and Shields argue 'that for any defined group of unions ... peak body formation and organization are determined by a combination of ... factors internal and external to the unions within the grouping'. The five internal factors are 'historical precedent and practice in union strategy', 'union density, size and spread', 'sectional and ideological divisions', 'membership involvement' and 'leadership agency'. The external grouping consists of 'market structure and conditions', 'the division of labour', 'employer strategy and organisation', 'the role of the state' and the 'wider labour movement'.²

The analysis of the respective peak council's activities and the problems it encountered will be based on the four 'general comparative yardsticks of authority for peak union councils' advanced first by R.M. Martin in 1962³ and used by Ray Markey in his study of the Labor Council of NSW.⁴ Markey lists the four yardsticks as follows:

- membership of affiliates, in aggregate and as a proportion of all trade unionists and of the workforce;
- the structural diffusion of power within the organisation, between the executive and the affiliates, including the governmental powers exercised over affiliates;
- the industrial function of the peak body, in terms of its role in bargaining and/or arbitration, co-ordinating and controlling industrial action, and intervening in demarcation disputes between unions;
- the political function of the peak council.⁵

The paper commences with a brief overview of the literature and continues with a short account of the Wagga Wagga community in the period to 1990. Each of the attempts to form and re-form the EHA or the TLC will then be analysed. The remainder of the paper will be taken up by an analysis of the four comparative yardsticks and the local peak council.

Peak union councils have not been the focus of sustained research. As Ellem and Shields rightly point out, there are 'empirical and theoretical gaps in our understanding of [the] origins, development and role[s] of the peak councils'.⁶ To date it is only the national and state bodies that have warranted attention. The vast bulk of publications on the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) have concentrated on the level of authority it had over its affiliates. Foenander, Ross, Gollan, Donn

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and Dunkley, Dabscheck and Rawson⁷ have all argued that the ACTU has had little or no authority over affiliates. Only Martin and Griffin, who concentrate on events in the 1950s and 1980s respectively, have argued that the ACTU has had both internal and external authority. Martin argues that the ACTU's political and industrial functions illustrate that it played a very important role 'which both confers and requires substantial authority within the trade union movement'.⁸ Griffin has used Headey's four-point scheme for assessing the authority of national confederations – the role played by the peak-council in the collective bargaining process; the role it plays in the control of strike action and strike funds; the size of its staff relative to union membership; and the finances of the peak council. According to Griffin, 'on all these criteria the power of the ACTU has significantly increased from 1980 onwards'.⁹ All this work has an extremely narrow focus. In contrast, Hagan's lengthy and detailed official history of the ACTU analyses its relationships with state councils, individual unions, the arbitration courts, employers and government over three distinct periods – 1927–49, 1949–72 and 1972–80.¹⁰ It is a study of struggle between the competing interests of the supporters of 'labourism' and those of the radical left, and the growth and development of the Council. By 1980, Hagan argues,

The ACTU ... was a much larger and more volatile organization than it had been 50 years before. The unions affiliated represented the whole range of Australian trade unions. It had developed sophisticated skills in the presentation of wage claims, and in the co-ordination of controlled industrial pressure in pursuit of them. It had formulated a comprehensive range of carefully researched policies on issues of government. It had become the unquestioned representative of the trade union movement, and both Labor and anti-Labor governments consulted it formally and informally.¹¹

In comparison to the ACTU, the state and provincial councils have not enjoyed the same level of scrutiny. By far the most comprehensive analysis of a state council is Markey's study of the Labor Council of NSW.¹² By using the four comparative yardsticks for peak councils in analysing the activities of the council, Markey found that it 'may be judged to have exercised a reasonably extensive level of authority, among unions and in the community as a whole, for most of its 120 year history'.¹³ Nairn's analysis of this council's early years highlights its industrial and political activities, especially in the formation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), and the development of a

community role.¹⁴ Felmingham's study of the United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia's first year of activity highlights the limitations placed on peak councils, especially during their early period.¹⁵ Similar research on the Barrier Industrial Council, the Newcastle Trades Hall Council and the Illawarra District Trades and Labor Council is patchy or incomplete.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that these councils have enjoyed either total dominance in their localities or have enjoyed a reasonable level of authority. Eric Aarons, for example, has pointed out that they have been effectively a fourth tier of government and '[m]ost local movements in these areas, whether union, community or even directly political, were led or co-ordinated by these Labor Councils'.¹⁷ In contrast, Eather's work on the Wagga Wagga and District Trades and Labor Council during 1943–78 illustrates a vastly different relationship. Here the TLC had very little influence or impact.¹⁸

The bulk of other relevant historical work to date has concentrated on national and state issues. Of fifteen surveyed histories of trade unions, eight are relevant to this study, however these studies rarely move beyond the big picture in any meaningful way to examine developments at a local level.¹⁹ Likewise works on the ALP by McMullin, Freudenberg, and Murray,²⁰ rarely move outside the respective caucus or executive debate at the national or state level. Works by Cavalier, Rasmussen and Hay, who all focus on local branch activity,²¹ and by Hagan and Turner, who have a more regional approach in their study of the ALP's NSW branch,²² are exceptions. In their discussion on the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Gollan, Davidson and Macintyre²³ concentrate on internal developments and the party's reaction to international, national and/or state events, despite widespread activity in rural areas.

The Wagga Wagga Community, 1890–1990

As figures in Table 1 show, Wagga Wagga has undergone dramatic changes over the hundred years to 1990. Unlike many of its regional counterparts, the city (Wagga Wagga was proclaimed a city in 1946) has seen its population increase more than ten-fold over the period, from 4596 in 1891 to 53406 in 1991. By 1991 Wagga Wagga was the largest inland city in NSW. The vast bulk of the population was born in Australia and was Anglo-Celtic. Relevant census figures for either variable never fell below 90 per cent. The majority of the population who acknowledged a religious affiliation was Protestant, although the percentage figures for this group began a steady decline from 1921, and by 1991 was below 50 per cent for the first time. Over the same

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Table 1
Wagga Wagga Census Data 1891–1991: Selected Items

| Year | Population | | | Religion (%) | | Aust. born (%) |
|------|------------|--------|-------|--------------|-------|-------------------|
| | Male | Female | Total | RC | Prot. | |
| 1891 | 2361 | 2235 | 4596 | 34.46 | 59.00 | |
| 1911 | 3238 | 3181 | 6419 | 32.81 | 62.50 | |
| 1921 | 3805 | 3874 | 7679 | | | 92.08 |
| 1947 | 7390 | 7950 | 15340 | 31.37 | 58.50 | 95.98 |
| 1976 | 16645 | 17706 | 34351 | 31.48 | 50.60 | 92.92 |
| 1991 | 26323 | 27083 | 53406 | 32.23 | 49.83 | 91.10 |

period, the local Catholic population has stood at about one-third of the population.

Table 2 charts the changing nature of the workforce from 1921.²⁴ These figures show that for every census date less than 10 per cent of the population was employed in primary production. These figures do not give due importance to the farming industry. For most of the twentieth century Wagga Wagga has acted as a service centre to the surrounding farming communities located in the Mitchell and Kyeamba Shires. Local businesses were heavily dependent on this trade until government agencies were located in the city in increasing numbers after the Second World War. This shift is evident in the importance of the 'Public Authority' category. There was a substantial numerical increase in this category after 1947 that mirrored the increase in total population, but the more important percentage figure more than doubled in the period to 1991. In contrast, the numbers employed in 'Manufacturing' only increased slightly, while in percentage terms there was a dramatic decline from 34.18 per cent in 1921 to 13.46 per cent in 1991. This decline reflects the changing nature of the workforce from one orientated towards the rural sector to one dependent on the service sector. It also shows how local industry was unable to cope with the vastly superior economies of scale enjoyed by industries located in the capital city and improved transport networks that brought goods from these industries to the local doorstep. Over time the local brewer and soft drink manufacturer, for example, were bought out and closed down to become little more than distribution points. Attempts by the local council and various business organisations to attract new industries proved relatively fruitless for much of the twentieth century. The remaining sectors,

Table 2
Wagga Wagga Census Data: Selected Occupations

| Year | P'mary | % | Manuf. | % | P. Auth. | % |
|------|--------|------|--------|-------|----------|-------|
| 1921 | 295 | 9.35 | 1078 | 34.18 | | |
| 1947 | 461 | 7.54 | 1023 | 16.72 | 983 | 16.07 |
| 1976 | 387 | 2.80 | 1495 | 10.75 | 4364 | 31.38 |
| 1991 | 1390 | 6.03 | 3101 | 13.46 | 8107 | 35.20 |

| Year | C/Fin | % | T/Com | % | Women % |
|------|-------|-------|-------|------|---------|
| 1921 | 1064 | 37.74 | 243 | 7.70 | 18.01 |
| 1947 | 2146 | 35.08 | 649 | 10.6 | 19.57 |
| 1976 | 5765 | 41.45 | 769 | 5.52 | 27.80 |
| 1991 | 7839 | 34.04 | 1219 | 5.29 | 34.68 |

the 'Commercial/Finance' and 'Transport and Communication', remained relatively static in percentage terms.

The majority of paid workers were male, with the percentage of women in paid work nearly doubling between 1921 and 1991. Women always had to contend with the dominant mores of the time that dictated that paid work ceased on their marriage, and this barrier was not lifted in any meaningful way until the more liberal attitude of the 1970s and the economic necessity of families needing two incomes during the 1980s.

Politically the city has supported a conservative agenda. Branches of all the mainstream political parties have existed in Wagga Wagga throughout the twentieth century. As Table 3 illustrates the city has been represented in the NSW parliament between 1891 and 1973 by representatives of all the major parties. However, the figures illustrate two important issues. First, the ALP was only successful when the seat was multi-member or based on wider area rather than being centred on Wagga Wagga. The only exception to this was the electoral success of Edgar 'Eddie' Graham between 1941 and 1957. Graham was a political conservative who was first elected during the Second World War when conservative frustration with the major non-Labor parties was at an all time high. More importantly for the local community, he was an exceptionally good pork-barreller who ensured that State government largesse continually flowed to the city.

Second, when the seat was based solely on Wagga Wagga the ALP's total vote rarely exceeded 45 per cent, while the vote from

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the Wagga Wagga booths rarely surpassed that of the conservative candidate(s). As the workforce demographic changed, especially after the Second World War and following Graham's death, the voting public turned overwhelmingly to the conservative parties. This voting pattern continued between 1973–90. These trends are also evident in voting patterns in the two federal seats that Wagga Wagga has been part of since 1901.

The extreme Left and Right have had a consistent presence in the city. The CPA had a small number of members in the city during the 1940s, with a token presence thereafter. The extreme Right, in its many guises, was numerically the bigger of the two groups. Over the course of the twentieth century the Old Guard, the New Guard, the United Country Movement, the Association and the Australian Women's Movement Against Socialisation had large numbers of members in the city.²⁵

Peak Body Formation and Re-Formation

The trade unions have had a presence in the city from the 1880s. In the period to 1911, the largest and most influential union was the Amalgamated Shearers' Union of Australasia/Australian Workers' Union (AWU). The Wagga Wagga branch of this union claimed to have had on average around 3000 members during the 1890s, some of whom were locals but most were from a host of hamlets and towns in rural NSW and Victoria, Melbourne, Tasmania and a small number from New Zealand.²⁶ This branch published the socialist union newspaper, *The Hummer* between 1891-92, was instrumental in getting Arthur Rae elected as one of the three members to be returned for the seat of The Murrumbidgee in 1891 and was the power behind the decision of the Murrumbidgee branch of the Labor Electoral League based in Wagga Wagga to contest the Wagga Wagga Municipal Elections in 1892.²⁷ In the first decade of the twentieth century local branches of the Rural Workers' Union, the Farmers and Bushworkers' Union and the Rabbit Trappers' Union were formed in the city.²⁸ Workers in many other trades were in the city but had not been organised.

The local leaders of the AWU were instrumental in forming local branches of the Australasian Labor Federation and the Labor Electoral League, which had, by 1895, given way to the Political Labor League (hereafter referred to as the ALP). The branch folded in 1898 but was reformed in 1902 through the work of a handful of activists, notably Anne Addison and John O'Regan. However, the high point for local activists was the electoral successes of 1910. In this year the party was returned to the treasury benches

Table 3
NSW Legislative Assembly Elections, 1891–1973

| Year | Electorate | Enrol- ment | Total valid vote | ALP vote |
|------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1891 | The Murrumbidgee – multi 3 | 7594 | 3975 - 52.34% | 2280 - 24.72% |
| 1894 | Wagga Wagga | 2092 | 1220 - 58.32% | 2274 - 22.70% |
| 1895 | | 1795 | 997-55.54% | N.C. |
| 1898 | | 2118 | 1058 - 52.58% | N.C. |
| 1901 | | 2488 | 1618 - 73.58% | N.C. |
| 1904 | The Murrum- bidgee | 8111 | 5172 - 63.76% | 1538 - 30.04% |
| 1907 | | 10309 | 7212 - 69.96% | 3931 - 55.59% |
| 1910 | | 12661 | 8592 - 67.86% | 4326 - 51.39% |
| 1913 | Wagga Wagga | 10802 | 7918 - 73.30% | 3951 - 51.20% |
| 1917 | | 10538 | 7245 - 68.75% | 3371 - 47.16% |
| 1920 | Murray - multi 3 | 37857 | 21158 - 55.89% | 9099 - 45.88% |
| 1922 | | 39500 | 25736 - 65.15% | 10154 - 41.20% |
| 1925 | | 42630 | 25751 - 60.41% | 11391 - 46.40% |
| 1927 | Wagga Wagga | 14136 | 11589 - 81.98% | 3813 - 33.43% |
| 1930 | | 12393 | 11780 - 95.05% | 5077 - 43.59% |
| 1932 | | 12231 | 11943 - 97.64% | 3783 - 32.35 %* |
| 1935 | | 13121 | 12563 - 95.42% | 4529 - 36.51 %* |
| 1938 | | 13665 | 13022 - 95.22% | 4734 - 36.91% |
| 1941 | | 15046 | 13947 - 92.25% | 6850 - 49.72% |
| 1944 | | 15403 | 13844 - 89.88% | 9287 - 67.97% |
| 1947 | | 15503 | 14702 - 94.37% | 9408 - 64.66% |
| 1950 | | 17085 | 16066 - 93.87% | 9509 - 59.89% |
| 1953 | | 17328 | 16342 - 94.31% | 10292 - 64.21% |
| 1956 | | 18260 | 17137 - 93.85% | 10250 - 60.31% |
| 1957 | Wagga Wagga B/E | | 16040 | 5499 - 35.49% |
| 1959 | | 18685 | 17632 - 94.36% | 6615 - 37.96% |
| 1962 | | 19235 | 18142 - 94.29% | 6659 - 37.11% |
| 1965 | | 19933 | 18624 - 93.43% | 5374 - 28.85% |
| 1968 | | 21145 | 19488 - 92.16% | 4984 - 25.57% |
| 1971 | | 21226 | 19451 - 91.63% | 5889 - 30.27% |
| 1973 | | 22706 | 20607 - 90.75% | 5429 - 26.34% |

Sources: C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *Voting for the NSW Legislative Assembly 1890–1964*, Canberra, 1974, and the NSW Electoral Commission.

* = Lang Labor

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Table 3
NSW Legislative Assembly Elections, 1891–1973 (cont.)

| Year | Member/Party | WW/ ALP | WW/ LIB | WW/ CP | WW/ Oth |
|------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 1891 | 1 x ALP - K Rae | 654 | 1617 | | 168 |
| 1894 | J.Gormly - Protectionist | 217 | 689 | | |
| 1895 | J.Gormly - Protectionist | | 457 | 298 | |
| 1898 | J.Gormly - Nat Federal | | 519 | 274 | |
| 1901 | J.Gormly - Progressive | | 689 | 416 | |
| 1904 | P. McGarry - ALP | | 865 | 910 | 425 |
| 1907 | P.McGarry - ALP | 1452 | 1162 | | |
| 1910 | P.McGarry - ALP | 1507 | | | 1220 |
| 1913 | W.J.Boston - ALP | 2001 | 1579 | | |
| 1917 | G.S.Beeby - Nationalist | 1702 | 1642 | | |
| 1920 | 1 x ALP - W.J.O'Brien | 1388 | 475 | 1004 | |
| 1922 | 1 x ALP - W.J.O'Brien | 1770 | 1568 | 412 | |
| 1925 | 1 x ALP - V.W. E. Goodin | 1864 | 1212 | 592 | |
| 1927 | M.Kilpatrick - Country Rty | 2199 | | 3116 | |
| 1930 | M.Kilpatrick - Country P'ty | 3129 | | 3163 | |
| 1932 | M.Kilpatrick - Country P'ly | 2320 | | 3926 | |
| 1935 | M.Kilpatrick - Country P'ty | 2816 | | 3876 | |
| 1938 | M.Kilpatrick - Country P'ty | 2879 | | 4136 | |
| 1941 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 3540 | | 3088 | 259 |
| 1944 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 4690 | | 2131 | |
| 1947 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 5090 | | 2614 | |
| 1950 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 5268 | 2373 | 878 | |
| 1953 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 5688 | 2483 | 405 | 65 |
| 1956 | E.H. Graham - ALP | 5899 | 3679 | | |
| 1957 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3212 | 3440 | 1070 | 1624 |
| 1959 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3587 | 5179 | | 835 |
| 1962 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3866 | 5877 | | 700 |
| 1965 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3265 | 7504 | | 753 |
| 1968 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3019 | 8484 | | 876 |
| 1971 | W.Fife - Liberal | 3794 | 8001 | | 1281 |
| 1973 | W.Fife - Liberal | 4440 | 10039 | | 1584 |

Sources: C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *Voting for the NSW Legislative Assembly 1890–1964*, Canberra, 1974, and the NSW Electoral Commission.

in the Federal elections in April and in the NSW elections in October. Locally, the ALP won the federal seat of Riverina (of which North Wagga Wagga was a part), helped the Independent, Sir William Lyne, win Hume (of which the rest of Wagga Wagga was part) and retained the state seat of The Murrumbidgee for the third consecutive time. This new-found confidence was expressed in an advertisement the local ALP branch ran in the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* after the federal poll:

TRIUMPHANT LABOR. WORKERS AND ANTI-FUSIONISTS
JOIN THE POLITICAL LABOR LEAGUE and assist in not
only maintaining our great position but in strengthening
our position in the future.

You can best do this by at once joining the local leagues
and adding to our fighting strength²⁹

Following the state poll, the branch decided to strike 'out in [an] industrial direction' and assisted local workers in a range of trades to form branches of their unions. The ALP met with immediate success; local shop assistants formed a branch in December 1910 and were followed by printers, tailors and tailoresses, and bakers in February 1911, and the carters in mid-1911.³⁰ Conditions were favourable for the organisation of a more encompassing industrial body: unionisation had increased, there was no sectional or ideological division, although such divisions would soon appear, and the political situation was favourable. So acting on an idea of William Stopplebein, a local plumber, ALP activists, unionists and businessmen formed the EHA in August 1911. The first Eight-Hour Day march was held on 18 October 1911.³¹

One month later, the association resolved to set aside ten pounds of its profits as a 'nucleus fund towards the building of a trades hall', and rooms were secured in Gurwood Street for this purpose in March 1913. These rooms were known as either the EHA rooms or the Trades Hall, and union meetings were held in them until they were closed in late 1914 due to debt problems and the beginning of the First World War. These problems also led to the cancellation of the Eight-Hour day celebrations in 1914.³² The activism that existed until late 1914 encouraged other trades to form unions, with the saddlers doing so in April 1912, the carpenters and joiners in July 1912, the liquor trades in March 1913 and the butchers in May 1913, while the public servants reformed their branch in April 1914.³³

The EHA continued to exist until the mid-1950s and it, on occasions did take up industrial issues for its members, as will

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be outlined in a later section. However, for a number of reasons it was incapable of becoming the peak body that was so urgently needed. First, the EHA's constitution stipulated that it was a non-political and non-sectarian organisation, and the office bearers continually tried to increase membership by emphasising that it was not a political organisation, which did not please all the local unions. For example, the Wagga Wagga branch of the NSW Typographical Association directed its delegates in September 1912 to withdraw from the EHA in protest over its anti-union rules. The delegates did so, but were promptly re-elected as individuals. The NSW Typographical Association did not rejoin until 1922.³⁴ However, this moderate stance pleased the local elite and the leader writers of the daily newspaper. On 18 October 1911, the *Daily Advertiser* editorialised that:

So far as this movement is concerned there can be no antagonism between labor (sic) and capital so long as the spirit of moderation prevails and no misguided effort is made to have the principle applied to those primary industries where it is impracticable.³⁵

In the final part of the quoted sentence, the leader writer was politely telling delegates to stay well away from the Rural Workers' Union's industrial campaign for improved wage rates and a 48 hour week over five and one-half days then causing consternation among local farmers.³⁶

Second, businessmen led the Association. In June 1914, the local branch of the NSW Amalgamated Butchers' Union sought to alter Rule 3 of the EHA's Constitution to ensure that all office bearers were members of a union. The business community had helped form the association and the first president was the local mayor, Thomas Dobney, a shopkeeper. Many businessmen maintained their membership and some were re-elected to the executive each year. The butchers' target was John O'Regan a leading activist in the ALP, a butcher who ran his own business and a former president of the Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce. O'Regan had held various official positions since 1911 and was a trustee in 1914. The majority of delegates supported O'Regan, and the Butchers' Union withdrew in disgust. The union did not rejoin until 1917.³⁷

Third, the unions, unable to turn the EHA into a more union friendly body formed another organisation, the United Unions. Little is known of this latter organisation, but it reputedly consisted of 'all the unions having secretaries or delegates at Wagga [Wagga]'. The total number of unions involved was seven and it functioned during 1914.³⁸

The United Unions or an alternative organisation did not function in the post-war years because the EHA again pushed for the establishment of a TLC and a trades hall during the early 1920s. A sub-committee was established in November 1920 with the aims of organising the union branches that were functioning at the time, helping form other branches, and raising funds for the construction of the hall. It was not a good time to embark on such a program: the nation was working its way through a severe recession that dramatically worsened the rate of unemployment; the federal government was in conservative hands and beginning a period of concerted anti-union activity; and the state ALP Storey and Dooley governments were only in office from April 1920 to December 1921. These were not propitious years for union organisation or fund raising. By 1925 the EHA had 380 pounds in the building fund, which fell short of the required amount. What made the situation more difficult for the executive was that by the mid-1920s the Eight-Hour Day no longer celebrated labour ideals. Only one union, the Trolley and Draymen, participated in the 1926 procession, no procession was held in 1928, and only the Federated Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union of Australia (Council Employees) participated in the 1930 procession. This poor state of affairs was not turned around until the Second World War.³⁹

The TLC, 1943 and 1959

The TLC was formed in May 1943 and a Trades Hall established by the end of the year. Reports in the local newspaper, the *Daily Advertiser*, suggest that these moves were the result of concerted action by the Combined Unions and the ALP executive to have the local council reverse its decision to impose a new gas tariff that workers believed was punitive. Having overturned the tariff the Combined Unions and the ALP maintained the new found unity and strength by forming the TLC. Although the gas tariff was an important catalyst in the formation of the TLC there was a mix of internal and external factors that were more important. The internal factors include union density, overcoming ideological divisions, membership involvement and leadership agency, while the external factors were market structure, the role of the state and the wider labour movement.

Union activity picked up slowly after the depression of 1929-33. However, by 1936 a communist organiser and the Wagga Wagga branch of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) believed that the presence of at least seven unions and the increase in union activity in the city warranted the formation of a trades

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and labor council. Nothing came of these observations. During the early Second World War years there was an upsurge in award violations, the location of three defence facilities in or around the city and the establishment of new industries that warranted greater vigilance on the part of labour. A request from the ALP branch in October 1941 for the Labor Council of NSW to appoint a district organiser achieved nothing. By 1943 unemployment had disappeared, unionists were protected on the job by federal government National Security Regulations, and workers in wartime industry were seen in a very positive light. Moreover, there was a spread of unions enrolling members. Affiliated unions by June 1945 were those enrolling shop assistants, railway, building, council, munition and transport workers, teachers, engineers and printers. The Federated Ironworkers' Association and the Postal Workers' Union (Postal Workers) would affiliate after the war. There was one notable omission, the AWU. This union had affiliated with the EHA during the 1910s but did not join the TLC in the period to 1990. Nevertheless, by the middle war years there was sufficient union density and spread of unions to warrant the formation of the TLC.⁴⁰

More importantly though, there was for the first time in decades no sectional or ideological division within the labour movement in the city. The ALP in NSW had continually struggled to overcome debilitating internecine struggles during the interwar years, and the local branch followed this trend during the 1930s and early 1940s. Along with many other rural branches the Wagga Wagga branch split along pro-Lang and anti-Lang lines during 1931-36 and along pro-Heffron and anti-Heffron lines during 1938-39. The divisive state parliamentary leader, Jack Lang, was replaced by William McKell in September 1939 and, despite another minor split in April 1940, McKell led the party to victory in elections held on 10 May 1941. With the Curtin federal ALP government occupying the treasury benches from 7 October 1941 the ALP was in the ascendancy. Locally this confidence was reflected in electoral successes in the state seat of Wagga Wagga (1941 and 1944) and the federal seats of Hume (1943) and Riverina (1940 and 1943).⁴¹

The transformation of the CPA from a threat to an ally in 1941 eliminated the ideological divisions that had also divided the labour movement, locally as well as nationally, since the party's formation in 1921. At the height of the Great Depression there was very little communist organisation in rural New South Wales, but reports in the *Communist Review* stated that in 1935 'over 100 local party organisations exist in rural districts and main country towns...'⁴² Although it is difficult to dispute this

claim and total numbers are unknown, individual communists arrived in Wagga Wagga in the 1930s after being transferred by employers like the New South Wales State Railways and the New South Wales Education Department, or by the CPA itself. These men (only men have been identified) included Stanislaus (Stan) Kelly, a teacher at the Oura Primary School, Charles (Harry) Lake, a railway employee, and George Gowland, a party cadre in the local unemployed movement. Kelly and Lake were executive members in their respective unions and members of the ALP branch during the 1930s and 1940s, while Lake was also secretary of the Wagga Wagga CPA branch in 1943. The CPA had always been regarded by conservative and labour forces alike as a threat, but these feelings turned to outright hostility following the party's opposition to the war. Following the German invasion of Russia in mid-1941, CPA members in Wagga Wagga, like their counterparts elsewhere in Australia, actively supported the war effort and were active in the local branches of the ALP, the New South Wales Teachers' Federation (Teachers' Federation), the Building Workers Industrial Union of Australia (Building Workers) and the ARU. Kelly and Lake were involved in the formation of the TLC although neither was elected to the first executive. Over time, the communists increased their influence in the TLC and by 1948 controlled the executive.⁴³

Having overcome the sectional and ideological divisions, the labour movement had the leadership to establish a peak council. More importantly, this group traversed the entire movement, with some members occupying executive positions in a number of organisations at the one time. This convergence had occurred before, notably during the late 1910s, but not to the extent it did in the 1940s. John Lancaster led this group. Lancaster was a teacher who had arrived in the city during the early war years. He quickly established himself in the ALP branch, becoming branch assistant secretary/treasurer in February 1942. In quick succession he became branch president (1942-43), leader of the Combined Unions/ALP executive (1942-43), TLC president (1943-44) and secretary-treasurer of the Teachers' Federation branch (1944). He was transferred to Newcastle in February 1945. Others in the leadership group included Kelly (the ALP branch secretary during 1940-44), Lake (a member of the ARU executive and president of the CPA branch), Ellen Collins (the president of the ARU Women's Auxiliary), Mabel Maud Chambers (a former ALP executive member and the first woman elected to the Wagga Wagga Municipal Council in 1944), Alexander Taylor (the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and Bricklayers/ Building Workers secretary during 1942-43, and ALP member

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throughout the 1940s), Charles Weyland, (an executive member of the Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia [Printing Employees] and an ALP member), Louis Collins (the secretary of the Council Employees), and Neil Boomer (a farmer and past ALP president).⁴⁴ Lancaster, Boomer, Taylor, Weyland and Ellen Collins formed the first TLC executive.⁴⁵

As with the formation of the EHA in 1911, the establishment of the TLC in 1943 was predicated on a perceived external opportunity. This opportunity was based on the positive environment engendered by the ALP governments in NSW and at the federal level. Local workers expected both of these governments to be more labour friendly. Moreover, the wartime emergency provided full employment by 1941 and the National Security Regulations introduced by the Curtin government protected activists from dismissal. Award violations did increase during the wartime industrial expansion in the city and neither the Labor Council of NSW nor individual unions were able to police this area. The ALP branch and the Combined Unions hoped the TLC would be able to do this by appointing a full-time organiser to carry out this work. The lack of funds prevented the position from being filled.⁴⁶

The positivism experienced in Wagga Wagga at this time was also being experienced in towns and cities around the state. In Newcastle, for example, workers utilised the wartime measures to improve rates of unionisation and to retard the impact of employer sponsored attacks on their wages and conditions. These same workers were also trying to offset the impact of rationing and cuts to production of beer, with varying degrees of success.⁴⁷ Miners and waterside workers were also able to achieve major gains to their working conditions during the war.⁴⁸ In rural NSW, trades and labor councils were being formed and councils were signalling that greater co-operation was needed to further the interests of workers in the bush.⁴⁹

Within Wagga Wagga the positive developments did not last. These events have been analysed in some detail elsewhere⁵⁰ but what is important here is that between 1943 and 1946 the Trades Hall became the focus of working class activity. Political and union meetings, fund raising rallies and social functions were held in the hall. Local unions increased their rates of unionisation and vigorously enforced awards. The labour movement as a whole adopted a positive role in the community; a very successful post-war conference was held in the city, a co-operative society was formed with the Wheatgrowers' Union and the formation of a municipal market was pursued. The TLC advocated equal pay for equal work, represented workers on the Wagga Wagga Housing

Commission Tenancy Advisory Committee, and adopted more enlightened resolutions in support of the Indonesian struggle for independence and the Aboriginal movement.

These positive developments stalled after 1946, following the rise in the city of the anti-communist hysteria during the Cold War and the mobilisation of conservative and extreme Right-wing forces in response to the federal ALP government's bank nationalisation proposals of August 1947. Right-wing unionists, many of whom were members of the Catholic Social Studies Movement and the ALP Industrial Groups, mobilised between 1947 and 1952 to oust communists from the TLC and individual unions. The battles were hard fought, often violent and supported by the wider community. The Right celebrated its success by having the TLC pass anti-working class resolutions and allowing the union presence in the city to wither and die. These same forces mobilised to oust communists and communist sympathisers from the ALP branch and had succeeded in splitting the branch by mid-1956.

Despite their best efforts to do so, the Right-wing unions and the Democratic Labor Party could not kill off the TLC. Even so, in 1958 it was moribund; two unions were affiliated and it had one pound in funds at the end of the year.⁵¹ Again the ALP branch and leading unionists were the forces behind the move to resurrect the council. The leader of this group was Robert (Bob) Raper, a member of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union of Australia (Miscellaneous Workers) and long time activist in the ALP. Raper had been expelled from the ALP on three occasions over a 50 year period, the last in Wagga Wagga in January 1953 (he was reinstated in August 1955), and his son claims that he was a card carrying member of the CPA during his long association with the ALP. He became the local Miscellaneous Workers' south west organiser in 1964, was either president or secretary-treasurer of the TLC throughout the 1960s, and was an executive member of the ALP branch during the same years.⁵² Raper and his associates in the ALP branch contacted all unions with members in Wagga Wagga urging them to affiliate with the council and have delegates turn up to the annual general meeting in July 1959. These overtures resulted in six further unions affiliating by July, bringing the total to eight. The new executive consisted of delegates from the Miscellaneous Workers and the Building Workers. The ideological divisions that had brought the council to its knees were still evident in the wider community, but the new council seemed to be free of these tensions; delegates represented opinion from across the political spectrum and the TLC adopted a more aggressive attitude.⁵³

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There are numerous external factors that could have prompted or encouraged Raper and the ALP to act. The most obvious is the ALP's very poor showing locally in the federal poll in November 1958 and the state poll in March 1959. The Liberal Party won both seats with increased majorities. Also the fallout from the 1955 split was still being felt in the wider community and the Menzies government was entrenched in power at the federal level.⁵⁴

Re-forming the TLC: 1974, 1979 and 1985

The TLC functioned throughout the 1960s, looked as if it would fold in 1970 but found a second wind in 1971, before folding early in 1972. It was reformed in August 1974 and functioned until late 1976. The council was re-formed for the third time (excluding 1959) in January 1979 and maintained its operations until early 1984. After a hiatus of some twenty months it was re-formed on 9 October 1985 and has been in continuous operation since.

As with the events in 1911, 1943 and 1959, members of the ALP branch, who were union activists, were behind the moves in 1974 and 1979. The 1985 action was slightly different because it was carried out by union organisers who were based in the city and who worked independently of the ALP branch, although they were active members of the branch. The motivation of all three moves, as the ALP branch president, Pat Brassil, a teacher, suggested at an ALP meeting in July 1974, was a need for 'more union activity ... in Wagga [Wagga]'.⁵⁵ The leadership group in 1974 consisted of Ken Fletcher, the Teachers' Federation organiser and secretary of the ALP branch in 1974, Neil Piper, a Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees Union of Australia (Liquor Industry) organiser and treasurer of the ALP branch, Les Dallas, a clerk, and Betty Gerber, a member of the Liquor Industry. Dallas and Gerber reappeared in 1979. In 1985, the leadership consisted of Geoff Lawler, the Miscellaneous Workers' organiser, Peter Hood, the Public Service Association's (PSA) organiser, and Bill Higgins, the Teachers' Federation organiser. On all three occasions at least eight unions affiliated, which accounted for the majority of unions with members in the city. These unions reflected the changing workforce demographic and the move to larger unions. Unions like the Teachers' Federation, the Miscellaneous Workers and the Postal Workers were still affiliated, but they were joined by the PSA, the Postal Communications and Technicians Union and the Australian Timber Workers' Union.⁵⁶

The external factors in these reformations are far more problematic. The 1974 action occurred after the federal double dissolution election in May of that year, in which the Whitlam ALP government was returned, but the result in the electorate of Farrer was again very disappointing. But if the federal factors were so important, why hadn't the action occurred the previous year during the period of euphoria associated with the election of the Whitlam government after 23 years of conservative rule and the legislative changes enacted by that government during its first year in office? And why did the TLC fold in late 1976 after the controversy of November 1975 and the election of the anti-worker Fraser government in December? These questions will probably remain unanswered, as all the activists have died or moved away from the city and the TLC's records are not complete.

In 1979 the national situation was not favourable to the wider labour movement. The Fraser government had cut funding to a host of public programs and its policy to 'fight inflation first' had led to large increases in unemployment. Like most centres in Australia, Wagga Wagga was hard hit by these policy decisions. So much so, that between October 1978 and January 1979 the mayor, Bruce Hedditch, a former president of the Wagga Wagga branch of the Liberal Party, and his council worked with the ALP branch and the Labor Council of NSW to find ways to overcome the worsening unemployment situation in the city.⁵⁷ The TLC was not functioning at this time, but was reformed at the end of these negotiations. The reasons behind the decision to fold in 1984 are also unknown and the action difficult to understand. Politically, the ALP was in government at both state and federal levels at this time, and the economic indicators were improving, although the rates of unemployment were far from satisfactory. The 1985 decision to reconstitute the TLC reflects the radical changes to work practices that were unleashed in the early 1980s and were still unfolding, and the negative impact these changes were having on workers. It was also based on the need to maintain a union presence in a city and a region that was not worker friendly.⁵⁸

Yardstick of Authority: Membership of Affiliates

During 1911 and 1922 a total of 20 unions affiliated with the EHA, although the number of unions affiliating in any one year rarely exceeded eight. This latter group consisted of the Municipal Employees' Association of Australia, the Federated Millers and Mill Employees' Association of Australasia, the Amalgamated

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Society of Carpenters and Joiners, the Federated Liquor Trades Employees' Union of Australasia, the Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees' Federation of Australia (Shop Assistants), the AWU, the Federated House and Ship Painters, Paperhangers and Decorators Employees' Association of Australasia and the Building Workers' Union. Unions like the Australian Saddlery Trades Employees' Federation, the Railway Workers' Union and the United Clerks affiliated one year and not the next, while the NSW Typographical Association and the NSW Amalgamated Butchers' Union joined in 1911 and 1913 respectively only to leave in 1912 and 1914. Although both unions did eventually rejoin, their departures signalled the end of the euphoric rush that greeted the EHA's formation.⁵⁹

Although it is relatively easy to find out which unions affiliated and when they did, it is considerably more difficult to ascertain the unions' membership as a proportion of all trade unionists and the general workforce. Not all unions published membership figures for each locality and the figures for the largest union, the AWU, are unknown. The figures for those branches that are known are relatively small: the Shop Assistants branch had 80 members in 1912, the Saddlery Trades had 12 in the same year and the Millers' Association had 17 in 1915 and the Teachers' Federation had 48 in 1920. It seems that the Typographical Association with around 20 members was one of the few branches to enjoy 100 per cent unionisation for any length of time.⁶⁰ Many paid workers were not members of a trade union. The 1921 census figures in Table 2 show that 3153 people, 2455 men and 698 women, were in the paid workforce. This total represents 41.06 per cent of the city's total population. Despite all the uncertainty, it is fair to assume that the rate of unionisation was between 20 and 30 per cent of the paid workforce at this time. On the basis of these figures, it cannot be said that the EHA represented the majority of unions or workers.

Evidence indicates that the 1943 TLC did not fare much better than the EHA. In June 1945, Alexander Taylor, the TLC's secretary, claimed that nine unions covering 1263 workers (approximately 20.6 per cent of the paid work force) had affiliated. The number of affiliates was rarely stable and all unions did not join. Whatever stability the TLC enjoyed was destroyed by the anti-communist frenzy of the late 1940s and 1950s. Attacks on the TLC and individual unions had a dramatically negative impact on the TLC. During these years, the Printing Employees, the Federated Ironworkers' Association and the Teachers' Federation disaffiliated before 1950. The Printing Employees rejoined during 1950 but the other two declined to do so, with the Teachers'

Federation still having not done so by 1955 despite a number of requests from the TLC during 1954-55. The Miscellaneous Workers, the Transport Workers' Union and the Hospital Employees' Association of NSW affiliated for the first time during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1971, the TLC claimed it had eighteen affiliates, a somewhat exaggerated figure considering events before and after this date. Generally about eight to ten unions affiliated during the 1970s and 1980s. The Federated Clerks' Union, the Vehicle Builders' Union, the PSA and the Postal Telecommunication Technicians Association (Australia) joined for the first time in the mid-1970s, while the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union and the AWU did not join in this period.⁶¹

The inability of various unions to maintain viable branches and to get delegates to attend meetings hindered the TLC's ability to maintain its level of affiliates. With regard to the former point, the ARU had to re-establish its sub-branch in 1963 and 1967, the Building Workers had to do likewise in 1964 and 1969, while the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association did not re-establish the shop assistants branch that was active up to the late 1950s.⁶² At no time did all available delegates attend council meetings; some unions did not appoint delegates or the delegates simply decided not to attend. Attendances throughout the period to 1990 were never great, continually falling well short of the possible maximum.⁶³

These problems also severely limited the TLC's coverage of paid workers. Complete figures are not available, but branch numbers ranged from the 35 members of the Printing Employees, to the 250 plus of the Teachers' Federation, to the 400 plus of the Miscellaneous Workers. Some of the larger unions located paid organisers in the city: the Liquor Industry (and its predecessors from the mid 1950s), the Federated Clerks' Union (during the 1950s), the Miscellaneous Workers (1964-1973 and from 1985), the Teachers' Federation (from 1972), and the PSA (from 1982).⁶⁴ Other branches had to rely on active members to maintain rates of unionisation, but if their activities were restricted by poor health or halted for whatever reason, branch numbers declined.⁶⁵ Moreover, very rarely were unions able to maintain unionisation rates approaching 100 per cent of eligible workers. So at best it is fair to assume that the TLC's affiliates covered around 20 per cent of the paid workforce.

Structural Diffusion of Power

There was no structural diffusion of power within the EHA and

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only a marginal amount within the various reincarnations of the TLC. As stated in an earlier section of the paper, the EHA continued to exist until the mid-1950s and although it did take up industrial issues for its members, as will be outlined in the next section of this paper, it never had the authority of a peak council. During its 47 years of on-off existence, the TLC had very little power to control its affiliates. It seems that it was only during the heady days of 1943–46, when the TLC was endeavouring to establish a positive community role for itself (as outlined earlier), did it have any authority over its affiliates. As well, the Eight-Hour day procession was taken over and turned into a trade union spectacle. Affiliated unions accepted TLC decisions on a range of issues and the local community saw union activity in a positive light.

This situation changed after 1946 with the onset of the Cold War. In this confronting time the TLC's decisions were regularly ignored by affiliates. The Building Workers, for example, decided to oppose a TLC black ban in support of legitimate union ideals in 1948 because it was ideologically opposed to the TLC executive. From this point to 1990, the TLC did not have the same level of authority over affiliates that it enjoyed in its formative years. Ideological suspicions during the 1950s, the TLC's inability to maintain a continual presence during the 1970s and 1980s, and the failure of unions to affiliate all played a part in this declining authority. This state of affairs was also due to industrial and legal limitations imposed on the TLC, and these are explored in the next section.⁶⁶

The Industrial Function

In theory the EHA had no industrial function. Its constitution stipulated that it was a non-political organisation, and this meant that it was also non-industrial. Moreover, it was difficult to pursue industrial campaigns when employer representatives occupied executive positions. This was borne out during First World War when the ALP branch, rather than the EHA, led the anti-conscription campaigns in the city during 1916-17.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the EHA did have an industrial function during its first eleven years of existence, albeit in a very minor way. In 1913 it passed on information about award violations by a local hairdresser to the Sydney office of the Hairdressers and Wigmakers' Union; in 1920 it supported moves towards a 44 hour week made by the Storey government in NSW; and in 1922 it pushed for a reduction in hours to 48 per week for nursing staff at the local hospital.⁶⁸

Its major industrial action was in support of the Shop Assistants' campaign for Saturday half-holiday that was conducted between May 1921 and December 1922. Prior to May 1921 the standard working week included a half-holiday on Wednesday and late night shopping on Saturday. Shop assistants wanted to change these arrangements to late night shopping on Friday and a half-holiday on the Saturday. Local unionists expected to play a part in a state wide campaign for the changes, but the Dooley ALP government put the issue to one side, claiming it had more pressing legislation to introduce in the Legislative Assembly. This government lost office before introducing legislation in the house, and the Fuller Nationalist government was opposed to the changes. The EHA and the Shop Assistants pushed on with their campaign. A Half-Holiday Movement was established and Ernest Hedditch, a local land agent, was appointed organiser. Hedditch held meetings in surrounding towns in the hope of drawing these communities into the struggle, while executive members from the EHA held talks with the Wagga Wagga Shopkeepers' Association. Shop owners and shop assistants voted on the proposal on 29 November 1922, with the result favouring the change to Saturday. The new hours were gazetted by the NSW government on 8 December 1922 and came into force three days later. The EHA provided the vast bulk of the funds to fight the campaign, while the Shop Assistants contributed just less than one-third. Despite support for the change, the Shopkeepers' Association and the Wagga Wagga branch of the Farmers and Settlers' Association used whatever means they could over the next two years to have the decision overturned. A further poll taken in late February 1925 returned the half-holiday to Wednesday.⁶⁹

The TLC was far more positive than the EHA in the industrial area, but it too did not have a lasting impact. The major obstacle that confronted the TLC was that it never had the power to deal with industrial matters in the city. This power rested with the trade unions and their officials, all of whom were based in Sydney. Union officials were, justifiably, reluctant to release any authority to the TLC except in rare circumstances. For example, in 1946 the TLC acted on behalf of the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union during an industrial dispute and in 1990 it was asked by the Miscellaneous Workers and the Furnishing Trades Society of NSW to investigate and make a decision on a demarcation dispute at Ellrow Pty Ltd.⁷⁰ During the 1960s and early 1970s, calls by the TLC to the trade unions, to be granted greater authority to deal with a host of award violations went unheeded because of union resistance and legal concerns over

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right-of-entry tickets. Local workers had to await the arrival of union organisers, which on occasions took many months.⁷¹

The TLC only became more involved in industrial disputes after unions had referred disputes to it, as occurred on four occasions in 1948. In this year the TLC acted in conjunction with the Hotel Club Restaurant Caterers Tea Rooms and Boarding House Employees Union of NSW, the Building Workers and the Federated Ironworkers' Association as the unions endeavoured to enforce award provisions and conditions. The political turmoil of the time ensured that not all workers supported the TLC's involvement in these disputes. Once the Right-wing had gained control of the TLC in the early 1950s industrial disputes were not supported on purely ideological grounds.⁷² The TLC was powerless to intervene in industrial disputes that were either not referred to it or were being fought by a union which had not affiliated with it. For example, between July 1953 and March 1960 the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union conducted nine disputes at the local abattoir. When public criticism of the TLC's inactivity was aired in the *Daily Advertiser* during the 1954 dispute, its reply was that the union concerned was not affiliated and therefore the TLC would have nothing to do with the dispute.⁷³

What the TLC could do was assist the trade unions as much as possible to improve their rates of unionisation. Hence successful trade union rallies were held in the city in 1948, 1967, 1971, 1975 and 1979. However, unless unions had organisers on the ground to maintain the momentum generated by the rallies, the gains were lost in the following years as workers allowed their membership to lapse. The TLC did not have the authority to enrol members into unions. This function had never been the role of a peak body, but in a city like Wagga Wagga, where numbers in most union branches did not warrant the placement of organisers in the city, it would have made sense to empower and fund a local organisation to do this. TLC executive members recognised this in 1943 when they believed a full time organiser position was warranted, but the TLC could never raise sufficient funds to fill the position.⁷⁴ Executive members have also believed that greater co-ordination of the provincial regional peak councils outside the established industrial areas would have proved highly beneficial to the unions and the Labor Council of NSW. Successful conferences were held in 1945 and 1960, but not all decisions were followed up. In 1960, for example, the Labor Council of NSW agreed to appoint a regional organiser, but it seems that this position was not filled until the 1970s. Calls from the TLC for further conferences in 1965, 1968 and 1971 went unheeded.⁷⁵

Political Function

Both the EHA and the TLC had limited political functions. Despite the limitations imposed by its constitution the EHA did occasionally involve itself in political matters. Calls for a shorter working week were examples of this, while in 1916, it nominated Walter Boston, an Adelong based coachbuilder, for ALP preselection for the seat of Wagga Wagga.⁷⁶ For the most part, the TLC's links with political parties were through the Labor Council of NSW to which it was affiliated for the most part from the early 1960s or campaigning locally for the return of ALP candidates. The TLC played a part in the electoral successes of Eddie Graham and Arthur Fuller during the 1940s. The Trades Hall housed their respective offices until 1946. The TLC also had a representative on the NSW Housing Commission's Tenancy Advisory Committee in the city from 1948 until 1971.⁷⁷

Local political activity was directed to getting TLC representatives elected to the city council. In 1943 John Lancaster contested a Wagga Wagga Municipal Council by-election, but was easily defeated. The next year Lancaster stood again and was joined by the TLC secretary, Alexander Taylor. They both polled badly, running nineteenth and twenty-third in a field of 25. The only success was the election of Mabel Maud Chambers, an ALP member who had campaigned as an independent, who filled the twelfth and final position. In March 1947 the TLC decided to run a 'progressive ticket' in the elections of that year, but had dropped the idea by November in favour of an ALP ticket. This ticket included Ellen Collins, the TLC's first treasurer and former president of the ARU Women's Auxiliary, and Taylor. This ticket also polled badly. Charles Spokes, a milk vendor, was elected, but the remaining candidates filled eleven of the last twelve positions, with Taylor running last.⁷⁸

Politically, the TLC's crowning glory was its Regional Convention on Post War Planning and Construction that it held in Wagga Wagga, over 10-12 June 1944. Debate on issues concerning post-war reconstruction had commenced early in 1943, shortly after the Commonwealth government had established the Department of Post-War Reconstruction in December 1942. A public meeting was called by the Wagga Wagga and District Chamber of Commerce and held at the Town Hall in mid-May 1943. The voice of labour at this meeting was Lancaster's, the driving force behind the TLC's involvement. He stated that there should be representatives from the ALP or the TLC or from both on any committee that was formed. Ten months later and after little had been done in the intervening period, the

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TLC, in mid-March 1944, decided to sponsor a regional convention of all sections of the local community 'with the view of promoting a fuller understanding of problems and the proposed solutions associated with Post-War Planning and Construction...'⁷⁹ To this end a seven man organising committee was formed, which included Lancaster, Taylor and the communists Kelly and Lake. Two weeks later circulars were sent to all the local shire and municipal councils, clubs, churches, trade unions, political parties and leading citizens. On 21 April 1944, a public meeting chaired by the Mayor, Henry Gissing, and attended by 40 people, resolved to hold a convention, to which delegates from throughout the Murrumbidgee region would be invited. The meeting also elected a seventeen-person management committee with members from a diverse range of organisations as well as members of the TLC organising committee.⁸⁰

The convention was a major success, so much so that the *Daily Advertiser* editorialised at its conclusion that it 'may well prove to be a landmark in the history of the Riverina'.⁸¹ Approximately 140 delegates from 35 organisations, regional councils, local sub-branches of the trade unions and political parties attended. Keynote speeches were delivered by leading academics, public servants, local government officials, unionists and church leaders. A host of resolutions were adopted; those from the TLC covered land settlement, the basic wage, education and the need to have trade union representatives on all committees set up to implement decisions of the convention.⁸²

The TLC's hopes that its last resolution would be implemented were dashed shortly after the convention. During 1944, the Regional Boundaries Committee, established by the Commonwealth and the six state governments on 1 December 1943, divided the nation into a series of regions to facilitate planning for post-war regional development. New South Wales was divided into twenty regions along established local government boundaries, of which Murrumbidgee, Region 15, was one. In late 1944 the NSW government decided to form Regional Development Committees for each region. The first Region 15 conference was held in Junee on 29 August 1944. The Wagga Wagga Municipality was represented by a contingent of 22 that included Lancaster and the communist leaders of the Wagga Wagga sub-branch of the Building Workers, Roy Barton and L.J.Beattie. As the NSW government had stipulated that each regional committee could not exceed twelve members, the Junee meeting divided the region into six zones with Wagga Wagga Municipality and Kyeamba Shire grouped in Zone 5. In a move

that reflected the dominant political networks in Wagga Wagga, the Mayor, Henry Gissing, was chosen to represent the Municipality. At no time during the 1950s did the TLC or individual unions have a representative on the Murrumbidgee Regional Development Committee.⁸³

Conclusion

This paper has used the theories on the formation of peak councils advanced by Ellem and Shields, and on the 'yardsticks of authority' advanced by Martin and used by Markey. The analysis has corroborated the findings of Ellem and Shields that a number of internal and external factors are involved in the formation of a peak council. One addition that the Wagga Wagga experience reveals is the central role played by the local ALP branch. On the issue of 'yardsticks', it is obvious that both the EHA and the TLC lacked any semblance of authority either over affiliates or within the city itself. The only exception to this finding was the period from 1943 to 1946. It is little wonder then that the union presence in rural NSW, the highly industrialised areas excepted, has withered during the course of the twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 Bradon Ellem and John Shields, 'Why Do Unions form Peak Bodies? The Case of the Barrier Industrial Council', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38, 3, September 1996, pp. 377–411.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 388.
- 3 R. Martin, 'The Authority of Trade Union Centres: The Australian Council of Trade Unions and the British Trade Union Congress', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 4, 1, 1962, pp. 1–19.
- 4 Raymond Markey, *In Case Of Oppression: The Life and Times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1994. The quotation is on p. 4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 6 Ellem and Shields, *op.cit.*, p. 378.
- 7 O. Foenander, *Studies in Australian Labour Law and Relations*, Melbourne, 1952, p. 94; L. Ross, 'Trade Unions', in *Australian Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 9, Melbourne, 1958, p. 14; Robin Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920–1955*, Canberra, 1975, pp. 14–15; C. Donn and G. Dunkley, 'The Founding of the ACTU', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 19, 4, 1977, pp. 404–423; B. Dabscheck, 'The Internal Authority of the ACTU', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 19, 4, 1977, pp. 388–403.
- 8 Martin, *op.cit.* and 'The Rise of the Australian Council of Trade Unions', *Australian Quarterly*, 30, 1, 1958, pp. 30–42.

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- 9 Gerard Griffin, 'The Authority of the ACTU', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 5, 1, June 1994, pp. 81–103.
- 10 Jim Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, Melbourne, 1981.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 453.
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