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A Short History of the Port Kembla Waterside Workers Branch from 1939 to the End of the War

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A Short History of the Port Kembla Waterside Workers Branch from 1939 to the End of the War

Abstract

In November 1936, when I arrived at Port Kembla, accompanied by my brother, we were shocked at the absence of any working conditions. In these days there was not a single condition in the Port. There was no meal money, no minimum period of engagement, nowhere to have meals, 24 hour shifts, a bull system, brutalisation of labour in many ways by handling pig iron, 80 or 90 pound ingots of pig iron, 90 pound ingots of lead. These all had to be stacked into large buckets, lead into large sling loads, and this work was demanding because the hook was always in single gear, was racing in and out and the hook was always waiting on the men below; and so it means that whilst one tub went out, the other tub commenced being filled by a section of the labour force down below and by the time the other tub came in the tub had to be filled. And so it was continuously in and out with the cargo winches running at full speed. We were able to institute many campaigns on the job itself, either for safety or for insisting on the break down of the workload, and as a consequence we were victimised regularly.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PORT KEMBLA WATERSIDE WORKERS BRANCH FROM 1936 TO THE END OF THE WAR

Ted Roach

In November 1986, when I arrived at Port Kembla, accompanied by my brother, we were shocked at the absence of any working conditions. In these days there was not a single condition in the Port. There was no meal money, no minimum period of engagement, nowhere to have meals, 24 hour shifts, a bull system, brutalisation of labour in many ways by handling pig iron, 80 or 90 pound ingots of pig iron, 90 pound ingots of lead. These all had to be stacked into large buckets, lead into large sling loads, and this work was demanding because the hook was always in single gear, was racing in and out and the hook was always waiting on the men below; and so it means that whilst one tub went out, the other tub commenced being filled by a section of the labour force down below and by the time the other tub came in the tub had to be filled. And so it was continuously in and out with the cargo winches running at full speed. We were able to institute many campaigns on the job itself, either for safety or for insisting on the break down of the workload, and as a consequence we were victimised regularly.

To portray the actual conditions that prevailed in Port Kembla at the time, I will quote extensively from a thesis written by Gary Griffiths for his BA Honours degree at the University of Wollongong.

The major cargoes handled by waterside workers at Port Kembla were bulk and bagged coke, bulk coal, steel, scrap iron, copper products, bluestone, bulk phosphate, bagged superphosphate, bagged ores, bulk sulphur, and bagged barley. Coal and phosphate boats provided the most work for south coast waterside workers. Both cargoes involved long hours or arduous work. Coal was handled for a two fold purpose. Many ships that entered port required bunkering as a fuel source; and bulk coal was also exported as cargo. Number one jetty at Port Kembla, known as the coal loading jetty, was equipped with a coal loading plant. Hopper trucks

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on rail brought coal to the base of the jetty where it was discharged into underground concrete hoppers. From here it was fed onto a conveyor belt which travelled along the jetty to a place where it was diverted into travelling loaders and conveyed by a boom belt and chute into the hatches of the ships. After the shoot had stopped tipping, waterside workers went below with their plate and shovel (a plate was a flattened piece of steel or iron positioned beneath the coal to provide a smooth shovelling surface), and would shovel the mountain of coal back into the ends of the hatch. Walter Bailey described the work involved on one such coal ship, and the conditions waterside workers were forced to work under.

I have in my mind a ship that used to come here namely the La Perouse. It was beyond the average person's imagination as to how bad it could be. We were required to go below on this particular ship... she had a big trunk like hatch, and after she'd been run up as we called it, coal was tipped till it was full to the bottom of the trunkway. We used to be ordered below them, on this great pyramid of coal, with just enough room to squeeze through under the combings. We'd go down with our plate and our shovel, told to stand clear and the shoot would commence tipping again and great quantities of coal would be tipped in on top of us, on top of the existing pyramid. And we'd find that there would be several hundreds of tons... tipped up in this trunk way above us with no possible chance of getting out until it was dug away with the shovels.

When working cargoes such as coal, dust was a constant problem. It settled on the hands, faces and clothing of men and reduced their visibility. When working below deck on these ships the dust was so thick that wharfies could barely make out the candlelight of their next door workers. The number four low level jetty was equipped with both a 5 ton and a 2 ton electric travelling crane fitted with grab buckets suitable for handling bulk cargoes such as phosphate rock and sulphur. The AIS jetty was similarly equipped with an electric travelling transporter crane capable of lifting 20 tons. Large ships capable of carrying several thousand tons of phosphate provided a lot of work for waterside workers. Phosphate was usually discharged by shovel, using large baskets, which would then be winched from the ship's hold onto the jetty. If grabs were used to discharge phosphate, waterside workers would be employed to work to the grab. Walter Bailey recalled the phosphate process:

We'd have eight men below and of course the winches would be in single gear so as to speed it up like hell. Four baskets working and one on the hook as a floater and he'd be coming in at a great old rate... he was always ready before you had the other one full; unless you went stone mad. Of course you were required to shovel and continue shovelling for eight hours, twelve hours, for twenty four hours without stop.

Safety conditions were extremely poor on the waterfront during the 1930s. There was a certain amount of danger involved in the loading of cargoes, especially those of a steel nature. There was always the possibility of ropes and chains breaking and spilling the contents of tubs and slings back down amongst the men working below. The employers provided no first aid provisions; the South Coast branch contributed annually to the local ambulance fund. There was no set weight limit in the use of slings; men were obliged to work with gear that hadn't been tested and the rules of safety were flaunted as stevedores and their foremen pressed men to speed-up their output. If workers ventured to raise questions about overweight loads in slings, or bad gear, or asked that the working gear should be checked, it meant a dismissal and then a victimisation. No meals were provided by employers. Waterside workers took their own meals to the job. There was no place to have meals, no shelters for the men; they either sat aboard ship or on the jetties as best they could amid the dirt and the dust of the cargoes they were loading, and exposed to the elements. There were no washing facilities and toilets were of a primitive nature. On jetty the toilets were down the steps under the wharf, two concrete slabs with some iron around them. For a toilet on number four jetty a hole was cut in the end of the jetty with 'a bit of a tin shed placed around it'.

After being picked-up for work, Port Kembla men made their own way to the wharves. Wollongong men were transported to work on open flat top lorries owned by the stevedores, and driven by their representatives within the union who were paid 2 shillings each way plus wages. Often these drivers would leave jobs short handed as they returned isolated gangs that had been knocked off early. Men completed with working gear for space on the truck and sat with their legs and arms dangling over the sides of the tray. It was a dangerous situation, and accidents were not infrequent. W. Lynch, a south coast waterside worker, had two fingers amputated as a result of an accident he sustained on his way to work on an open lorry. Men travelled to work in all types of weather. If it rained they placed a sack over their shoulders in an attempt to stay dry. Wharfies were also required to work in the rain, no matter

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how heavy. Stevedores often made a willingness to work in the rain a condition of employment. Walter Bailey remembered:

It didn't matter how hard it rained. the job had to go on. It was not unusual after commencing work at 8 o'clock in the morning, by 9 o'clock we'd be soaked and our clothes saturated and we'd be required to work 24 hours with little or no chance of drying out. I know I have come home and I've still been soaking wet after being wet first thing in the morning. I've come home from working with the clothes still on me still soaking wet.... feet and hands all shrivelled with the wet and the cold by so many hours.

The working conditions of waterside workers were made worse by the overbearing attitude of the stevedores and their foremen. Wharfies were harshly treated by employers who were able to control who would work on the waterfront and who expected two day's work in one day from each man. Waterside workers were paid hourly rates and it was in the stevedores' interests to have as much work done in the hour as possible. Foremen who wished to remain in favour with the stevedores pushed waterside workers to the limit and favourites, given the jobs of winchmen and hatchment, constantly hurried up the men working down below on the shovels. In times of great poverty and hardship waterside workers had little choice other than to accept work on the boss's terms. There was a large pool of casuals and unemployed who could be called upon to take the place of those who were not, in the employers' opinion, working hard enough. The stevedores' interest in waterside workers did not extend beyond their availability to work on ships and the amount of work they were able to perform. Stevedores had little sympathy for the plight of waterside workers and treated them accordingly, as Walter Bailey recalls.

We would be required to work until midnight, sometimes after midnight. To go home in our dirty clothes, of course no overalls were supplied, no gloves, nothing like that. And we'd go home in these dirty clothes; after bathing and getting into clean night-clothes we'd only have a couple of hours to sleep and then be up and off again down to the jetties but before we went we'd put on these filthy clothes again, mostly we'd be working in amongst coal.... If we were assured of a job then we got there it would have been bad enough, but to go down there in these filthy clothes and we'd sit about the jetties and wait for the stevedore to come along to us and notify us that we were required or otherwise... and very often we

waited there until dinner time, and he didn't bother to come and tell us that we were not required.

Dissatisfaction was rife on the Port Kembla waterfront in the 1930s, with sections of the branch becoming increasingly critical of their leaders' failure to alter the existing situation on the waterfront. The operations of the 'Bull System' became the main focal point for dissatisfaction and division within the union. The family relationships that existed between stevedores and prominent members of the South Coast branch of the WWF meant that the trade union organisation was tied to the employers. Stevedores had control over the favourites and Bulls within the union and through them, control over the entire branch. Bulls and favourites had a monopoly of employment on the wharves and showed little concern for those who could not find employment.

Favourites, given the easier jobs, very often went back to work ahead of those members who had not worked at all. It was not unusual for these men to work a double shift, and on at least one occasion one wharfie was known to have worked continuously for 72 hours. Opponents of the 'Bull System' introduced several measures in an attempt to overcome the inequalities of the 'Bull System'. At a meeting of the South Coast branch in August 1932 a resolution was adopted stating that 'any member starting work at or before 6:00pm and working till after midnight be not eligible for work that day, unless there is no Federation labour available'. Similar resolutions were adopted in following years but all proved unsuccessful. Resolutions of this nature were not enforced by the branch leadership, and the inequalities of the 'Bull System' persisted into the later 1930s.

The meeting between Arthur, Federal General Secretary of the WWF, Turley and south coast wharf labourers took place on 15th March 1937, and proved to be an historic one for the South Coast branch. At this meeting Turley voiced his concerns for the branch arising from insufficient numbers of Federation men available at the Port, and the employers' intention to employ outside labour if the branch could not supply them with the men they required. His purpose in coming to Wollongong was to persuade members to increase the branch membership, claiming that 'it would not take the employers 24 hours to bring 500 men from Sydney to Port Kembla to scab'. At times the meeting became disorderly with members claiming that Turley wished to flood the branch and that he came to Wollongong at the invitation of the shipowners. Waterside workers were worried that an influx of new members into the branch could further reduce their chances of gaining employment under the Bull System. I was critical of Turley's

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attitude and in opposition proposed a roster system of equalisation, whereby employment on the waterfront would be evenly distributed amongst the membership. Turley claimed that the branch intention of introducing an equalisation scheme was contrary to the Federation award and likely to prove unacceptable to the employers. Despite Turley's warnings, a resolution moved by myself for a roster system of equalisation was carried by 43 votes to 19.

The intention of the South Coast branch to implement a roster system of employment was met with strong opposition by employers and Bull elements within the union. Employers opposed the introduction of the roster because it would restrict their powers of selection on the waterfront, and the Bulls were opposed to the roster because they enjoyed a monopoly of employment under the Bull System. As a result, 1937 developed into a year of struggle for the introduction of the roster system of employment with Ted and Matt Roach heading the campaign. Members of the South Coast branch undertook direct action in support of their claims for a Roster. They refused to offer for work unless they were employed on a roster controlled by the union. The increased shipping trade at Port Kembla in the later 1930s, and the problem of a shortage of labour at the Port, placed the South Coast branch in a strong position to enforce their demands upon employers for a roster. The four independent stevedores operating at the Port had made it the local custom to give preference of employment to WWF members, and were unable to recruit non-Federation men to work their ships. By July 1937 the independent stevedores at Port Kembla had agreed to give WWF preference of employment, and became the first employers to capitulate to the union's demand for rosters.

In 1936 a new company, the Port Kembla Stevedoring and Agency Co. Ltd (PKS) had commenced operations on the south coast, and were made respondents to the WWF award in 1937. This company handled the bulk of stevedoring work at Port Kembla, and immediately set out to break down the local custom of preference for WWF members. In April 1937, Captain Crompton, representative for the PKS, informed the South Coast branch that the company rejected the proposal of a roster scheme and did not intend to give union members preference over non-unionists. In July 1937 PKS introduced a gang of non-unionists to work their cargoes. This gang was partially made up of 'Bulls' who had left the union. On 16th July, 1937 three members of the South Coast branch of the WWF took strike action, refusing to work alongside the scab gang, and their action was supported by casual workers.

During the fight for the roster system strong links were

forged between members of the South Coast branch and non-Federation casuals. The casuals were organised by the members of the branch and were given an undertaking that when the branch membership was to be increased, casuals who supported the union would be given the first consideration.

As a result the majority of casuals stood by the branch in its campaign to introduce rosters, as this letter from casual wharfie, A. Brooks, indicates:

On Sunday last we met officials of your organisation and they made us certain promises... although Captain Crompton has repeatedly offered to pick us up in preference to union men... we have repeatedly refused work when union labour has been available, and never at any time have we acted contrary to union principles.

In August 1937 the dispute between the South Coast branch and PKS was resolved with the company agreeing to give preference to union members and to a temporary system of sharing the available work. However, the settlement was short-lived, and the dispute arose again in the final months of the year and persisted into 1938.

At the South Coast branch elections held in March 1938, I again contested George Sloan's position of branch secretary. In the weeks prior to the elections the militants within the branch issued a programme of their policies, shaped around the needs of the branch membership. The programme included the implementation of rosters for all work being done by Federation members, a roster for the casual workers, the need for job delegates, meal money, shorter shifts, a pick-up shed, improved safety conditions, smaller lead, smaller pig iron, also smaller tubs to load it in, no working in the rain and the supply by the employer of smaller shovels.

At the elections the militants proved successful I defeated Sloan by a narrow margin. Under my leadership campaigns were intensified for a roster system to cover the entire port. Industrial campaigns were stepped up against PKS until finally in November 1938 they capitulated and agreed to employ WWF members under a Roster system, 'covering the whole of the Port with absolute Union control'. The South Coast branch perfected the first union controlled roster system in the Federation, and its importance in strengthening the branch cannot be overstated. The Bull System was defeated and the employers' powers of selection on the waterfront were now in the hands of the union. Members were now in a position where they could openly campaign for improved working conditions without the fear of victimisation by employers. Accompanying the struggle for rosters came the need to establish strong union

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discipline. Ted Roach was a firm believer in the importance of strict discipline as part of union building policy. Rules governing the roster system were established and hefty fines were imposed for those who did not act in accordance with union rules. Those members who took advantage of guaranteed employment under the roster system and acted irresponsibly on the job, were also disciplined. Branch COM meetings were held weekly to deal with offenders, a practice which became known as 'fronting the red beards'.

Discipline had to be applied to ensure that policy was carried out as it was meant to be carried out. Strict discipline was linked with policy and unless the members carried out the wishes of the majority, which was always spelt out very clearly, it was imposed upon them. This ensured that every single member of the branch carried out the policy, and this ensured the success of each of our campaigns.

The combination of the roster system and strict discipline greatly strengthened the South Coast branch of the WWF. Divisions that existed within the union disappeared as members became united in the struggle to improve the appalling working conditions on Port Kembla wharves. Nowhere was the strength and unity of the branch more evident than in the *Dalfram* dispute of November 1938.

Our most important steps in building strong organisation was by the creation and use of programmes of immediate demands. These centered around a list such as running up of coal with no escape holes, gangways of boarding a ship, handrails on the gangways, nets under the gangways, water buckets and cups down below, no working in the rain, safety in the handling of all sorts of cargoes, instead of employees providing their own shovels the employer to provide shovels of a suitable size, reduction of sling loads, insisting on the application of the loading and unloading regulations of the Navigation act, reduction of the pig iron ingots, reduction of the size of lead bars, reduction of the amount of lead to be loaded into slings. Many other issues such as this were demanded in order to be able to keep the momentum of movement for the establishment of better conditions. Also linked with these better conditions was better organisation and better political understanding. We at the same time drafted a set of rules, that we had printed into a rule book that was not submitted to the Federal Committee of Management, for its endorsement because I knew that it would not be endorsed because of all the automatic penalties we had already included in the book of Rules that we had published and circulated amongst the members, and all the penalties were directed towards

ensuring that every man carried out the policy of the union. We did not use penalties for penalties' sake. We used the penalties to ensure only that every member carried out the decisions as laid down.

As we wound up these programmes point by point we set them out in short 4 or 5 point programmes, and as each one was achieved I would ensure that we had a meeting to discuss the campaign and draw the lessons from it to ensure clearing the way for further points to be won. So this went on as a continuous thing. We would win something and enmasse we would talk and draw the lessons from winning it and go on to the next point and so we had continuous campaigns going day in and day out. We had to tackle the big Australian, the BHP, and the shipping companies, day in and day out, on the Port Kembla waterfront, and we were able to chalk up victories very regularly and the more victories we won the stronger became our organisation. After we established the roster, we found the employers would, at the ship's side, select men for various working positions on the ship. This still gave the foreman the right to victimise, by putting some on the best jobs and some on the worst jobs, some on the long jobs and some on the short jobs, in the various ways they had of victimisation. So we said this was to all cease. As our next step, after having established the roster as such, we insisted on what we termed rotation of hatches. This is that each hatch be picked up in its turn from No. 1 hatch onwards in that order. The employer resisted this but I talked to the men before they went on the job and I pointed out what was expected of each one of them. I stressed that when the employer placed labour at the ship's side nominating them for a particular position, to agree nod their head or say OK Bill or Joe, whatever the case may be-but go where the roster says and start work never mind the foremen or anybody else, start work, start handling cargo. As soon as this happened, the foreman would run around tearing his hair out screaming, 'I told you to go to No. 1 nor No. 3' - say "OK Bill, OK" - keep agreeing. This frustrated them to the point where they had to run into the Captain and/or engineers and have the steam turned off so that the ship could not work. This suited us because we immediately got in touch with our Federal office and Canberra and pointed out how the employers were holding up the cargo during the war.

This anti-rotation campaign by the employers lasted a few days and they had to cave in because of the impossibility of them carrying out their policy because each time they would stop the ship we would immediately get in touch with the Government and point out how they were holding up the war

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effort, and as a consequence they had to pull their head in. I recall clearly the first ship we selected to fight for the principle - Union Steamship Company ship called the *Keni*. The men went to work, they were placed by the foreman, but the men placed themselves according to their union instructions, thus forcing the employer to have the steam cut off-so the men just sat around the decks for the full day and did not work. When we got in touch with Canberra, the employers were forced to pull their head in. It went on and on and we finished up establishing this principle by organisation. The members, every one of them, enjoyed this so much when we would explain it to them and they remembered that the employer had been in the box seat for so long and here they were able now to turn the tables. They were in the box seat, they enjoyed every minute when we were applying tactics and defeating the employer with this rotation of hatches and that type of activity. In this way we honed industrial guerilla warfare to a very fine edge.

A couple of months after my election as Secretary, the employer decided to challenge our right to preference on the waterfront. They introduced what was known as the *Ravine Dispute*. They built a gang up with a couple of outsiders, linked with supervisors, foreman and office staff they were able to make up a gang and this gang commenced working a ship. This is the only time in the five years of building organisation in Port Kembla that we decided to withdraw our labour. We withdrew, leaving the employers the responsibility of working the port with this gang. It lasted the one week and the employers had to dispense with the Ravine Gang and thus we went back in charge of the job again. Here it is interesting to note on the Port Kembla breakwater huge boulders on the top in very high letters that could be seen half a mile away the names of "Sloan-scab-Dodds-scab". These were some of the ex-stevedores who used to do all the stevedoring in the Port and later became foremen for the Port Kembla Stevedoring and their names were written up as scabs on the breakwater.. Lockwood mentioned this in his book *War on the Waterfront*. If he had seen me he would not have made the cardinal mistake of relating this graffiti to the *Dalfram* Dispute. It happened months before the *Dalfram* dispute occurred.

I remember a very humorous incident after the Ravine Dispute. We resumed work on a ship called *The Momba*. I was driving on the yardarm and Bill Brody, the President of the Union, was driving the mid-ship. Well this *Momba* had solid steel gunnels about 4 foot high; on most ships the gunnels consisted of rails,

but these were solid steel. There were half a dozen hatch boards being sent up from below and as they come into sight I could see there was only a bit instead of a round turn on these hatches which were hardwood and one could easily slide out and spew down below on top of the men. So Bill Brody was letting the mid-ship off and I could see that the tail of this sling of hatch boards was going to hit the coamings and possibly spear down below. I had to give the winch an extra turn of speed to get the tail over the coaming and with all the slack of the mid-ship winch it hit the gunnel with a really hard whack. We were watching the ship's hook, didn't know old Dick Dodds was standing there leaning with his elbows on the gunnel and looking over the side of the ship-it missed him by six inches. He turned around and said "missed you bastards". It was most humorous, we did not even know he was there, but his guilty conscience caused him to think that Bill Brody and I were after his scalp.

Whilst we were campaigning about these immediate demands on the ship themselves in relation to general working conditions, safety and hygiene, we were still campaigning for an eight hour minimum, campaigning for meal money, and dust money.

As a matter of fact, the BHP ships regularly brought Whyalla ironstone from Whyalla in South Australia and unloaded the ironstone there on a private jetty and then brought their ships over for back loading of general steel cargo. We forced them to hose all the red ironstone dust off the ships before the wharfies would work them. We did not have to strike, we just threatened them and told them that was necessary. We demanded heavy dust payments and the BHP decided they would wash the dust off the ship before they brought it over for the wharfies to work on.

Then there is the question of the eight hour minimum. Whenever the opportunity presented itself at the pick-up, ie. when a ship was finishing off and only an hour or so of work remained, the men would receive only a two hour minimum and lose their turn on the roster—a turn on the roster at this time could mean anything from a half to a full week's wage because at this time the shifts were of 24 hours duration. We therefore refused to accept the short job unless guaranteed at least an eight hour minimum. The employers finally took this question to the Arbitration Court. Judge Beeby awarded a four hour minimum to four ports.

It is important to understand the role of the court and how the court operates. Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart did not do anything about the eight hour minimum, they were not

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campaigning. They had no organisation. We were the only port that was doing it. But Judge Beeby finally gave the four hour minimum. He could not give it to Port Kembla alone, but he included Sydney, Hobart and Adelaide. None of them were campaigning for the eight hour minimum at all but you see he could not very well give it only to Port Kembla because of our demanding way. He had to make it appear that justice was being done. He gave it to three other ports as well as Port Kembla, remembering that there were thirty-odd other ports in the Federation who were picked up each day the same as we were but still had to do with a two hour minimum. So the Kembla campaign played the major part in increasing the minimum period of engagement from two to four hours at that time.

In the meal money campaign, before meal money we had to provide all our own meals. Overtime in Port Kembla was particularly tough because you would go out and expect to be home for tea and you would finish up that you would be working the 24 hours and you would have to try and take your meals with you. We decided to campaign for meal money that would buy decent meals when we were asked to work these long hours and because of the way we campaigned, we played an important part in the meal money struggle.

Whenever a man was picked up the Federation finished up gaining meal money from the Court. Meals were to be supplied when working outside of ordinary hours, and it finished up a pretty important condition.

Continuous campaigning brought great strength and understanding to our membership. This enabled us to help other unions less fortunate than ours through the Trades and Labour Council. This activity broadened the political and industrial understanding of members and built strong ties with the rest of the labour movement. We engaged in the 9/10 months previous to the Pig Iron struggle in every day struggles against the employers, the Arbitration Court and the BHP and this enabled us to learn to assess a situation. We learnt that when you are in a strong position, you must give the other person an opportunity to save face and to accept inferences, because such inferences are based on your strength and you know that if such inferences gleaned from an argument have not borne fruit they could find themselves in the same position tomorrow as they are today. So in assessing any situation in any struggle we must take this into consideration. This business of standing flat footed and saying we demand all or nothing, is the best way to lose your battles. So we learnt and kept learning and that is why we were able to

assess the situation carefully and correctly at the conclusion of the Pig Iron Dispute.

We were able to keep our opponents on the wrong foot. We were able to seize on the situation and had a resolution carried that we do not load the pig iron for Japan. But after this was carried, I communicated it to the Port Kembla section too. I pointed out that whilst the resolution was carried we do not stop loading pig iron unless it is necessary, that we be sure of our action and that all gangs should go to work and commence loading pig iron on the ship to give me an opportunity to mix with the crew and make sure that we would not be left with egg on our face. I confirmed that the pig iron was in fact going to Japan and at about 11 o'clock I was able to come up on deck, walk along the deck and say right members, the pig iron is going to Japan. All work stopped and to a man they walked off the vessel. Employers had some of the office employees with note and paper on the wharf because they must have anticipated this action and asked each individually: "You refuse to work? Do you refuse to work?". They were just brushed aside. The roster, job delegates and the union gave members more self esteem, they were no longer intimidated by the employers. Twelve months previously that type of tactics would have intimidated the members. They just brushed them aside and just walked off the job. Confidence flowed from this new found independence brought about because rosters and job delegates gave them new independent strengths and that is how the *Dalfram* Dispute commenced.

We were not on strike, we just refused to load the pig iron. We were prepared to work any other ship and all other cargoes. Each day at the pick up as the preceding day's labour finished, and the as new labour would come into the pick up the employers' representatives would put the *Dalfram* on the top of the list to be picked up first. Thus, each day they would run through the labour and it only took them two or three days to finish off through the roster in such a way with the *Dalfram* on top of the list that all available labour was locked out thus commencing a ten week dispute over the loading of pig iron to Japan. We were 180 strong at the time and with our action we became the conscience of the Australian people.

It was a struggle that lasted for ten weeks. Ten weeks' wages were lost by all of the wharfies. There was no pecuniary gain involved—it was purely a question of bombs on China today means bombs on Australia tomorrow. The Australian people rallied to the wharfies in a magnificent way and made it very difficult indeed

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for the Government and even the Opposition led by John Curtin who opposed our ban—and he told us so. When we went to Canberra as deputation, with the Mayor of Wollongong. Curtin laid back in his divan with his hands behind his head and staring at the ceiling, he remonstrated with us like we were a lot of naughty boys and said that if the Labor Party was in power we would have to load the pig iron because it was Government policy. So much for the attitude of the leader of the Labor Party who was completely out of tune with the attitude of the people of this country who realised the hazard and danger of a Japanese invasion. There was a ‘Tanaka Memorandum’, (copies had come into our possession) which set out clearly the area of future Japanese conquest, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea and Australia. Despite this the Menzies Government decided that they were going to coerce us into loading this pig iron. It finished up that Menzies had to have a few second thoughts. The Transport Workers Act was used to destroy the 1928 wharfies strike and left ten branches of the Permanent and Casual Union in Australia and it filled in 1935 half the coastal ships with black leg labour and dealt a very striking blow at the Seamen’s Union and it was this Transport Workers Act that was going to be used against the Federation. If a Port was declared a Transport Worker Act port, all that was needed the Union notwithstanding any person could go to the Customs House and for the payment of 1 shilling take out the licence under the Act and they became a wharf labourer. So it was union busting legislation too.

Menzies threatened and he changed the date of the application two or three times because we had the Government in a very difficult spot. He threatened and then he adjourned and threatened again and after the Canberra delegation, he came down to meet the Trade Unions in Wollongong and incidentally’ to the most hostile reception a politician ever had. I was called upon by the Inspector of Police to break a way through the crowd so that Menzies after his lunch could get across to the Town Hall where the meeting was to be held with the Union leaders. I had the dubious honour of breaking a way through the crowd so that Menzies, who was really fear-stricken, could cross the road to the Town Hall. The women with all their little bannerettes were poking at him and screaming at him. Menzies never had such a bad reception in all his life. However, he threatened us again with the application of the Transport Workers Act and again we told him at that conference that we were not concerned about the Transport Workers Act, we were concerned about the principle of pig iron for Japan, arming a potential enemy of ours but

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providing the wherewithal for bombs on Chinese women and children today and possibly Australian women and children tomorrow.

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