A history of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union

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CHAPTER FIVE

ARBITRATION: UNITY AND CHALLENGES

1914-1919
On 5 August 1914 Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Cook announced that Australia had joined Britain in an European War which had begun on the previous day. The following fifty-one months of war and the first period of peace led to the reshaping of the country's economic and social structure and to profound challenges to still fresh political ideas and practices. The War disrupted the economic advance of the previous years. Gross Domestic Product (at constant prices) fell sharply at first, recovered in the middle years of war but did not regain its 1913/14 values until 1920/21.1

Manufacturing industry was prey to conflicting determinants. There was a guaranteed and 'natural' protection afforded by the use of shipping for military purposes. This usage over-rode importers' claims. Conversely, important export markets, including Germany, were lost. This directly affected primary producers; the reverberations rang through the economy. There were opportunities for manufacturers. Conversely, there might be shortages of tools and machines. The immediate outcome of this uncertainty was that many workers were sacked.2 Unemployment rose from 6.5 per cent in 1913 to

1. N.G. Butlin, Australian Domestic Product, p.461. GDP in the last full year of peace, 1913/14 was £355.8 m. Its war-time low followed, in 1914/15, at £291.9m. In 1918/19 it was £328.9m.

9.3 per cent by 1915. In the same period the cost-of-living jumped by almost 16 per cent.³

Unemployment led many to volunteer for the armed forces. So great were the numbers enlisting and fighting overseas that, in each year, there was net emigration.⁴ The clothing industry was sorely affected by this because it meant a fall in the size of the market. Neither the natural trade barriers nor the military needs of these years were sufficient to make up for the loss of so many male customers. One Factory Inspector noted that men who might buy two or three suits each year were enlisting.⁵ The order-tailoring trade was thus especially hit. In NSW, tailoring employment fell by almost 17 per cent in the war years, 'slop' employment by a similar level. The dress-making trade, however, held up fairly well. The Victorian industry mirrored this pattern. The value of output, at constant prices, rose clearly in two sections: the NSW dressmaking trade and the Victorian shirt trade. In the others, it was roughly constant which, given the general decline in employment, suggests that productivity increased.⁶

⁴. See C. Forster, op. cit., p.215. The figure peaked at 129,000 in 1916.
⁶. The calculations are upon figures in NSWSR, Victorian Statistical Register, VYB. The Victorian Statistical Register ceased publication in 1916 and the less comprehensive VYB must be used thereafter.
The other indices point to changes in the industry and some documentary evidence endorses this. At the beginning of the War, 20 per cent of Sydney's tailoring shops had electrically-powered machines; by 1918, 23 per cent had them. In dressmaking, the same figure rose from 3 to 16 per cent.\(^7\) In Victoria's booming shirt trade, the application of machine-driven horse power rose by a quarter and by a little more in the dressmaking trade. In other important ways the industry was stable. Thus the average number of hands in a factory barely changed at all. When it did, the trend to larger factories was reversed - except in dressmaking. There was a corresponding rise in the number of working proprietors - except in dressmaking. In NSW the proportion of males to females was unchanged except in order-tailoring where 59.6 per cent of workers in 1913 were female, compared with 64 per cent in 1918/19. This was the continuance of a trend noticeable since 1907. In Victoria the largest change in this index was but 0.9 of a percentage point. In short, statistical evidence shows a general decline in employment, some increases in electric power and production. More clothing was produced by less workers but, unlike the overall picture of Australian industry, increasing capitalisation, bigger factories and the decline of the working proprietor were not apparent.

There is a paucity of evidence on changes in the labour process for

\(^7\) 'Factory Reports', despite not covering all the factories are the clearest sources for this information. For Victoria, see the Statistical Register and VYB.
this particular period, but two features do emerge. The first was the pressing-machine which had come to notice on the eve of the War. Its main application seems to have been in the bigger factories in Victoria but even there its impact was, as yet, limited. Of more importance to more unionists was the continued expansion of team systems. For some of these women the central problem was that the team system seemed to be a form of speed-up. For apprenticed workers — be they men or women — the team system appeared as a means to taking away knowledge of, and any control over, production. Further, as team systems developed, employers tried to introduce weekly wages to replace piece-work.

By the end of this period employers had had some success in changing the basis of payment in the trade. In 1919 only 933 women in the Victorian clothing trade were registered as piece-workers as against 3497 on wages. Piece-hands averaged 44s 3d weekly to the wage-hands' 42s 4d in the last year before a Federal award was secured. The same source — Victorian Factory Reports — also reveal a little more about the industry in 1919. In clothing, if there was a 'typical' worker, it was a wage-tailoress aged 21 or over. (Roughly one quarter of women in the clothing trade were aged less than that). In contrast,

8. The best material of all on the trade is perhaps the assortment of nineteenth-century inquiries and Royal Commissions. From 1907, union material, dealing in any detail with these issues, is patchy. The great exception to this is the series of Arbitration Court transcripts from 1918. Although all sources dealing with claims must be treated very carefully the transcripts, claims and judgments are most helpful. These remain a useful source for further study.
in the dressmaking trade, over a third were below 21. Both juniors
and adults remained more poorly paid at 15s 3d and 37s 8d weekly
respectively.9

The clothing trade remained divided between fragmented sections of the
trade with few innovations but the maintenance of trends towards more
machines and more finely divided work. Despite industrial changes,
the industry was a relatively stable part of workers' lives. How the
industry should be regulated, how society should be structured and how
workers should be organised were far more volatile problems.

The limitations of the different States' wage fixing machinery were
highlighted in the first half of the War by what amounted to a wage
freeze. This confirmation of the deficiencies of the systems might
have led more unionists to favour the Commonwealth Court but its
principles were confused too. The question was a particularly
difficult one for women workers because there was no body of precedent
and few hints of how their wages would be fixed. The FCT's claim was,
in fact, to be the first for workers in an industry employing mainly
women.10

For many workers, the choices were not simply to be made between
different forms of arbitration but between arbitration and direct

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figures, it must be remembered, applied only to registered and
investigated factories. After 1909, Victoria's Factory Reports
are merely statistical, lacking the actual reports of inspectors
which were previously included.

10. See E. Ryan and A. Conlon, op.cit., pp.77-83, 100-5.
action, reform and revolution. This is not to say that, in daily struggles, direct action and arbitration were considered mutually exclusive, but, in these years, the challenge to the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the primarily pro-Arbitration unions, resolved itself in that form. These choices became real conflicts. In some unions, including the FCT, they became explicitly framed as questions for resolution by the membership. The political divisions of the period became important for the development of the FCT's structure, for what sort of organisation it should be.11

The ALP's attitude to the pending war had been summed up in July 1914 when the Federal leader, Andrew Fisher, pledged 'our last man and our last shilling' to Britain. Trades' unionists seemed to share this zeal for they enlisted in the forces in numbers disproportionate to their share of the population. Fisher had the chance to put Labor's words into action from September when he became Prime Minister in a Labor landslide. By 1915 there were Labor Governments in five of the six States, the exception being Victoria. This seemed a propitious time to take up the cause of the Commonwealth's powers. It also seemed a necessary step as, in NSW, Premier Holman outraged the unions with his complicity in a freeze on wages. In Victoria the Wages Boards were similarly suspended. In all States, union anger rose with the price level. Holman narrowly escaped censure at the NSW ALP conference at Easter, 1915. In May, the Federal conference called for

a referendum to be held to give the Commonwealth power over prices. Despite Holman's opposition - on 'States' Rights' grounds - the Federal Government moved towards implementing the decision. The retirement of Fisher thwarted the policy. Billy Hughes, who replaced Fisher, had little enthusiasm for the plan. The planned referendum was shelved. This instance of the conservatism of the Party outraged many unionists and ALP rank-and-file. Throughout 1916 there were major strikes by waterside workers, miners and shearer. These disputes were not merely economic because they often involved explicit denunciations of arbitration processes, ALP leaders and some conservative union bosses. The most vivid political response was in the NSW ALP where an 'Industrial Section' was formed by the unions. In 1916 this organisation recaptured control of the Party for the unions.

As prices continued to rise, and as unemployment did not dissipate, the Federal Government became increasingly unpopular within the union movement. Many unionists felt that simple black-market lay behind the price-rises; most were angry that profits and rents seemed unchecked while wages were pegged. An increasingly militaristic Hughes had to convince the labour movement that, to prosecute the war successfully, conscription was necessary. By May 1916, enlistment was about one-third what the Government required and the slaughter in the Battle of the Somme led Hughes to draw up new estimates. There must be conscription, he announced in August 1916. For almost all of the Labor Party this was the last straw. Hughes and his ally Holman were expelled.
Opposition to the War itself remained relatively restricted. The IWW and the VSP had been the most conspicuous opponents at first. New anti-war bodies sprang from both socialist and pacifist groups. Of these, the Peace Alliance was the most prominent. There was also an avowedly feminist organisation, the 'Women's Peace Army', established in Melbourne. Another organisation involving women was the Militant Propagandists' which would have some links with the FCT. These organisations were well placed to campaign against conscription which was, in any case, unacceptable to unions under most circumstances and absolute anathema without any kind of controls on capital or the economy. The 'no' vote triumphed after one of the most bitter campaigns ever held in Australia. The anti-conscriptionists did not rely solely on the arguments for freedom and equality of sacrifice. From many quarters of the labour movement the 'yellow peril' was conjured up. Would white Australia be safe with the nation's young men fighting in Europe?

Greater division followed the campaign. In January 1917 Hughes' so-called National Labor joined the Liberals as the Nationalists and in May the new party won a Federal election. Thereafter the ALP began to move to an outright anti-war policy. Prior to this, the IWW had provided the most impressive anti-war propaganda - one example had earned Tom Barker, an IWW leader, a gaol term. During the campaign, twelve IWW members were arrested and charged with conspiring to burn down part of Sydney to secure his release. In July 1917, the IWW was declared illegal - but neither direct action nor anti-conscription fell away thereafter.
Hughes announced that another referendum would be held. There was little time to prepare for this one but, in November 1917, the people again rejected conscription. Once again Hughes' timing might have been better, for another round of industrial action had rendered the labour movement more militant. This stoppage, from 2 August to 19 September, became known as the NSW General Strike. It began with a dispute over time cards, speed-up and general management practices in the Randwick railway engineering shops in Sydney. The central union conflict involved one of the most aristocratic and anti-syndicalist of unions, the ASE. This did not stop the Government claiming to see the IWW's evil influence at work. At its height, the stoppage involved 75,000 workers, some of whom were sympathetic to the IWW. Most workers simply identified with the threats to working conditions and unionism that the Government's actions carried.

The strike ended with the unions in utter disarray. It also doomed Hughes' conscription hopes and revived schemes for a more effective organisation of workers. In the wake of the strike, the Labor Council elected a new Secretary, Jock Garden, who was a keen supporter of the IWW's One Big Union (OBU). A congress of unions was held under the auspices of the Labor Council. This meeting, in August 1918, voted to establish the One Big Union. Its form was to be the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA); its aim, the abolition of capitalism by a general strike. This was to be achieved by building industrial unionism, relying above all upon direct action. By the end of the year, most Trades and Labour Councils had adopted the scheme and a national conference was convened in January 1919.
Progress thereafter, and the winning of the labour movement piece by piece, proved difficult. State Labor Parties re-emphasised reformism, trying to ward off what seemed an electoral liability whilst craft unions redoubled their schemes of defensive 'further organisation'. The major stumbling block was perhaps the Australian 'Workers' Union, jealous of its power and status, tied firmly to parliamentary politics and seeing itself as the One Big Union. Labor Party conferences rejected the WIUA from mid-1919. The OBU supporters were forced to re-group outside existing forums and they resolved to set up the WIUA wherever possible - if necessary in opposition to existing unions. By the end of 1919 the question of political action was being raised in discussions of a new revolutionary politics. The war had largely inspired these trends. After a year of peace, industrial and political innovation was still possible.

(ii) THE FEDERAL UNION

During the war years, the FCT grew at an extraordinary rate. Membership in Victoria and South Australia tripled and, in 1917, a similarly expanding NSW Branch rejoined the Union. In Victoria during the first half of the war, workers were joining at a rate of about 80 to 100 each fortnight. These increases represented an increased commitment to 'further organisation'. Although traditional areas were part of the advance, the Branches struck out into dressmaking, whitework and shirts. In Victoria and South Australia, the female percentage of the membership rose from about 75 to over 85. This performance was, finally, matched in NSW, where the proportions
changed from less than 50 to almost 80 per cent. These changes coincided with structural and political transformations in the FCT. Before considering these themes, it is necessary to review industrial responses to problems arising in the context of the War.

Response to the War in the FCT was typical of the union movement. The War itself was never discussed at Federal Council, nor was there much reference to it in the Victorian Branch. Divisions between socialists were evidenced in the few discussions which took place. Alf Wallis quickly moved appreciation of the volunteers although his party, the VSP, was opposed to the War. Just a fortnight later, however, he joined Secretary Carter to appeal for support for the Peace Alliance. Similar tensions were revealed in the Branch's industrial response. That Wages Boards hearings be suspended for the duration of the War was at first agreed to, but by the end of the year, some unionist rationality had quelled patriotic fervour. Members decided on a campaign to secure preference for unionists and they discussed policies to ensure some union control over the making of military clothing.

12. Membership figures are incomplete and unreliable. For Queensland and Tasmania they are non-existent. The best statistics for comparison are these: SA: about 400 in 1914, 744 in 1916, 1395 in 1919; Victoria from 2774 in 1915 to 9415 in 1921. For the Victorian rate of growth, see Vic. Branch, Minutes.

13. Vic Branch, Minutes, 14 September 1914.

14. ibid., 28 September 1914. For the peace alliance, see I. Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, pp.168f. Turner notes that 'the war was little mentioned, in union gatherings, except in terms of its possible economic effects' (p.69).

15. Vic Branch, Minutes, 31 August, 26 September, 31 December 1914.
Two challenges confronted the Branch immediately: how to secure this control and, in the CGCF, the threatened spread of machinery to pressing. Both problems had come to the attention of unionists before the War. In 1913, the Branch had been alarmed by the low prices being paid for military garments and, in the following year, union preference had been demanded. The Branch secured an agreement that all military clothing would be made 'indoors' and preferably at the CGCF.16

To try to control how garments were made, the Branch demanded that its officers be given access to all places which had contracts and that the state, through Commonwealth Examiners of Clothing, be empowered to investigate the wages paid in such places.17 The election of the Labor Party to Federal office in September did not receive much 'official' notice, but the Branch received favourable responses to these requests. Tender rates rose and union officials were granted the right freely to address workers without employers or supervisors present.18 This was immediately put to the test when Wallis visited Blencowes, one of Melbourne's oldest firms. Wallis spoke to the women, left application forms and returned the next day to be confronted by an enraged proprietor claiming Wallis had no right to be

16. ibid., 30 September 1912; 15 September 1913.
17. ibid., 31 December 1914.
18. A new minimum rate for tenders was reported in PUNSW, Minutes, 29 March 1915; TTU, Minutes, 12 April 1915. A clause was added to the 'General Conditions of Tender' to this effect; Correspondence, Department of Defence to H. Carter, 16 February 1915.
on the premises. The incident, which was common enough in peace-time, justified the Branch's demands.

There was little that the Department of Defence would do to prevent cost-saving short-cuts in work. By February 1915, pressers were complaining that they had been told not to do a proper job. In Sydney, pressers appealed for public support on the grounds that those who co-operated had 'swindled the government', but, in Melbourne, it appeared that the Government had no objection to the practice, for Carter was informed that due to an urgent request for immediate delivery of Great coats ... it was decided to issue 2000 lying in stock without being pressed.

The Defence Department effectively warned pressers against seeking to say how their work should be done, adding that it would 'reserve the right to take action which any exceptional position demands'.

In the CGCF, where the piece-log lay down 1 shilling per coat, £100 was thus lost in wages. This worked out as thirty three and a third weeks of one presser's ordinary time - a significant injury to add to the insult to the craft.

19. A. Wallis, Report to Executive, 9 May 1915; included in CGCF Correspondence.
20. Vic Branch, Minutes, 1 March 1915.
21. PUNSW, Minutes, 12 April 1915.
22. Correspondence, Department of Defence to H. Carter, 31 July 1915.
23. Calculated from CGCF, 'Pressers' Log', 1915 (assuming their £3 weekly minimum). See CGCF, Correspondence.
The Branch Executive had also to deal with the problems faced by workers employed on military sub-contracts. The earlier resolution to accede in the suspension of Wages Boards was quietly forgotten, as logs for military clothing were discussed. The Boards would not act, of course, so the Branch instructed Carter to approach the Chief Inspector of Factories. However, just as the Department of Labour in NSW would not act against the State Clothing Factory, so the Victorian Department told Carter that it had no jurisdiction over military clothing. The Branch then fell back on haranguing the Department of Defence.

The second immediate problem facing the Branch was the spread of machine-pressing. Like military clothing it was an area which had caused some concern before the War. The advent of the machines had first come to the Branch's attention in 1913 when 'the need of some form of regulation was urged'. Nothing was done at Branch level although agreements in individual work-places may have been reached. This was certainly the case at the CGCF where pressers used such an agreement as the basis for resisting management's attempts to increase the range of garments which could be machine-pressed. It was agreed that there would be no such increase and that no more machines would

24. Vic Branch, Minutes, 27 April 1915. An apparent anomaly had arisen with machinists earning more than hand-workers.

25. For NSW, see Cutters' and Trimmers' Union, Minutes, 20 April 1915. For Melbourne, Vic Branch, Minutes, 10 May 1915. Approaches to the Department then and later were unsuccessful. See below.

26. Vic Branch, Minutes, 24 November 1913.
be installed so long as pressers were unemployed. Meanwhile the Ministry of Labour reported that machine-pressers must be paid the full wage.

These signs that employment and earnings could be maintained were not enough to satisfy one prominent presser who wanted the machines to be unreservedly opposed. In November 1914, a sub-committee reported that this was 'not opportune'. Whatever reasoning lay behind this, the fact was that matters were rather different away from the CGCF. Elsewhere, employment did not seem so secure and even within the CGCF the machines still loomed as a threat in the minds of many. By February 1915 special meetings of Victoria's pressers had been called to discuss the machine. The pressers at first attempted to ban the machine from military work but, within a month, this policy was abandoned in favour of demands for higher wages. In discussing the problem, President Baker argued for regulation, not opposition. Wallis reminded the men that, with proper organisation, they could enforce their will. The question became: what should that will be?

The Branch Executive recommended that bans be lifted and that £3 per week, that is 5 shillings over the rate, be demanded. This wage was

27. ibid., 28 April 1914.
28. ibid., 9 November 1914.
29. ibid., 1 March 1915 (which includes a Report of Pressers' Meeting, 22 February), 15 March 1915. These meetings heard reports of some unhappy conferences with Labor's Minister for Defence, Senator Pearce. According to these sources, Pearce was sarcastic and patronising - and entirely unhelpful.
The introduction of new machinery at the CGCF was not surprising. The factory was itself new, opened in the same year as the Government's Small Arms Factory in Lithgow, NSW. There, the most recent semi-automatic machines were installed in an establishment planned and run on modern methods. The craftsmen of the ASE did not care for the 'American hustling' of the management any more than the pressers liked the CGCF's administration. These conflicts pointed to a central problem of state enterprises. If such concerns were to be competitive with capitalist production - and that often seemed the main aim then how different from a capitalist company's would the internal relations be? This was one aspect of the struggles within the CGCF. Those struggles were very broad ones. If management thought that the machine would break the pressers' and, thereby, the Branch's resistance it was mistaken. Women workers built upon their pre-War experiences to oppose management just as staunchly as the pressers and cutters.

30. For a report on the new rate, see PUNSW, Minutes, 29 March 1915. Employment did fall hereafter. The Branch claimed that the number of pressers at the CGCF fell from 37 to 28 and, further, that piece-rates were not satisfactorily adjusted to the new rate. See, Correspondence, CGCF, Wallis, 'Statement of the Case of the Employees at the Commonwealth Clothing Factory', June 1916.


32. Turner claims that this was the central aim of Queensland's venture into state socialism in and after 1915 - in order to protect consumers; Industrial Labour and Politics, p.75.

33. See Chapter Four.
There cannot be much doubt that most unionists who gave the matter their attention would have wished for good relations with and within the CGCF. If the great majority of military needs were met there, then the scope for sub-contracting would be minimal and the Union's say in matters maximized. Members of the CGCF work-force then, and subsequently, tended to be conspicuous delegates on the Branch Executive. In the factory, shop stewards tended to be rather more enduring than elsewhere. The Branch's interest in the factory was, thus, reinforced. The conflicts there are the best documented of any before the 1930s. They are treated herein with some detail because of what they reveal for some of the main concerns of the thesis: changes in the work process, relations within the Union and the relations between the Union and labour movement.

Only a few months after the War began, management demands for an increase in coat-hands tasks led to disputes. As had been the case since the factory's establishment, the Breeches Room was the scene of the most intense conflicts. In mid-1915 management decided that trouser-linings would be done by machine, not hand. The manager, Mr Slade, threatened instant dismissal if the women refused machine-work. On 30 July the women sent their shop steward, Miss Toumeys to telephone the Trades' Hall. All women and girls in the room had struck work.

34. One of the two pressers' representatives was J. O'Brien who organised a limit on output in September 1914. Perhaps the most remarkable CGCF 'survivor' was Ethel Phillips, a shop steward in both wars and a member of the Executive Committee 1936-48.

35. Vic Branch, Minutes, 23 November, 7 December 1914.
The MTHC's Industrial Disputes Committee insisted on an immediate return to work. Organiser Wallis was infuriated by this demand: any return should be under the old terms. The strike attracted something which the women had earlier demanded - the intervention of the Defence Minister, Senator Pearce. He insisted upon re-instatement without reprisal. Carter claimed 35 jobs had been saved and recorded that the women's action had given him 'a new hope' in the Union. The long-term implications of the stoppage are unclear but two significant pointers emerge: the officials were drawing up a log for machine work, indicating their pessimism about sustained resistance to technological change; and second, this well-publicised action by women encouraged similar action elsewhere. The administration of the CGCF itself irked other women. Cap workers believed that problems were inevitable because Slade had no trade experience, that he 'was not a fair-minded man'. For a time discontent was checked by news that Wages Board hearings would resume but on 16 April 1916 the factory's cutters walked off the job.

When the cutters went on strike, Examiners were quickly called in to replace them, occasioning 'several scenes of disorder' at the factory. The acting-Minister for Defence was given a detailed statement of the men's case, while, according to The Age

36. This account is based upon Carter's Report in CGCF, Correspondence and the Branch Minutes. It is not clear why or when the MTHC's Industrial Disputes Committee was asked to act.

37. CGCF, Correspondence, Note, 15 August 1915.

38. These Examiners were probably Government Examiners, former tradesmen with a detailed knowledge of the whole trade. For a report see The Age, 22 April 1916.
demonstrations against the non-unionists were made by the women employed in the factory who hooted vigorously.39

At the end of the month, the men returned to work in order that a deputation could be received by Senator Pearce. Carter, two cutters, and members of the ubiquitous Industrial Disputes Committee subsequently met Pearce.

The strike was over two sets of issues: wages and control. The cutters outlined the delays which they had endured and the unsatisfactory nature of wage increases which were finally granted. Their apparent selectivity had aroused more anger. Carter dealt with general wage concerns. He told Pearce that the Government need not fear conservatives' attacks on state enterprises. There was no 'feather-bedding'; rather, wage rises could be justified because the division of labour in the cutting room and the specialised lines of production both rendered high rates of pay possible.40 The delegation concentrated upon the wage issue whereas on earlier 'Statement of the Men's Case' had emphasised work practices and control.

When merit is not recognized there will always be trouble ... the foreman cannot judge this as he does not understand Stock Cutting.

Senator Pearce was unimpressed, arguing that the grading of workers

39. ibid.
40. This account is based upon 'A Statement of the Men's Case', Correspondence, CGCF, Department of Defence to H. Carter, 24 May 1916, 'Notes on Deputation'; and The Age.
was purely a matter for management. Similarly, he rejected Carter's wage claim: Labor's opponents must not be given a rod with which to beat state enterprises. Publicly Pearce went further, for he was reported to have said that the cutters were 'blacklegging' on the labour movement. The Government's attitude after the strike was a similar one. The Defence Department asked Carter to restrain workers' reactions to the continued employment and, indeed, promotion, of 'blacklegs'. For many unionists this caused the utmost frustration. 'We are told that we are to support scabs' was Wallis' irate reaction. The end of the cutters' strike became entangled with the claims of all CGCF workers. In 1916 the Clothing Board handed down the first increases of any note since its inception. Disputes over back-pay and the size of increases for women earning rates above the minimum led to threats to reduce output. Two stewards warned of widespread dissatisfaction in the factory. This could only be exacerbated by delays in negotiations on the log. By the middle of June a number of women had adopted 'go slow' tactics. As was the

41. The Age, 26 April 1916; see also 22 April for a threat by Pearce's deputy that all military work be done privately.
42. Correspondence, Department of Defence to H. Carter, 8 May 1916; Vic Branch, Minutes, 6, 19 June 1916.
43. CGCF, Correspondence, A.R. Wallis, 'Statement of the Case of the Employees at the CCF' (n.d.).
45. A.R. Wallis, Report to Executive, Vic Branch, 1 June 1916.
46. ibid.; see also The Age, 13 June 1916 where, perhaps, Wallis was playing down the militancy. Wallis believed the go slow was a tactical error because it might harm the chances of securing back-pay.
case with many other workers, the women resisted the advice of their
officials. Even Wallis urged 'tactical' caution. Meanwhile,
political pressure increased. Pearce thought that there was a
'sinister pro-German influence' in the CGCF - just as Hughes had
seen German sympathisers at work in the Broken Hill miners' strike.

The Branch officers now attempted to resolve all the conflicts within
the CGCF. Wallis set out the position thus: many workers had in fact
coop-erated with management because of 'military exigencies'; all
that the Branch asked was that rates be adjusted in line with Wages
Board changes. Wallis squarely blamed Slade for the delays, detailing
a number of conflicts and his attempt to set up a non-Union 'club' for
the cutters and, in general, his 'aversion to united action'. Perhaps
the central point was highlighted by the managerial edict of 1915 that
complaints be handled by Slade, not the Union. Wallis believed that
if 'this is the policy to be accepted we as unions may as well close
up shop'. Wage increases were soon paid but disputes over conditions
continued. As 1916 wore on, there were dismissals as the employment
needs of the factory declined. The role of the union itself
remained a source of conflict. When a dispute-settling Board of

47. Quoted, The Age, 13 June 1916.

48. I Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, p.87; see also pp.82-92
for the Watersiders' and AWU's 'political' restraint compared
with the Miners' 'tactical' restraint in disputes in 1916.

49. 'Statement of the Case ... '

50. Vic Branch, Minutes, 3 July 1916.

51. ibid., 28 August 1916, 26 February 1917.
Reference was established, it fulfilled Pearce's declared intent that it 'would not deal with questions of management'.

In the last months of war, the CGCF drama was played out in a dispute in which Organiser Wallis was thrown out of the lunch-room by military police. This action followed a letter written by Wallis to several members who had quit the Union. Wallis asked:

Is it not apparent that your opponents will at all times try and mislead you, for they hate the working class with an implacable hate and use all means, however unscrupulous, to divide you that they may drive and sweat you at their will.

Unionism was the only way by which workers could defend themselves.

When the Industrial Disputes Committee intervened, a meeting was held to resolve the place of the Union in the factory. Wallis was banned, the MTHC was to approve all Union representatives and the organisers would not be free to move inside the factory. The MTHC was censured by a Branch meeting which rejected the terms. The end of the War took away much of the conflict within the CGCF. By then, with Federal

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52. Pearce, quoted, *The Age*, 2 May 1916; see also CGCF, Correspondence, Memorandum, 17 July 1916. There is no record of the Board being called upon. Decisions would have been subject to managerial or ministerial approval.

53. Vic Branch, Minutes, 29 July 1918.

54. Quoted, *The Age*, 30 July 1916. One unidentified member declared that the 'letter would live as long as the Union lived'.

55. Vic Branch, Minutes, 24 July, 12 August, 9 September 1918. The Minute-taker's loyalties were clear, describing the MTHC President as having 'crawled' and the Secretary as having 'engaged in a characteristic grovel to the bosses'.
Labor divided, it had become apparent that there would not even be any hope of a hearing for workers employed by the state. In truth the Union was probably more marginalised in 1918 than in 1914. How might those sorts of problems affect the still fresh ties that the Branch had made with 'politics'? We may now look closely at this question and at the ways in which the Branch developed 1914-18.

The Victorian Branch changed considerably in the War. Its growth was a signal feature, particularly as employment was falling. On the day after war was declared a meeting of tailoresses was told that 'women should organize themselves against the sweater and the unscrupulous'. It could be suggested that 'the unscrupulous' were not merely to be found amongst employers. Within the Branch there was no encouragement for women's representation to be changed until 1916. Only then did Branch structure begin to look less like a 'craft club' and more like an industry-based union. From 1910 until 1916 a committee of eight persons represented the sections: two delegates each for tailors, cutters, pressers and tailoresses. This practically guaranteed that there would be six craftsmen on the committee at all times - in addition to a President, Vice-President and officers. After the change, there was one delegate each for order tailoresses, stock tailoresses, cutters, pressers, dressmakers, whiteworkers (i.e. underwear) and tie-makers. This structure was a compromise between craft (cutters etc) and industry (dressmaking etc) forms of

56. ibid., 17 August 1914.
representation. It did allow for a greater representation of women workers but this change was restricted in impact by a ruling that delegates could represent any section. This removed the element of 'guaranteed' female representation because it opened elections up to the assertive and experienced craftsmen. Notwithstanding this, the number of women on the committee rose from two in 1914 to five from 1917-19.

The South Australian proportions were similar but NSW retained what may be called the craft structure with a committee of six, of whom two were women. The Victorian Branch continued its changes by adding another 'industry' in shirtwear in 1917 and, in the following year by ending the practice of holding separate general meetings for the different 'Groups'. The Victorians were rather idiosyncratic. Federal Rules called for Branches to have equal representation for the order and the ready-made trades. The Victorians managed to ignore this edict until a rule change made such obstinacy unnecessary.

As the Branches grew so did the number of officials - from two to five in Victoria, from one to two in South Australia. In Victoria, organisers were to be clearly seen as servants of the members. They did not vote at meetings nor could they stand as committee officials.

57. For these changes: ibid., February 1916; 12 February 1917; January 1919.

58. This situation aroused no recorded comment in Victoria or elsewhere. The Victorians may well have argued that the four delegates for cutters, tailors, pressers and order-tailoresses were the components of the 'craft half' of their Committee, 1910-1916.
representatives. Who the organisers should be was as important a question as what they should do. Federal Council agreed that membership would be open to officers.59

In the Branches, the selection of organisers proved to be a source of vexation. By 1916 the two female organisers had left the Union. Carter and Wallis were then the only two officers. Early in that year, H. Hainsworth, a former AST cutter was appointed without much controversy but, in March, the Executive recommended a VSP member named John Cain to organise Number Two Group. The meeting, however, viewed

with dissatisfaction ... the appointment of Mr Cain as organiser, a man totally unacquainted with even the rudiments of the trade.60

Wallis moved the matter be reopened but the Executive was ordered to give preference to an FCT member. Fortunately for the Executive this candidate withdrew 'owing to unforeseen circumstances' and an open selection was then agreed to. Miss Brennan of Number Two Group commented that this would be 'in the best interests of the women'.61

In June the Executive again recommended Cain. This time the numbers

59. FC, Minutes, 3-16 March 1916; FCT, Rules, 1918.
60. Vic Branch, Minutes, 27 March 1916.
61. ibid., 6 June 1916. See also 11 April, 22 May. The CGCF dispute was responsible for the delay in resolving the matter although the Executive must also have been concerned by the members' intransigence. In addition, the Rules required some clarification. This was not achieved until June.
fell Cain's way and he began a short period of organising. Members of the group insisted that still more organisation was needed. Once again (as in 1910) the MTHC's appointment of organisers for women gave some added impetus to those requests. The only women to be appointed organisers in this period were Miss Whitford in Victoria in April 1917 and Miss Mabel Gilbert in South Australia - on the same day. As the Union's coverage expanded, there were new voices heard at meetings and some prominent women committee members coming to the fore. Lesbia Keogh - the first woman President (1918) - was a vocal advocate for the 'Number Two Group' and May Francis - a member of the socialist, anti-war group Militant Propagandists - urged 'further organisation' and opposed the adoption of Wage Board Reports on the grounds that women's wages were too low.

As the Branch expanded there were changes in relations with employers as well as changes within the Union's structure. At one firm, women struck work for two days because Wages Board representatives had been dismissed. Earlier in that year, 1918, a strike over wages and conditions had been threatened. Wallis had been obliged to defend the

62. ibid., 19 June 1916. John Cain was in his 30th year at this time; he later became an ALP parliamentarian and was Victorian Premier 1952-55.

63. Vic Branch, No.2 Group, Minutes, 13 February 1917. See also Vic Branch, Minutes, 12 February 1917.

64. Whitford and Mabel Gilbert both served until the early 1920s. For their appointments see Vic Branch, Minutes, 16 April 1917; SA Branch, Minutes, 2, 16 April 1917.

65. For Francis' initial activities see Vic Branch, Minutes, 28 February 1916, 5 June 1917. May Francis (later Brodney) was to be a foundation member of the CPA.
'sweated' worker's right to take direct action as against relying upon arbitration. There was also a willingness to act against certain forms of payment. At Barnett Glass and Company in 1916, women turned craft tradition on its head by resisting the introduction - without negotiation or notice - of a piece-work system. The employers had to accept that discussions would take place. This kind of action could set off similar responses. At the next Branch meeting, 30 women from another factory voiced their grievances at the way in which rates had been set.

Many in the Branch felt that good results would accrue from encouraging unionism in still more areas. In reporting on MTHC meetings Francis attacked that body's attitude, arguing that the organisation of women workers was 'a question pigeon-holed by the Council'. Others attacked the Labor Party following its failure to invite FCT representatives to a women's conference. In one way or another both wings of the movement had their short-comings. Conspicuous individuals like Wallis and Francis challenged many of the basic assumptions of the FCT. The actions of many workers could be similarly significant when, however misleadingly, their options were being seen in terms of 'arbitration or direct action'.

This question was resolved in a particularly volatile atmosphere of

66. ibid., 6 May 1918.
67. ibid., 21 June, 5 July 1917.
68. ibid., 4 November 1918.
69. Vic Branch, No.2 Group, Minutes, 9 October 1917; 26 March 1918.
challenges to the Labor Party, economic difficulty and specific political problems arising from the War. The FCT did not deal with these problems as a federation but the Victorian and South Australian Branches joined other unions in opposing conscription. In August 1915, a motion from the floor at a General Meeting had sent Victorian delegates to the newly-formed Anti-Conscription League. This organisation was inspired by the VSP whose influence saw the League move quickly towards a more clearly socialist, less pacifist, opposition to the war. Just before the first referendum, Branch officials were freed from routine work to concentrate upon the campaign and from late August until the vote, on 28 October 1916, most other Union business was set aside. The breadth of union opposition to conscription makes it easy to forget how much of a change had taken place in the Victorian clothing union's attitude to political issues in a very short time. There were, of course, degrees of enthusiasm: the South Australian Branch did not affiliate with the ALP until 1917. Not until November of that year, just before the second conscription referendum, was there whole-hearted support for the cause.

70. Vic Branch, Minutes, 30 August 1915.
72. Vic Branch, Minutes, 25 September 1916. Two members quit the Union as a protest, one of whom was a foreman at the CGCF.
73. SA Branch, Minutes, 16 April 1917.
74. ibid., 19 November 1917; see also 26 February 1917 for comparison.
The political differences between the Branches were most obvious in relation to the questions of industrial unionism, support for the IWW, and alignment with the OBU. These questions were not resolved as an exercise in political debate. They were resolved as part of a framework which included the industrial actions at the CGCF and elsewhere and the economic and political circumstances of the war years. They came to be decided, particularly in Victoria, in the context of the FCT's commitment to Federal arbitration and of the disaffection with Wages Boards which had inspired it.

In Victoria, the history of relations between the Branch and the state had become sadly repetitious by 1914. The first Wages Board determination of the War came into effect in March 1916 with the first increases since 1912. Tailors' rates were advanced 5s to 65s weekly. This rise, of 8.3 per cent, compared with a cost-of-living increase of 24.1 per cent in Melbourne, 1912-16. For once, women received substantial rises although the Branch's demands for women's wages, which would have given them rates of from 50 to 54 per cent of men's, were not met. Instead, female machinists were to be paid 29s 6d (45.4 per cent) in ready-made, and 30s 6s (46.9 per cent) in order-tailoring. There was an 'all others' rate of 28s for women:75 the

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75. For the determination, see 'Factory Report', 1915, VPP 1916, Vol.2; for the claims, Vic Branch, Minutes, 11 October 1915. The demands were not expressed as percentages of the male wage. For prices, CYB, No.13, 1920. The increases for women in money terms were unusually high, almost matching the rate of inflation: 23 per cent for ready-made machinists; 19.6 for order. These rates were still below the 'real levels' of 1897.
implication of this was that a mere 1s 6d a week was added as a margin for the skill of the ready-made trades' machinist.

Any benefits that an 'all others' rate might have brought were undermined by the chairman of the Dressmaking Board who introduced a new category of woman worker: that is, one over 21 years but without previous experience.76 A lower rate of pay was prescribed in what was, in effect, an extension of the 'improver' principle. In 1917 the new Determination carried the change through: only 21s had to be paid to 'inexperienced workers' - yet another term definable by social construction and conflict not by legal nicety.77

This problem was of even greater importance when Boards declined to set out piece-scales and merely stated that an 'average worker' should be able to earn the minimum wage. Beginning with the Underclothing Board in 1899, a number of determinations had authorised the employer to fix rates on this basis.78 Wider concerns than the level of real wages informed hostility to the Boards. Procedural difficulties, delays and the exclusion of officials as either representatives or witnesses maintained unionists' anger.79 Early in 1917, the Victorian

76. Vic Branch, Minutes, 17, 31 July 1916.
77. VGG, 2 July 1917.
78. For the Dressmaking Board see ibid.; for Headwear, ibid., 21 October 1918; Waterprooﬁngs, ibid., 25 February 1919.
79. Vic Branch, Minutes, March, September 1918. See 23 April 1918 for President Baker's being ruled ineligible and, more unusually, 27 August 1917 for Wallis being declared persona non grata and not permitted to give evidence.
Branch held a general discussion which saw the final condemnation of the Boards for all those sorts of reasons. In addition, the importance of the 'inter-State competition' was taken up. That employers constantly got away with claiming that wages had to be kept low to preserve jobs pointed directly to the need for Commonwealth-wide regulation of the trade.\textsuperscript{80} Subsequently Carter informed employers that their love of delaying tactics and the restricted range of claims with which Boards would deal impelled the Union towards Federal arbitration.\textsuperscript{81}

The smaller Branches most certainly shared Carter's view. At Council in 1916, Queensland's delegate had emphasised that, despite the election of a State Labor Government, the Branch was still keen for a Federal award.\textsuperscript{82} Although the Branch experienced financial difficulties thereafter, it pledged loyalty to the FCT.\textsuperscript{83} Similarly, by 1917 South Australians found their local system 'intolerable'\textsuperscript{84} because wages were pegged at or below Victorian levels, the Boards were powerless on non-wage issues and they made a 'faulty assessment of Women's labour as compared with that of men'.\textsuperscript{85}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{80} ibid., 30 January 1917.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Correspondence, H. Carter to Davies, Doery and Co., 3 June 1918.
\item \textsuperscript{82} FC, Minutes, 3 March 1916. Subsequently, State Awards became very favourable.
\item \textsuperscript{83} ibid., 2 March 1920.
\item \textsuperscript{84} ibid., 15 March 1917.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Miss S. Fewster, Report (?) to Branch; S.A. Branch, Minutes, 12 February 1917.
\end{itemize}
Following this report, the Branch called for 'early proceedings' in the Commonwealth Court which, it had already decided, was 'the only tribunal through which our many grievances can be satisfactorily rectified'. Quite how the Court would rectify the 'many grievances' of women was not much clearer in 1917 than it had been three years earlier. In 1916 the Court, under Justice Powers, had declined to fix any wage for female clerks. Neither needs (the living wage) nor work value were considered.

When Powers handed down a wage for workers in the Public Service Clerical Association, he differentiated between male and female, married and single. In 1917 female telephonists received a lower wage because it was 'women's work'. Oddly enough in 1918, the States provided some clarification with their minimum wages. A rate of 30s was set for women in NSW - more than many categories of clothing workers. In South Australia it was 27s 6d. The rates were half those of men's. Some rays of hope lay in the arrest of the declining proportion of female to male wages and in the possibility of securing 'margins for skill' above that rate. As a living wage, the rate remained absurd. As the FCT's South Australian Branch recorded when the minimum wage rose to 30s: 'a woman cannot live decently and independently on 30/- per week'. In general the Commonwealth

86. SA Branch, Minutes, 15 January 1917.
87. This account is based upon E. Ryan and A. Conlon, op.cit., pp.81-3, 100-4.
88. Reported, SA Branch, Minutes, 16 December 1918. The minimum rate under a new Determination was 29s - only 1s 6d for skill.
89. ibid., 8 September 1919.
Court's wage rates were more attractive than the State rates. It is clear that most women workers were coming to believe that they could not be worse off by a change whilst, for all workers, the attractions of a greater degree of regulation pulled them towards the Commonwealth.

In Queensland and South Australia this was a relatively simple process. For the South Australians it was not just that the Commonwealth Court was the only tribunal from which to expect results, it was the only method. There were alternatives but they were quickly dismissed. For that Branch, joining the ALP had been a significant step. There was to be no further search for political or industrial options: the plight of IWW prisoners received scant attention, the OBU scheme of industrial unionism received even less. In June 1919 it was opposed and not discussed again.90

With the small Branches and, on rejoining, NSW unambiguously committed to the Commonwealth Court, the detailed work for a Federal log was discussed and launched at Council in 1917. Just as this commitment was enacted and confirmed it was challenged in Victoria.91 The usual complaints about the Wages Board did not lead neatly to support for Commonwealth arbitration. At the end of 1915 Wallis had told members that 'they must fight the employing class by direct action for any real advantage'.92

90. ibid., 24 March, 16 June 1919.
91. See FC, Minutes, 15-22 March 1917.
92. Vic Branch, Minutes, 22 November 1915.
had of course already begun to encourage precisely this response in the CGCF and elsewhere. From the VSP, people like Wallis, from the Militant Propagandists, people like May Francis and for all sections of the industry, aspects of the IWW's scheme made immediate sense. As the Branch expanded and as battles were fought over organisation and structure, the ideas of industrial unionism were beginning to be expressed. The process cannot be traced in detail, but its climax and challenge to the FCT's very nature, can be.

The IWW challenge was first negotiated in terms of apparently mundane issues. Thus, a vote of funds for the IWW's Release Committee was significant because it triumphed over an amendment declaring no sympathy with the IWW. The question of active support for the IWW was not officially raised. When May Francis urged that more be done for the IWW prisoners, the IWW vision of revolutionary unionism was not itself discussed. The questions raised by the IWW were explicitly formulated in September 1918, following the revival of the OBU at a conference in Sydney where the delegates agreed to a Labor Council proposal to establish the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia. The consequent conference of unions in Melbourne demanded some discussion of the whole scheme.

For OBU sympathisers in the Victorian FCT, the issue could hardly have come at a better time. The MTHC's stocks were low following the Industrial Disputes Committee's failure in the Wallis-CGCF affair.

93. ibid., 18 December 1916; 5 June 1917.
Further, both the MTHC and the Labor Party had irked many women by their apparent indifference to women's issues95 whilst the delays in preparing a Federal case were, to some, as frustrating as the Wages Board structure was inadequate.

Of the Branch's paid officials only Wallis spoke for the principles of the OBU and, despite some support, the OBU supporters could not win the Branch to binding its delegates to vote for the WIUA's establishment. After the conference had followed the Sydney lead, the FCT's Federal Management Committee attempted to stifle any resurgence of OBU support by ordering that Branches refrain from taking a decision on the WIUA. It was, the Committee resolved, a matter to be considered from a Federal viewpoint.96 This was, in one sense, a clever ploy because Management Committee was so pre-occupied with the Federal arbitration claim that it was uncertain just when the matter would be dealt with. In another sense it was an odd tactic because Federal Council had not yet discussed any 'political' questions. Why should the OBU sympathisers take this at face value? Why take it at all? In Victoria, they didn't. In December, despite Carter's pleas the recommendation - for in truth it was no more than that - was defeated. By March 1919 the Branch Minutes were recording that members were 'keenly disappointed' with Federal activities. Would all forms of arbitration now be rejected?97

95. Vic Branch, Minutes, 1, 15 March, 1915; 4 November 1918; No.2 Group, Minutes, 9 October 1917; 26 March 1918.
96. Vic Branch, Minutes, 23 September 1918; No.2 Group, Minutes, 21 October 1918; MC, Minutes, 27 November 1918.
97. Vic Branch, Minutes, 2 December 1918; 10 March 1919. All the other Branches voted in accordance with Management Committee's request.
Following further WIUA conferences, the Branch's delegates reported enthusiastically for the new organisation. One delegate reported that, while workers' associations 'struggled foolishly as craft unions', the employers practically had their own OBU. The adoption of this report, in June 1919, signalled the height of OBU influence in the Branch. Coincidentally, the Victorian Labor Party conference rejected the re-formulation that the militants wanted. Discussions in the MTHC of the principles of arbitration prepared the way for a resolution of the conflict.

By the end of June most of the work for the Federal award was complete. Carter and the 'arbitrationists' could, then, point to the achievement of the FCT's initial aim. His work, the work of witnesses and of officials, the time and cost invested were to be banked up against the call for a leap into the unknown with the WIUA. Wallis therefore emphasised the limitations of the pending Award particularly in relation to the 'secondary wage' for women which, he said, was 'inadequate for the skill required'. The report detailing the Award was rejected but in July Carter fought back, saying that the FCT's policy was for arbitration and it was not negotiable until the Federal Council of 1920. No role in the WIUA should be considered. Wallis and Francis subsequently rebutted these claims, calling for a ballot on the question of the WIUA. With the final handing down of

98. ibid., 16 June 1916.
100. Vic Branch, Minutes, 2 June 1918.
101. ibid., 14 July, 11 August 1918.
the Award only weeks away, the WIUA ballot was held. Wallis wrote that workers now had the chance to organise on class not craft lines with 'workshop control, not so called craft autonomy'. He went on to say there was no half-way house.

It is either One Big Union of all workers or industrial serfdom forever. Which shall it be? Each worker's interest is the same whatever his or her calling.102

Arbitration and the existing structure of unionism withstood the challenge. Of the 2480 papers issued, only 782 were returned. Of these, only 263 cast in favour of the WIUA.103 Most members agreed with Carter: the FCT was their OBU; the pending Federal Award was preferable both to the Wages Boards and to syndicalism. By concentrating the choice as between arbitration and the WIUA, not between craft and the WIUA, Carter and his supporters won the Branch over after the political and industrial struggles of the War years. In that time, Carter had helped expand the Union in Victoria, gained a Federal award and had encouraged the return of the tailors' and tailoresses in NSW and their Union's amalgamation with the PUNSW.

(iii) THE NEW SOUTH WALES UNIONS

The War years brought more apparent disruption to the trade in NSW than in Victoria, whilst dissatisfaction with Wages Boards became

102. A.R. Wallis, 'An Open Letter Re the One Big Union To The Members of the Federated Clothing Trades Union' (n.d.); ANU E138/21/1.

103. Vic Branch, Minutes, 6 October 1918. The number issued suggests that a strict ruling on financial membership was applied.
almost as great as it was in the FCT Branches. At first, however, the
War did not seem likely to change unionists' beliefs that they had
been right to reject the FCT. This was particularly true of the TTU
whose membership rose by over one-third in the first two years of the
war, to 2597 persons of whom 72 per cent were women.104 The expansion
which had been talked about in 1913 was, then, carried through with
some vigour. There was not much concern over the 'freezing' of wages
because most of the TTU's awards were not to expire until 1916.105
Surely the war would be over by then.

What did cause concern was the trade itself. The TTU attempted to
secure some control of the supply of labour through a 'bureau' in the
Union office and some control of production through a Union label.106
If these policies related to perennial industrial problems, then
changes in the labour process demanded new measures. They did not
come forth. Thus when the spread of 'teams' was discussed, it was the
apparent threat to male employment that occupied most attention, not
the question of the work itself. Assistant-Secretary Lazzarini urged
members to accept women's right to work and to concentrate upon
developing appropriate responses to the team system. He saw these
in terms of piece-work schemes as against the weekly-wage favoured by
employers.107 The TTU decided that a label was the best way to secure
whatever conditions it would finally decide upon. To implement the

104. Calculated from TTU, Minutes, 15 January 1917.
105. See NSWIG, Vol.3, 7 May 1913; Vol.5, 4 March 1914.
106. TTU, Minutes, 22 February, 13 March 1915.
107. ibid., 26 April, 10, 26 May 1915.
scheme, the Union began to lobby Labor parliamentarians and prepared for a meeting with Premier Holman. In its first attempt to secure assistance from a State Labor Government the TTU fell flat on its face. Holman refused to see the deputation and, despite a meeting with the Minister for Labour, members were disgusted. On 16 July a motion of no confidence in the Government was carried. Holman's administration had already incurred the wrath of other unionists because of the cessation of Wages Board hearings. The TTU found itself keeping company with unfamiliar friends: railway and labourers' unions were amongst Holman's strongest critics. The critics became more vocal when the NSW Government's opposition to Federal regulation of prices emerged at the ALP's conference in May.

The unwillingness of Labor to defend real wages and to assist in the TTU's industrial struggles was matched by the difficulties unions encountered with unemployment. By the middle of 1915 the order trade was 'dead; some of the shops ... being empty'. This collapse in employment was particularly significant for the predominantly male leadership of the TTU, for they were of and from that section. Thus the Union's growth may have made them uncomfortable: clearly the ready-made trade was providing some of the new unionists.

108. ibid., 21 June, 16 July 1915.


111. The female proportion of the TTU's membership rose from 49.5 per cent in June 1914 to 72.1 per cent in December 1916. This was as much due to enlistment of men as anything else. The Minutes, 17 January 1916, claimed, rather ambiguously, that 370 men left in 1914 'owing to the war'.
The PUNSW was even more directly affected by industrial and political change. Its apparently successful policies were quickly undermined. As in Melbourne, the presser found himself confronted by the new pressing-machines. The PUNSW drew up a special wage claim for machine-pressers. The demand was so high, at £4 10s, that its aim was more likely to make the machine prohibitively expensive than to secure a share in increased output. Nothing came of the claim. There was no further reference to the machine during the War, suggesting that its application was not as widespread as it was in Victoria.

The major concern of pressers, unlike, at first, the TTU's members, was the attitude of the Boards to War-time wages. In October and November 1914, the PUNSW repeatedly inquired about this. The new Award gazetted in May 1915 froze pressers' wages at £3 weekly whilst granting increases to the workers taken on in the PUNSW's 'further organisation' drive and setting wages, for the first time, for brushers, folders and examiners. Since the Award of 1912, prices in Sydney had risen 24.2 per cent.

For the first time since the early 1890s, the Pressers' Union was finding it difficult to defend the material interests of its members. For the first time, NSW's wage fixation machinery appeared

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112. PUNSW, Minutes, 16 March, 11 May 1914.
113. ibid., 26 October, 9, 23 November 1914.
114. NSWIG, Vol.7, 26 May 1915. Brushers, folders and examiners received 50s per week; under-pressers, a 3s rise to 48s. In Victoria, under-pressers received only 36s to pressers' 55s.
115. CYB, No.13, 1920; Price indices 1912: 1124; 1915: 1396.
inadequate. Arguments which had been long familiar in other unions now began to be heard amongst increasingly uncertain pressers because the protection of employment now became difficult. Indeed some pressers had argued that this was the over-riding factor in their present difficulties and that wage demands would entail the risk of jobs being lost to Victoria. There was a timely reminder of this danger with news that a Sydney company had sent 300 railway-contract suits to Melbourne for making up.116 At the same time, Victoria's pressers were beginning a Wage Board claim which would secure them £3 – and parity with NSW. From every side, then, the NSW presser was assailed: wages fell behind prices, employment was unstable, inter-State competition threatened jobs if wages remained higher than Victoria's whilst, if they did not, it could no longer be argued that either the NSW Union or the NSW arbitration system were more effective than the Victorian counterparts. In all ways, then, the PUNSW was being undermined.

The PUNSW's response remained conservative. It continued to reject politics and, with the Cutters' Union, to discuss the further organisation of tailoresses.117 The PUNSW's 'apolitical' position was quite extraordinary. Although one of its members was, until 1918, Secretary of the Labor Council and although a couple more committee-men were active Labor Party members, the Union at no stage had an official position on, or became involved in, any one of the political struggles

116. PUNSW, Minutes, 1 March 1915.
117. Cutters' and Trimmers' Union, Minutes, 23 March 1915.
of the early years of the War. Even the Cutters' Union was moved to criticism of the Holman Government's shelving of the Fair Rent legislation and threats to free speech.118 The PUNSW's options were few: it could hardly be blamed for being little interested in Parliament as a defence. In the industry, the growth of the TTU, in particular its expansion of female membership, restricted an industrial response such as the PUNSW itself trying to become more broadly based.

For Cutters, the PUNSW, and the TTU, the problems of further and closer organisation were intractable. Inter-union hostility did not abate as external difficulties increased. This was particularly clear in relation to the unionisation of women. Thus, many cutters opposed their leadership's agreement that tailoresses would be best to join 'the existing union', the TTU.119 Although the TTU did indeed cover more women than before 1913, its entry fees for women, at 1s 3d, remained much higher than those of the FCT.120 From the records of these Unions, and the PUNSW, women workers appeared as an external 'problem'; and further organisation as a defensive tactic to maintain craft status. Herbert Carter wrote to the PUNSW when Federal unionism was again under consideration in 1915. The FCT was, he believed, the only hope for women workers. He blamed male unionists and the division between their Unions for the 'standing shame' that the stock

118. ibid., 17 November 1914; 9 March 1915.
119. ibid., 23 March 1915.
120. The FCT's rate was 6d. See TTU, Minutes, 24 July 1916 when the fees were changed to bring them into line with those of the FCT.
trade was not yet properly organised. The Tailoresses' Union was now quite dead and the Women Workers' Union, under the Labor Party's Kate Dwyer, was making some advance in the dress-making trade. However, huge numbers of women remained unorganised.

The main impetus to action remained the immediate interests of those already unionised. For both the TTU and the PUNSW these might be defended through the Commonwealth. Union demands for greater Commonwealth control of prices seemed likely to succeed despite the opposition of the NSW Government. This was enough to encourage Lazzarini to urge federation but when, at the end of 1915, these hopes were dashed, the TTU returned to its isolation. Nevertheless, this policy was consistent, for Crombie wrote to Carter that the TTU would 'give all the assistance' it could to the FCT if the States' industrial powers were transferred to the Commonwealth.

Having experienced the vagaries of war-time wage fixation, the PUNSW had no option but to pursue its arbitration commitment in the Commonwealth system. Within a few months of receiving its Award, the Union jettisoned its isolationist position in favour of joining the

121. Correspondence, H. Carter to PUNSW, 20 September 1915.

122. For the Women Workers' Union, about which little is known, see E. Ryan and A. Conlon, op.cit., pp.73-4, 78. For awards, see NSWIAR, 23 February 1915; NSWIC, Vol.13, 5 April, 21 June 1918.

123. TTU, Minutes, 16 December 1915; 17 January 1916; I. Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, pp.76-81.

FCT. The divisions in the trade were confirmed in that very little discussion with the TTU took place. On 30 August 1915, the PUNSW voted to join the FCT. There is some evidence that Secretary Reddy was not as seized with this plan as the majority. Not until the end of the year was the Union formally constituted as the NSW Branch of the FCT. 125

The PUNSW's move made things difficult for the TTU, whose officers no doubt saw themselves as potential Branch leaders, and for the FCT too, because its so-called NSW Branch numbered only about 150 pressers and assorted male workers. The TTU agreed, in principle, to amalgamation in February 1916 but, like most 'in principle' agreements, it did not lead to prompt action. At Federal Council's meetings for 1916, held in March at the Sydney Trades' Hall, these inter-union rivalries were emphasised. The Pressers sat as the NSW Branch whilst the TTU and the Cutters Union sent delegates, on separate days, to discuss amalgamation. 126 The Cutters' Union remained aloof, but there were changes within the TTU, changes in both political and economic outlooks which would push it into the FCT.

The dismay which the Union had felt with the Holman Government and the continued rigidity of the State's wage system saw a revival of the political traditions of the old AJTA. With prices rising, strikes

125. PUNSW, Minutes, 6 December 1916 for the distribution of FCT application forms.

126. FC, Minutes, 3, 4 March 1916.
threatening all forms of arbitration and with both NSW and Commonwealth Labor Governments distancing themselves from the unions, an unlikely alliance of the AWU, the Miners' Union, rail unions and craft unions, formed the 'Industrial Section' in order to assert union authority at the NSW Labor Conference in 1916. The TTU was one of the unions to join the 'Industrialists'. Neither the PUNSW nor the Cutters' Union showed any interest.127

A month after joining the Industrial Section, the TTU was the only one of the three Unions to show any interest in discussions on the OBU. Indeed, Kavanagh as Labor Council Secretary, was opposed to the scheme, working to draw more unions into the Labor Council instead.128

A commitment to Commonwealth Arbitration meant that these political differences between clothing unions were now no bar to co-operation. At precisely this time - the middle of 1916 - the TTU agreed to amalgamation under the FCT.129 The achievement of amalgamation was to be an extraordinarily difficult one though because of the traditional rivalries and present differences.

There were changes in the PUNSW, too. In June 1916 Reddy stood down from the Secretaryship, having become an employer. His deputy was defeated in the subsequent election by W. Retallack. Although

127. I. Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, pp.82-96; TTU, Minutes, 3 July 1916.

128. I. Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, pp.182-3; TTU, Minutes, 18 August 1916; Cutters' and Trimmers' Union, Minutes, 5 September 1916.

129. TTU, Minutes, 19 June 1916.
Retallack did not manage - or noticeably try - to introduce political discussion, he was opposed to two tenets of the old PUNSW - craft unionism itself (he favoured industry unions) and piece-rates (he favoured weekly wages).\textsuperscript{130} In daily policy, the change was evidenced by a commitment to unionising and defending machine-pressers.\textsuperscript{131}

The two Unions had little in common except that they wanted to join the FCT. The Federal Rules were not clear on how Branches were to be organised but Carter was opposed to separate organisations in one State. Federal Council had insisted on amalgamation within NSW.\textsuperscript{132} If the difficulties of achieving this worried the TTU's officers, then the Wages Board provided a well-timed reminder that the Commonwealth Court was a preferable arbitration arena. When the Boards finally resumed, the 'country tailors' were the first to be dealt with. Although they received a 5s rise to give them a wage of £3 5s, the highest in the country, real wages still fell.\textsuperscript{133} In 1917, the order tailors received the same rate. For them, it represented an increase in money terms of 8 per cent on the 1913 wage. In that time the cost-of-living in Sydney had risen by over 19 per cent. In this Award women's weekly rates ranged from £1 11s and £1 14s for trouser and

\textsuperscript{130} PUNSW, Minutes, 19 June 1916; Minutes, 17 March 1917 (piecework); NSW Branch minutes, 9 September 1918 (pro-OBU). W. (Billy) Gibb, an ALP member, was elected President.

\textsuperscript{131} PUNSW, Minutes, 17 July, 14 August 1916.

\textsuperscript{132} This had been consistently stated. See FC, Minutes, 4 September 1907; 3-10 January 1910; 21 February 1913; 3, 4 March 1916.

\textsuperscript{133} NSWIG, Vol.11, 20 October 1916; for prices, see CYR, No.13, 1920.
vest workers to £1 15s and £1 18s for coat-hands.134 The permutations for women were as complex as in Victoria. As against the 1913 wages, the highest paid received the smallest increases (8.6 per cent), the lowest received the largest (24 per cent) and there were significant improvements in the relationship between male and female wage rates. Nevertheless, only one increase matched inflation and the best proportions achieved were only 58.5 per cent of the male wage. Whether these women could expect more justice in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court was not clear (nor was it discussed at meetings).

A subsequent Award for the ready-made trade,135 where 84.4 per cent of workers were women,136 was less ambivalent: journeymen received a rise to £3 7s 6d; female coat hands would only receive £1 9s 6d (43.7 per cent), trouser and vest workers £1 8s (41.5 per cent). Women's control of the trade remained minimal - their apprenticeships (where enforced) were shorter than men's and two apprentices were allowed for each journeywoman. The male rate remained at one apprentice for three tailors. The Board delegates had in fact been instructed to seek a limit of four women to each tailor.137 These craft traditions, although now not enforced by the state, survived the apparent variety of changes in NSW clothing unionism.

134. NSWIG, Vol.11, 2 February 1917. The wage structure under this Board was fairly complex, with wages dependent upon the good's price. The £3 5s was in fact a minimum rate; this should be borne in mind when considering the proportion of female to male wage-rates.

135. ibid., 16 February 1917.

136. NSWSR 1916-17; 767 males, 4152 females.

137. TTU, Minutes, 15 January 1917.
For the majority of the TTU's active membership, then, the Commonwealth Court now seemed attractive and, in 1917, further changes in interpretation of the Act encouraged optimistic analyses of the likelihood of securing an Award. Within NSW, a complex process was played out as the TTU and the PUNSW tried to form up as a Branch. The amalgamation was almost called off. The main stumbling block was just how the Branch would be controlled. That the TTU's leadership was anxious about the implications of further organising the trade is suggested by its ruling of October 1916 that no tailorresses' or machinists' meetings be held without the tailors' Secretary's approval, a curious resolution but one which indicates that some kind of divided Branch structure was envisaged.

Following Carter's intervention, and after some private discussions, the amalgamation was settled. On 6 March 1917, members of the TTU and PUNSW met as the NSW Branch of the FCT. The Cutters' Union's only interest was in its concern that the FCT was 'poaching' cutters. Discussion of amalgamation with the other unions was 'allowed to drop'. The Cutters' Union provides a significant contrast to the FCT unions. Its notion of further organisation was to unionise shirt and mantle cutters. Even this step was opposed by some because 'it might tend to lessen the status of the order trade'.

138. ibid., 30 October 1916.
139. Cutters' and Trimmers' Union, Minutes, 30 January 1917.
140. ibid., 23 October 1917.
141. ibid., 2 November 1915.
Vice-President summarised his reasons for opposing amalgamation by saying that cutters 'would be outvoted by the women in the union'.

Its craft consciousness and sex-exclusivism were stronger even than the old PUNSW's. As the Pressers and the TTU had begun to change, the Cutters' Union had resisted, ignoring conscription issues for some time, opposing the OBU, and rejecting either political or industrial alliances. They broke this rule once - writing to the Foremen Tailors' Association about amalgamation with shop cutters.

Therefore, the NSW clothing unions had to go into the FCT without the best-placed craftsmen and their industrial bargaining power. That this was not seen entirely as a loss is suggested by Carter's attack on them in 1924. He believed they lacked a 'genuine Union conscience', that they were 'under the bosses' thumb' and, as such 'a serious menace' to the FCT. As for their belief in their status, Carter was unimpressed. They were 'novices' who were possessed of a sense of their own importance as a craft far beyond the bounds of reason.

They were also, in 1917, one of the few groups of clothing trades' unionists 'beyond the bounds' of the FCT, which was now organised in all States except Western Australia. Some eighteen months after the PUNSW had become the NSW Branch there was now a broad-based, truly Federated Branch.

142. ibid., 9 May 1916.

143. ibid., 2 May, 5 September, 12 December 1916; 6 March, 10 July 1917.

144. ibid., 11 July 1916.

145. FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924.
The Branch was established with five paid officers: Secretary Crombie and Assistant-Secretary Wilcox, from the TTU and three organisers. W. (Billy) Jones and W. (Bill) Gibb, who had been organising for the PUNSW, retained those positions, as did the TTU's organiser Lazzarini. The pattern mirrored Victoria: one female and four male officers. The Branch committee was more conservative, with only six representatives of whom two were women. The smaller committee partly reflected the new Branch's narrower scope of operations as compared with Victoria. This was to some extent rectified in the next two years. Membership rose from 2597 (72.1 per cent female) at the end of December 1916 to 5650 (79.6 per cent) by the end of 1918.

In the same period employment was falling. By 1918-19 there were only 4642 people in the tailoring trade; clearly the NSW unions had at last reached into the ready-made trade. We may safely assume that most of the recruits would have been stock workers. In both sections, then, union coverage rose from about 26 per cent to about 60 per cent of the total number employed. Without provision for a common rule, workers had to be unionists and their employers cited as respondents for awards to be binding. The huge growth in the Branch - and the FCT generally - testified to workers' faith in the Commonwealth system and was, then, a direct result of arbitration.

146. NSW Branch, Minutes, 6 March 1917. The Victorian Branch did not have five officials until 1919.

147. Calculated from figures given at ibid., 15 January 1917; 27 January 1920.

148. Calculated from ibid and NSWSR. The figures given are only a very rough guide indeed.
The Branch attempted to secure new Boards for some of these workers but most attention was concentrated upon the Federal claim. From the very outset, NSW officials zealously followed up the work of the Federal Council meetings of March 1917. At the end of April, Crombie was instructed by a General Meeting to ask Carter to 'hurry along' with the claim. In June the plea was repeated and other Branches were asked to act promptly. Both major Branches wanted changes in the log of claims, so there was a further delay before the claim could be served on employers.

In the last two years of the war, changes in the industry led to an increasing number of issues for which workers demanded redress. Branch officials were obliged to turn back to the Boards and to collective bargaining to try to achieve this. At the same time, however, there were conflicts shared with other workers who responded in other ways. An attempt to deal with the chart-work problem saw the Branch appeal against the Award - but in vain. Different rates would remain for order and chart work although, members argued, the work was the same. Organiser Gibb argued that soon most order work would be made-up in factories, at chart rates.

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149. NSW Branch, Minutes, 30 March 1917.

150. ibid., 30 April, 5 June 1917. Carter's reaction is not, unfortunately, recorded. However he later reminded NSW delegates of their Branch's earlier attitude. (FC, Minutes, 15 November 1921).

151. NSW Branch, Minutes, 30 July 1917; Vic Branch, Minutes, 30 July 1917.

152. NSW Branch, Minutes, 5 June 1917. See NSWIG, Vol.12, 1 June 1917 for charts.
This setback led the Branch to consider direct discussions with employers. During 1918, the Branch had more success in collective bargaining than through the Boards with a tentative agreement on a 'manufacturer's label' and in August, with considerable increases for costume-makers following a poor Award. Employers had earlier threatened to appeal against the order-trade Board where some women had done rather better than tailoresses under the costume-makers' Award. Whether this was to divide the workers is hard to say - the same organisation, the Retailers' Association, was involved in both cases - but it showed the limits of collective bargaining.

Employers' constant changing of work and payment systems bedevilled unionists with task systems being changed and weekly wage systems sometimes favoured. Tailoresses were especially anxious about the 'speed-up' component of team systems. They held a Special Meeting in order to discuss work loads and methods of payment. If the traditional support for piece-work placed the clothing unions in a difficult position in relation to other unions, then labour process conflicts were a common and unifying theme. Concern in the industry seemed to come to a head in 1918 but these conflicts were, of course, endemic. Their tie with other trades was highlighted by the Victorian Number Two Group's declaration of support for the NSW 'Railway

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153. NSWIG, Vol.13, 22 February 1917; NSW Branch, Minutes, 12 August 1918.
154. NSW Branch, Minutes, 6, 20 May 1918.
155. ibid., 27 April, 15 May, 21, 26 October, 4 November 1918.
Strikers'. Just as the high-handed introduction of time-cards outraged railway engineers, so clothing workers were anxious about changes in their industry. And just as the 'General Strike's' suppression added weight to militancy in the Labor Council, so the NSW Branch became a participant in the conflicts and arguments about unionism.

The second conscription referendum attracted more attention than the first. After a vigorous debate the Branch gave an immediate donation to the anti-conscription campaign, as against some more cautious members who argued for a levy. The OBU question became entangled, as in Victoria, with the Federal claim. Delegates were elected to the Sydney OBU conference in the middle of 1918 despite the opposition of Secretary Crombie and Organiser Gibb. Peter Fallon led the supporters of the OBU, just as he had in 1916. At the end of the year the officials were able to secure Branch endorsement for Management's Committee's defusal of the OBU 'threat'. Members agreed to leave the matter for Federal consideration. When, early in 1919, invitations to the inter-State conference arrived, a compromise was affected. Delegates would be sent but they would be 'observers'. By the time

156. Vic Branch, No.2 Group, Minutes, 28 August 1918.
157. NSW Branch, Minutes, 19 November 1917.
158. ibid., 1, 15 July 1918. See TTU, Minutes, 28 August 1916 for an earlier discussion. Peter Fallon (b 1882) was President, AJTA, 1904; Organiser in the Branch from 1919 and Secretary, 1923-54. He was also a member of the NSW parliament's Upper House 1952-56; Fallon fairly quickly retreated from his OBU position.
159. NSW Branch, Minutes, 16 December 1918.
the next communication was received, the AWU and the ALP had moved against the WIUA. In July a motion to 'ignore' the OBU's scheme was carried.160

The 'competition' between the OBU and the FCT's arbitration campaign was not as explicit as in Victoria. Indeed, the same industrial difficulties and Board set-backs which enlivened the OBU debate encouraged enthusiasm for the Federal log of claims. Hence Crombie was able to tell Management Committee in 1918 that NSW was ready 'to put up a considerable sum of money to fight the case',161 NSW did not dissent from a recommendation that members be levied to support the plaint162 and the commitment was underscored by an insistence that, in negotiations, union representatives should 'be instructed to fight for the whole of the log'.163

Both closer and further organisation were encouraged by the Branch's needs and, perhaps, by the rhetoric of syndicalism, as well as by the prospect of Commonwealth arbitration. In 1919, the Branch approached the Cutters' Union but, once more, no progress was made.164 Towards the end of the year, arrangements were made for the organisation of clothes' dyers and cleaners.165 That arbitration and organisation

161. MC, Minutes, 20 March 1918.
162. ibid., 23 April 1918.
163. NSW Branch, Minutes, 21 October 1918.
164. ibid., 10 June, 10 November 1919.
were clearly related to each other was shown when the Branch drew up demands for the reorganisation of NSW's Clothing Boards as just one Board. There were, then, many ways ahead for the NSW Branch. Some might be frustrated but, as 1919 wore on, the goal which had united the TTU and PUNSW was in sight - an award.

(iv) THE COMMONWEALTH COURT

Although the push for an award was in earnest from March 1917, there were still limits to the claim and delays in its progress. The claim covered only 'Number One Group', that is men's and boys' order and ready-made garments and 'ladies' tailoring'. In the following two-and-a-half years, the further organisation of the Union meant that many members were beyond the Award's scope. Delay also presented difficulties for the representation of those in the Number One Group. Early in 1919 the NSW Branch reported its anxiety that growing numbers of employers were not cited as respondents to the claim. Delays arose because of the difficulty of communication between Branches, because of employers' procrastination and because, although Carter became de facto full-time Federal Secretary, he still had Victorian responsibilities. There was no real Federal office, no guarantee of funding. The FCT remained hamstrung by the 'minimalist' conception of

165. ibid., 23 September 1918; 8, 15 September 1919.
166. ibid., 21 July 1919.
167. A copy of the claim is included with the Award. See 13 CAR 647.
168. NSW Branch, Minutes, 28 January 1919.
its aims - a frequent problem in Federal unions. The process was a difficult one for unionists in another way. They were confronted with legal technicalities, opposed by employers' legal counsel and obliged to enter a world entirely different from the political and union world. Carter 'led' the Union's case and was supported by witnesses from the union's rank-and-file, some men and many women who had to be briefed, who had to take the stand and then face cross-examination.

Before reaching the Arbitration Court, the FCT had to face various employers' claims that there was no dispute, or no inter-State dispute, or that the Union was not entitled to proceed under the Act. Mr Justice Higgins fairly readily accepted that there was a dispute. In April 1919 the case moved to the Court after an 'abortive' compulsory conference. There was a final challenge to the Union's claims for a label, inspection rights and limitations on outwork. A majority of the High Court decided that those issues did constitute an 'industrial dispute'.

169. See J. Merritt, 'The FIA', pp.59, 69; for the ASE, see K.D. Buckley, op.cit., pp.179-80, 247-8. Full-time federal officers were appointed, not without some opposition, in 1916; in the FIA, not until 1939.

170. Counsel was engaged but only for the High Court case. See MC, Minutes, 27 November 1918.

171. ibid., 28-31 May 1918; Commonwealth Arbitration Court, File No.66/1918, pp.7-20.

172. MC, Minutes, 25 November 1918; 13 CAR 647 for hearing dates.

173. 27 CLR 207.
Higgins first decided the basic wage for men and women. The Union claimed a base rate of 65s for men and 40s (61.5 per cent) for women. Higgins awarded the wage as asked for males but gave only 35s (53.8 per cent) as the female rate. The setting of the women's rate encapsulated the confused history of Australian wage-fixation. The Union presented evidence of women's cost-of-living which Higgins duly discussed. Women's needs were assumed to be less than a man's, to be for herself only. In delivering his judgment, Higgins reviewed the awards where women's wages had been set, summarising wage differentials in terms of men and women being 'in competition' for jobs. Where employers were prefer women, wages should be lower than elsewhere. He then fixed 35s without quite saying why that level was appropriate as a resolution of the 'needs' basis and of social practice.

Confusion was exacerbated when, in the course of the hearing, an agreement was reached that women on 'the simplest operations' would be paid 37s, not 35s, because of lost-time in so seasonal an industry. This 2s allowance scarcely covered three weeks in a year - and was to be a stumbling block in later claims for other allowances and holidays. Men received no allowance. The most significant, but not noticed, anomaly was that the only women for whom 35s was now prescribed were final term apprentices. In practice, the female

174. 13 CAR 647 at 692.
175. ibid at 695.
176. ibid., at 700.
minimum was 37s, or 57 per cent of male wages. It could well have been argued that this should be the basis for future adjustments. In fact, 54 per cent was regarded as the precedent.

The setting of the base wage was an apparently haphazard process. Higgins justly regarded the Union's evidence as 'unsatisfactory' and was himself obliged to continue with rough estimates and unscientific precedent. The transcripts\textsuperscript{177} make sorry reading with anecdote piled on hearsay, prejudice on misinformation. The persistent use of the word 'girl', notably in the judgment, was a signal instance. We do not know how many of the women had dependents - any more than we know about men's - but in the sections covered by the Award, approximately three-quarters of the women were over 21 years of age, hardly 'girls'.\textsuperscript{178}

In applying 'secondary wages' (margins for skill), there were the same problems, especially in the setting up of contradictory notions of work value and, in the words of the Act, the interests of 'society as a whole'.\textsuperscript{179} Tailors received 10s above the basic wage, a total of 75s. Only order-cutters, with 90s, approached parity with the Harvester margins of 1907. Women's margins were much inferior to men's. Only coat-hands in order tailoring, with 9s, approached the

\textsuperscript{177} See 'Archer Award', Transcripts, ANU, E138/18/5-6.

\textsuperscript{178} This figure is from Victorian factories and is calculated from statistics in 'Factory Report', 1919, VPP, Second Session, 1920.

\textsuperscript{179} Quoted by Higgins, 13 CAR 647 at 702. For margins, see 699-705.
Harvester standard. The exceptions to this were the craft bastions of cutting and pressing where equal pay was awarded. This followed the practice of most State Boards. In addition to standard practice, some coats would be paid at equal rates. This defensive ploy by the craftsmen was described by Higgins as 'a last stand'. So it was. Although Higgins was manifestly suspicious of claims made for the 'mystery' of coat-making, he granted the equal pay rate. His reasons were, quite clearly, to protect men's employment on the common (but never examined) assumption that, at equal rates, employers would prefer men to women.

In other ways, the Arbitration Court was kinder to women. Although margins were inadequate, rates rose by up to 35 per cent on State Wage Board levels. In general the proportion of women's to men's wages rose to about 50 per cent. The major achievement of the Award was its reduction in working hours from 48 to 44. After a survey of women's working conditions, reports on overseas practice and considerations of 'national efficiency' Higgins decided on the

180. ibid., at 701.

181. ibid., at 702, for 'the mystic grace of the body coat' as a product 'of this masculine gift' for shaping coats. Higgins rather ironic responses suggest that the advocates had learned quickly how to find a 'usable' argument to allow the Court to help them.

182. Comparisons are difficult because the different States and the Commonwealth Court used different categories and had different ratios between order and ready-made work. Perhaps the most useful comparison would be trouser and vest-work, where the Award rate was 21 per cent higher than Victoria's, 32 per cent above NSW. Compared with prices since the State Awards (1916-17) women's rates improved.
reduction for women. Men now benefited from the number of women in
the industry. Their hours were also reduced. The Union argued that
technological change rendered the reduction as possible as it was
desirable. In future cases, this kind of argument would be more
forceful. For now we may note that even one of the critics of
arbitration, Alf Wallis, took an active part in proceedings. He
argued that changes in the labour process might be encouraged in order
to allow for workers to work shorter hours.183

Other benefits of the Award flowed to the FCT itself. The
organisation received some powers within the framework of compulsory
arbitration. It was to police the Award; Union officials were given
access to factories to check on reported breaches of the Award, and a
permit system designed to control outwork was introduced. An
outstanding success was that, unlike the NSW Boards and Court, Higgins
agreed with the Union's claim that order and chart work should be done
at the same rate.

Carter, for obvious reasons, was quick to declare the Award a
triumph. He believed that 'the only weakness of the whole thing was
our modesty'.184 Its impact on the trade may, however, be
questioned. Average wages in Victoria in 1919 were well above the

183. Transcripts, E138/18/5. See, for a clear review of this
position, ACATU, Vic Branch, A Shorter Working Week for the
Clothing Trades Workers (1935). I am indebted to Raelene Frances
for drawing my attention to the ANU material.

Board rates in clothing at 42s 4d (wage-hands) and 44s 3d (piece-workers). Only coat rates in the Award outstripped these levels. By the same token, the very substantial increases on Board wages might be significant in less propitious times. For workers, the hours cut was the major breakthrough. Carter was keen to go on with arbitration and establish an Award for Number Two Group where wages remained much lower. Such a move might also dampen any remaining ardour for the OBU. Carter was confident that the next Award would be better, that arbitration was the way ahead. Significantly, then, the next strike in Melbourne was over delays in arbitration, not in opposition to it. Members seemed to agree with Carter that 'the time has not yet arrived for our Organization to turn down Arbitration'.

(v) SUMMARY

The FCT's War-time history is of special note because the Union moved closer and closer to its stated aim of securing a Federal award at precisely the time at which challenges to arbitration were coming to a head. By emphasising the choice between forms of arbitration it might

185. 'Factory Report', 1919, VPP, Second Session, 1920. A difficulty with these statistics is that they do not differentiate between categories of work. The average wage, then, must be treated with caution. The same source puts dressmaking wages at just 29s, and the adult female average at 37s 8d.

186. FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1920; Minutes, 9-12 March 1920.

187. Vic Branch, Minutes, 22 October, 17 November, 1, 15 December 1919.

188. FC, 1920, Carter's Report.
be suggested that the Commonwealth system acted as a kind of safety
valve as pressure on the State systems mounted. To summarise the
Union's history in these years is a difficult task for choices were
not clear cut, paths were not linear. The Union developed in a
complex framework where different claims were made by State and
Federal Labor Parties, the old socialist parties and the new WIUA,
different arbitration systems and different types of union. The
Union's role in politics and the consciousness of its members were
similarly complex. In Victoria, engagement by the Branch did not
follow the path that seemed to be clear from 1909 to 1914 when the
popularity of Labor and socialism had risen. Rather, the ALP's
failure in that State led to two responses: a sole reliance on
arbitration and the growth of a new politics or, rather, a militant
anti-political unionism in the IWW. This was a rapid development from
the protectionist/fair employer traditions. In NSW there was, for a
time, a renewal of earlier political traditions but this seemed
unlikely to endure. A narrow economist motivation brought the NSW
unions into the FCT. It is noteworthy that this happened after the
disintegration of the NSW Labor Government.

In the factories, clothing workers' dilemmas were encapsulated at the
CGCF where it seemed as if anti-unionism was policy. The machine was
pitted against the pressers, the division of labour against the
tailoresses, and divide-and-rule and an employer-sponsored association
against the cutters. All encountered conflicts about work-loads,
speed-up, methods of payment and, in short, control. They attempted
to resolve these problems through direct action.
For others, most especially, it seems, outside Victoria, the Commonwealth Court's award loomed as the great elixir. Yet here, most of all, were intense contradictions; contradictions that would threaten to divide the Union again from 1919. In seeking to win control in the trade, the Union had turned to the state. In entering the arbitration arena, even the 'anti-arbitrationists' were obliged to speak a new language. The fair employer relationship was institutionalised, the right of employers to manage was guaranteed. In return, the Union structure received formal encouragement and some male crafts were preserved. Most workers remained outside the Award's domain. Those under it had received a shorter working week but other issues remained untouched. Herein lay a final contradiction for there were indications that women were themselves to raise issues about their place in the trade, about union structures and radical politics. This had been quietly happening since 1916 and had not abated with the coming of international peace and industrial agreement.