Articles of agreement: the Seamen’s Union of Australia, 1904-1943 a study of antagonised labour

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ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT:
THE SEAMEN'S UNION OF AUSTRALIA, 1904-1943;
A STUDY OF ANTAGONISED LABOUR.

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by

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I HEREBY CERTIFY that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Donald Fraser
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the faulty relationship between leader and led which inhibited the establishment of democratic process within the Seamen's Union of Australasia, under successive leaders, in the period from 1918 to 1943. In arguing that the leaders of the union during that time allowed the pursuit of their particular ideological agendas to supplant the interests of the union's membership, it has been necessary to lay stress upon the peculiarity of the maritime workplace. This was a workplace that was not only occupied but inhabited by the merchant seaman. It is contended here that the special circumstances of the maritime workplace were such as to render seamen vulnerable to exploitation not only at the hands of their employers but also at the hands of their industrial leaders.

It is shown here that for the membership of the Seamen's Union of Australasia the period 1918-1943 was one of division and convulsion. None of the leaders that this work considers in historical succession was able to rectify the prevailing situation, regardless of their widely varying ideological agendas that ranged from utopian socialism through anarchistic individualism to realpolitik. It is argued that as a consequence of the breakdown of social polity within their industrial association, Australian merchant seamen were subjected to manipulation by forces that were beyond their power to control. Alienated from a landward society that was little aware of their special circumstances and that was generally unsympathetic, the seamen became an antagonised occupational group. Thus, by 1943, they were readily available for deployment in support of an ideology that was not of their making.

This thesis necessitates consideration not only of the physical circumstances but of the psychological consequences of seafaring in the development of an attitude and
subsequent behavioural patterns within the historical period under examination. It has also been necessary to take a number of contextual themes into consideration. Thus, shipping being crucial to the economic viability of the nation, maritime industrial relations routinely involved recourse to the coercive power of the state. And, since it was vital for Britain’s economic interest to restrict competition in the operation of the liner link between the United Kingdom and Australasia, British ‘shipping nationalism’ had a dire effect upon the crewing of Australian ships. Then there is the matter of the widening gap between the levels of skill reserved for and exercised by ships’ deck and engineer officers and those of the seamen, as recognised in the anachronistically punitive disciplinary clauses of the Navigation Act. Yet another theme is the internationalism of seamen which while making them conscious of their advantages in comparison to other national seamen, also rendered them apprehensive of disadvantage. Australian seamen feared regression to the conditions endured by British national seamen. Worse still was their fear of supersession by those ‘superexploited’ Asian, African, and Indian seamen who under the terms of Asian articles sailed in many ships of Great Britain’s merchant fleet, a situation that gave point to the factional power struggles which occurred within the body of the union.
DEDICATION.

I dedicate this study to the merchant seamen with whom, in former days, I sailed in order to earn a living.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

This work would have foundered without the supervision of Associate Professor Andrew Wells and Dr Ben Madison of the University of Wollongong. I am grateful to them for both their encouragement and their practical advice. I am also grateful to Emeritus Professor Jim Hagan for his advice early in the project and for steering me into the archives of the University of Wollongong, where I found much of value.

Unfailing courtesy was shown me by the librarians and archivists of the University of Wollongong, the Mitchell Wing of the State Library of New South Wales, the National Library in Canberra, and the Australian Archives in Mitchell ACT - for which I thank them. I am especially indebted to Michael Saclier and Emma Jolley of the Noel Butlin Centre at the Australian National University, custodians of a treasure-trove that now sadly is under threat.

And finally, I thank my wife and children for their forbearance during my absence on this prolonged voyage.
ABBREVIATIONS.

AA
Australian Archives, Canberra.

AB
Able-seaman.

ABL
Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour. ANU.

ACL
Australian Commonwealth Line of Steamers.

ADB
Australian Dictionary of Biography.

AGM
Annual General Meeting.

AIMPE
Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers.

AMWU
Amalgamated Marine Workers' Union.

ASU
Australian Seamen's Union.

AUSN
Australian United Steam Navigation Company.

BHP
Broken Hill Proprietary Company.

BISN
British India Steam Navigation Company.

BSU
British Seafarers' Union.

CAR
Commonwealth Arbitration Reports.

CC
Central Committee
(Communist Party of Australia).

CE
Central Executive
(Communist Party of Australia).

CGL
Commonwealth Government Line.

CIB
Commonwealth Investigation Branch.

CoM
Committee of Management.

CPA
Communist Party of Australia.

CPD
Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates.

CPP
Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers.

CPSU
Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

CPUSA
Communist Part of the United States of America.

CSOA
Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association.

ECCI
Executive Committee Communist International.

FIA
Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia.

FRO
Federal Returning Officer (Seamen's Union of Australia).

FSUA
Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia.

IWW
Industrial Workers of the World.

LSA
Licensed Seamen's Association.
MHR
Member of the House of Representatives.

MIC
Maritime Industry Commission.

ML
Mitchell Wing, State Library of New South Wales.

MMM
Militant Minority Movement.

MM
Minority Movement (of the MMM).

MMO
Mercantile Marine Office.

MP
Member of Parliament.

MSG
Merchant Service Guild.

MTC
Maritime Transport Council.

MWIU
Maritime Workers Industrial Union.

NLA
National Library of Australia, Canberra.

NSFU
National Sailors' and Firemen's Union.

NSW
New South Wales.

NUS
National Union of Seamen.

NZ
New Zealand.

NZSU
Seamen's Union of New Zealand.

OS
Ordinary Seaman.

P&O
Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company.

PB
Political Bureau (Communist Party of Australia).

PDHC
Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons.

RAAF
Royal Australian Air Force.

RILU
Red International of Labour Unions.

SA
South Australia.

SJ
The Seamen's Journal.

SMH
The Sydney Morning Herald.

SUA
Seamen's Union of Australasia.

TUC
Trades Union Congress.

WA
Western Australia.

WUA
University of Wollongong Archives.
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INTRODUCTION.

John Masefield sang romantically of the seafarer's "vagrant gypsy life". Richard Henry Dana, a pioneer advocate of seafarers' rights, wrote passionately of "obtaining justice and satisfaction for these poor men." Joseph Conrad, who as a master mariner had represented the shipowners' interest, spoke paternalistically of seamen. They were, he said: "Men hard to manage, but easy to inspire; voiceless men but men enough to scorn in their hearts the sentimental voices that bewailed the hardness of their fate." He mourned the passing of the pre-industrial sailing ship seamen who, no matter how exploited, "were strong and mute... effaced, bowed and enduring." Theirs were "simple hearts - ignorant hearts that know nothing of life, and beat undisturbed by envy or greed." But when it came to the de-skilled steamship seamen of the industrial age with their new sense of alienation, Conrad's tone became one of contempt. This new breed was "not our descendant, but only our successor." They were "the grown-up children of the discontented earth. They are less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps...

1Masefield, Sea-Fever.
2Dana, Two Years Before the Mast, p.100.
3Conrad, Nigger of the Narcissus, p.30.
4ibid.
5ibid, p.36.
6Skill is a recurrent theme within this thesis. Initially, it might be noted here that Bullen, who was contemporary with Conrad, described the steam-ship AB in 1900 as "...really only an unskilled labourer." Bullen, who had emerged from before the mast to attain chief officer rank in both sailing and steam ships commented that "...no skipper of a sailing ship dare take steamboat men, unless he has absolute proof that they know the work on board a sailing vessel." A few months in a steamship, he concluded, "rusts a sailor." And, "...what is wanted in a steamer is only a burly labourer who is able to steer - that is, as long as all goes well." Bullen, Men of the Merchant Service, pp.258, 262, 277. Mr Justice Higgins referred selectively to page 259 of Bullen's book in handing down his steamship seamen's award of 1911. 5CAR160-173. See also, Higgins Judgment 1911, A432/86 29/3433 PT2, p.11, AA. Higgins quoted Bullen's statement that "...an AB properly so called, is a skilled mechanic with great abilities". In fact, Bullen had been referring to the capability of an AB who had learned his duties in a sailing ship and had gone on to say that "... I must admit that the class of AB which is capable of answering to such a description as this is growing yearly smaller and smaller. That, of course, is the fault of steam... they are not wanted in steamships and so the supply dwindles with the demand." Bullen, op cit, p.259-260. The maritime historian, Sager, sees maritime legislation of the later 19th century as a consequence of a deteriorating labour force. Thus, Sager, Seafaring Labour 1820-1914, p.103.

There was one set of solutions for masters and officers, another for deckhands. The solution for masters and officers was examination and certification; for deckhands, enforcement of discipline by embedding punishment in the contractual relationship between employer and employee.

7Conrad, Mirror of the Sea, p.73.
also less believing; and if they had learned to speak they have also learned how to
whine." And who better to represent these 'whiners' than Donkin, the malingerer, "who
never did a decent day's work in his life, [and now] no doubt earns his living by
discoursing with filthy eloquence upon the right of labour to live."9

There has been sufficient discourse since, as Trainor has pointed out, to achieve a
"clear location of maritime labour in the wider historiography of the labour movement,"10
at least in the case of Australia, New Zealand and Britain. That the maritime workplace
has influenced the labour movement is clearly evident. As agents in that historical
process, however, the part played by seamen is less evident. Thus Rediker has observed
that though the domains of social, economic, working-class and maritime history have
found connection in the lives of merchant seamen, it yet remains to give effect to that
connection as an explanation of historical change. He sees need to "carry maritime history
into the mainstream of modern historical analysis."11 But how is it to be done? Sager,
too, in identifying maritime history as "a study of historical conjunctures in which
landward society interacts with the sea"12 considers it self-evident, at least to labour
historians, that such a study must be flawed "if events at sea are abstracted from their
landward context."13

In all humility this thesis, which involves an examination of the struggle for
power within an Australian maritime trade union, does not aspire to bridge that great
divide which lies between the concerns of 'esoteric' maritime and mainstream history.14

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8Conrad, Nigger of the Narcissus, p 30.
9ibid, p 174.
10Trainor, 'The Historians and Maritime Labour,' Broeze, Research in Maritime History No.9, p.294.
p.337. A significant proportion of the historiography of modern Australian and New Zealand maritime
labour must be considered in terms of apologetics rather than historical analysis. In that category I would
include commissioned histories, which must inevitably defend the interests of those commissioning them,
such as those of Bollinger, Against the Wind; Broomham, Steady Revolutions; Buckley &
Klugman, The History of Burns Philp, Fitzpatrick & Cahill, The Seamen's Union of Australia;
McKellar, The AUSN Story; Page, Fitted for the Voyage; and Riley, The Iron Ships. Economic histories
of the shipping industry such as Bach's, A Maritime History of Australia, and Burley's, British Shipping
and Australia, give only passing if disparaging attention to maritime labour.
12Sager, op cit, p.10.
13ibid.
14Broeze, 'Introduction', Broeze, op cit, p.xviii.
Rather, it attempts to heave a line across the watery gap between ship and shore preparatory to coming alongside. While stimulated by the need to link seaward and landward events in a wider appreciation of the maritime worker at a specific moment in the historical process, this work also responds to the recommendation of Richard Price that since the struggle for power is an important feature of trade union organisation, "it would be a real gain for the internal history of trade unionism to be written from this perspective." This thesis attempts to provide a realistic interpretation of what happened within the seamen's union, and it has been largely constructed from the union's existent archival records and from other primary source material that is directly relevant to those happenings. The availability of such evidence, rather than conjecture, has determined the scope of the study. An examination such as this, however, involves more than compiling a record of competition between discrete interest groups within a coherent organisation. This is an historical investigation of how leadership authority was constructed and maintained within the confines of a peculiar industrial organisation. Peculiar, in that while its professional leadership was at all times located within the mundane environment of the labour movement 'shoreside' it was, to borrow Johnson's phrase, "uncoupled from the lifeworlds" of its membership. For each working member of this union was a mariner and as such "a man of distances and distancing".

In the period considered here, when not signed on a ship's articles a seaman was unemployed. Unless he had ready access to an alternative means of sustenance, his time ashore was necessarily of limited duration. Consequently there was a certain inexorability in the routine of seafaring. Ashore, he was likely to experience a sense of transience and of alienation, for the seaman who had always just arrived or whose departure was imminent was never really part of shoreside society. Not for him the satisfactions of the

17 Mollat du Jourdan, Europe and the Sea, p.177.
intimate community life of the coal-miner with its network of familial relationships and its measured rhythmic alternation of work and domesticity.\textsuperscript{18}

It might be argued that the itinerant Australian rural worker, the shearer in particular, led a life similar to that of the seaman. Certainly the minimal standard of accommodation commonly provided by pastoralists for the shearers they employed is reminiscent of conditions endured by seamen. While pastoralist and shipowner were equally indifferent to the health, comfort and convenience of their employees there is similarity, too, in the strenuous nature of both shearing and seafaring and in the preponderance of young men engaged in both occupations.\textsuperscript{19} Just as onerous Masters and Servants legislation formed the precedent upon which the terms of shearing contracts were enforced by the state, so the terms of employment set out in the articles of agreement between masters and seamen were enforced by means of Australian legislation based upon the no-less onerous British Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, which was itself a compilation of earlier British legislation. And then there was the sense of fraternity common to both occupational groups, a sub-culture within the work environment, a sharing of grievances largely by word of mouth.\textsuperscript{20}

Shearing was a seasonal occupation in which men were engaged on a part-time basis that provided the relief of a regular alternation of activities. That relief was denied to the seaman who, as Mr Justice Higgins acknowledged in his judgment of 1911, were subject to a "general and unavoidable exile."\textsuperscript{21} Certainly the seaman could never lay claim to the independent status of many shearers whose social status as small-holders rendered their class position ambivalent. Then, too, as Merritt has described it shearing involved piece-work and as such attracted workers intent upon maximising their earnings in the limited time available. The shearer's occupation then, unlike that of the seaman, was by

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\textsuperscript{19}Merritt, \textit{Making of the AWU}, pp.64-72. Also see Sager, \textit{op cit}, p.254.

\textsuperscript{20}Merritt, \textit{op cit}, p.100.

\textsuperscript{21}SCAR161.
nature competitive. Earning power, reputation, and self-esteem were dependent upon an individualistic capacity to out-perform.\textsuperscript{22} However, in any comparison drawn between the shearer and the seaman, the matter of identification is decisive. A land-bound Australian society readily identifies with the shearer - whether as a figure of reality or myth. Perceived as a symbol of the nation's egalitarian ethos and material well-being, the shearer retains his place within Australian popular culture. Not so the seaman. In an island continent, which has always been dependent upon the link provided by shipping for its economic survival, few Australians know anything of the merchant seaman and fewer still would care to identify with this alienated, even pariah-like, figure.

The seaman, in fact, is more an international than a national figure. Thus both Sager, in Canada, and Nelson, in the United States, observe that a seaman might well have more in common with the seamen of other nations than with his fellow countrymen. And as Sager also reminds us, the transnational influences to which the seaman was particularly vulnerable were often baneful.\textsuperscript{23} In that context, the British economic motive, that was fundamental to Brian Fitzpatrick's thesis and that has been explored more recently by economic historians such as Noel Butlin, Andrew Wells, and Luke Trainor must be taken into consideration. Throughout the period considered in this work, a period which Wells sees as one in which Australia laboured under an unstable economic and political regime,\textsuperscript{24} Australian merchant ships were identified in law as British. A commission of inquiry into Australian maritime legislation as late as 1976 reported that Australia did not possess its own exclusively national registry of ships. Ships were registered in Australia by Australian customs officers acting as agents of the British Government and since the Commonwealth Navigation Act contained no provisions for registration of ships exclusively in Australia's name, all ships that were registered in Australia were duly included in the British registry. Lack of an exclusively Australian register for Australian ships was considered by the commission to be not only a matter of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Merritt, \textit{op cit}, pp.82-83.}
\footnote{Sager, \textit{op cit}, p.11 And, Nelson, \textit{Workers on the Waterfront}, p.2.}
\footnote{Wells, \textit{Constructing Capitalism}, p.166.}
\end{footnotes}
inconvenience when dealing with other countries, but detrimental to Australia's national prestige. While the Commonwealth Navigation Act provided "a corner post in the whole structure of maritime operations" and "a basis for the work and discipline of the men onboard the ship," in so doing it rendered Australia dependent upon British shipping legislation and "in many respects... still reflects British attitudes at the end of the nineteenth century."25

Burnett has concluded that, in the period 1820-1920, work for the unskilled and semi-skilled at least, though hard, "was a means to an end, not an end in itself". Even if that end was simply survival, there was life to be lived outside the factory gate. "Work was not a central, dominating influence."26 But for the seaman on articles it was, since both his working time and his leisure time were spent within 'the factory gate.' There, he took his place at the bottom of a hierarchical social structure and was subjected to a particularly intrusive, restrictive and unrelenting code of discipline. Whether finding its precedent consciously or not in Dr Johnson's dictum,27 it has been both affirmed and denied that, like a prison, a ship may be categorised as a 'total institution' in which "all aspects of life are tightly controlled and scheduled by a central authority operating through a body of officials in order to fulfil the official aim of the institution."28 Certainly the seaman aboard his ship was restricted in all aspects of his life, as is the prisoner in gaol. He was confined within a 'territory' for long periods with a group of people not of his choosing among whom he must spend both his working hours and his periods of recreation. And the environment, at least during the period of this thesis, was unrelievably masculine. Differentiation between prison and shipboard life might be said to depend upon whether the individual's submission to his incarceration was or was not

26 Burnett, op cit, p.15.
27 "Why, sir, no man will be a sailor, who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for, being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned." Boswell, Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, p.119.
voluntary. But then, depending upon the economic circumstances of the time, the degree of voluntarism involved when a seaman signed articles might well be minimal.

In investigating "the unromantic story of these seafaring workers"29 it is necessary to take into consideration what is known of the process of social-character development of merchant seamen as they have adapted to the cultural demands of life and work within isolated shipboard communities. And here there is opportunity to respond to Hobsbawm's recommendation that the historian should investigate "the internal logical cohesion of systems of thought and behaviour which fit in with the way in which people live in society in their particular class and in their particular situation of the class struggle."30

In such communities, according to Fricke, "the relationships derived from working and living with others, from engaging in interdependent activities, are social relationships, and form the basis for the development of an occupational community."31 But within the integral "common living" of the shipboard community there existed a number of antagonistic occupational associations each of which was engaged in pursuit of its own interest.32 Throughout the period examined by this thesis, deck and engine room ratings formed the base of the ship's social pyramid so that their association within the shipboard community might perhaps be said to have conformed to Lockwood's model of 'proletarian traditionalism' in which:

(a) the conception of social classes was viewed in dichotomous terms and as based on marked disparities of power; (b) career advancement was seen as either pointless or reprehensible; and (c) the typical orientation to work was solidaristic. In this last respect, then, relationships with superiors were defined as involving conflicts of interest; solidarity with workmates was valued and union organisation was seen as strength; work, while having an economic meaning, was viewed as a group activity and hence economic returns were at times sacrificed for solidarity and conformity with group norms; and ego involvement in work remained strong and was important

29Sager, op cit, p.11
31Fricke, 'Seafarer and Community', in Fricke Seafarer and Community, p.1.
for the satisfaction of workers' expressive and affective as well as instrumental 'needs'.

According to that model a seaman's sense of identity was based upon his connection with his occupational group, in which case the more the seaman was dependent upon the strength that lay in unity, the weaker as an individual he must become. But, within his unusual occupational environment, the seaman did not entirely conform to such a convenient frame of reference. A unique attribute of seafaring was that seamen who, unlike their officers, were casual workers employed by the industry rather than long service company employees tended to exercise a degree of independence by moving from ship to ship regardless of company ownership. Thus Robert Shore, an able seaman [AB] from the British ship Themistocles in Sydney in October 1925, stated: "I am a man who does not stay in a ship too long. I generally do one voyage in a ship and then change over." Lane found in the 1940s that other than among senior officers, and occasionally among such privileged ratings as chief stewards and bosuns, loyalty to a particular ship was unusual among merchant seamen. In fact, it was looked upon askance by the majority who greatly valued their 'independence'. Nelson considers that the seamen's "fabled 'independence" was at times manifested in a tendency to rebellion and militancy. At other times, however, it would be demonstrated as an "anarchic individualism" that would induce seamen to leave a ship rather than seek amelioration of conditions by means of remedial industrial action. An excessively high turn-over of seamen in an individual ship might result and this has been identified by sociologists as the root cause of the seaman's difficulty in constructing "significant long-term work-situated primary relationships." But, in fact, the seaman's freedom to leave one ship upon completion of a voyage and to choose another at random (though only realisable in

33Lockwood, 'Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society', cited in Poole, op cit, p.211
34Fromm, Sane Society, p.69.
35Transcript of Evidence Walsh/Johnson Deportation Board, Vol.4, p.886. A467/1 SF12/4 B32. AA.
36Lane, Seamen's War, p.71.
37Nelson, op cit, p.32
38ibid, p.33.
times of full employment) was also his defensive mechanism against the insidious effects of prolonged shipboard confinement.

Though not readily admitted by seafarers, prolonged confinement within the shipboard environment could result in the seafarer becoming institutionalised. Sociological investigation has revealed that the institutionalised seafarer, regardless of rank, might well take on particular personality traits. Wall categorised these as: sexuality, verbal aggression, adventurism, initiative and authoritarianism and related them directly to the exclusively masculine environment aboard ship. Moreby, in a closer examination of the personality characteristics of the institutionalised seafarer, found that they became accentuated and were significantly different from those exhibited by 'shoreside' society. He provides a check-list of such characteristics, as follows:

Lack of choice; territoriality; superficiality of personal contacts; lack of personal knick-knacks; identification and labelling by work roles; emotional undernourishment; rejection of the sick as causing work overload on others; believed infallibility of decisions; greater tolerance of views; behavioural conformity; tendency to 'infantilize subordinates'; temporary ganging against outsiders; fantasy; avoidance of personal responsibility; irreversible nature of decisions; lower members seen as irresponsible and incompetent (and, in some respects, systematically abused).

Given the consistently stressful nature of the seafaring environment, there is no reason to suppose that such psychological traits were any less apparent during the period of this thesis. And then Nolan found that the institutional environment of the ship was both supportive and constraining. It was an environment, in which the seaman's immediate needs were supplied and his decisions and choices limited. Inevitably it encouraged a degree of dependence. Such dependence Nolan saw as limiting the seaman's "social awareness and maturation." But how could 'anarchic individualism' co-exist with a sense of dependence and why should such opposing traits be characteristic of the same workplace? At one moment solidaristic at another schismatic, the seaman would seem a

41Moreby, 'The Human Element in Shipping', cited in Poole, op cit, p.209.
42Nolan, 'A Possible Perspective', in Fricke, op cit, p.94.
contradictory if not an irrational figure and such ambiguity must render him incomprehensible to the land-bound majority, at least until we consider the nature of his workplace. Then we are reminded by Mollat du Jourdan that the environment within which the seaman has his being, the workplace which informs his consciousness, is itself ambiguous. Simultaneously a source of life and of death, the sea is both beneficent and maleficent while as a geographical reality it both joins and separates. Little wonder then that the desire for some form of certainty imposes itself upon the restless few who sojourn upon the sea.

An investigation carried out among British merchant seamen in the early 1970s revealed strikingly uncompromising attitudes that would no doubt have been as firmly entrenched among that previous generation who play an active role during the period of this thesis. Many seamen experienced difficulty in 'getting on' with people ashore, but of all the categories of seamen tested it was found that deck officers experienced most difficulty in social intercourse ashore. A poll showed that of a number of deck officers sampled only 19 per cent had experience of shoreside employment, whereas of the engineer officers sampled, 75 per cent had previously worked ashore. The conclusion drawn was that:

Deck officers are likely to have been socialised into the shipboard life more rigorously and systematically and at an earlier age than other seamen and so might be seen to experience the deprivation of a total institution to a greater degree than other seamen.

A sociological analysis carried out in 1978 by Wall supported that conclusion. A group of British merchant ships' officers sampled whilst ashore studying for certificates of

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43 Describing the maritime workplace of 1900, Bullen observed that the seaman "...lives in a little world of his own". Invisible to people ashore, he was ignorant of shore-ways, and his opportunities to explain himself to shore people were limited. And then:

...one peculiarity I have often noticed among sailors is their preternatural suspicion, allied to a blind trustfulness - two opposing qualities meeting. Only, with the perversity of poor human nature, they exercise suspicion where they should be trustful, and confidence where they should be most cautious.

Bullen, op cit, p.256.

44 Jourdan, op cit, p.192.

45 Nolan, op cit.
competence at various nautical training establishments displayed personality factors markedly different from the norm. Those differences, Wall reported:

would appear to be developed during the period spent at sea, since those officers who joined the service at later stages in life, for example direct-entry engineer officers, tend to have personalities nearer to those of the shoreside population; whereas those who have served at sea since an early age, deck officers for example, tend to have larger differences between themselves and the shoreside population.\(^{46}\)

Significantly, it was from deck officers such as these that, on the basis of seniority, future chief officers and ships’ masters and the marine superintendents of shipping companies would be promoted. Admittedly these were British officers, but in the period under consideration in this thesis training facilities for aspirants to a sea-going career were extremely limited in Australia so that many officers in Australian merchant ships were of British origin.\(^{47}\) Initially, these officers would have gone to sea as teenage cadets or apprentices fresh from school or training college. When sampled, still early in their careers, they were already showing the effects of institutionalisation by an environment in which "the social reality of the ship is seen in terms of relatively few fixed categories, in which considerations of formal rank and status are prominent."\(^{48}\) They were, as Sager has described them, inheritors of "British traditions of subordination and superordination."\(^{49}\)

The professional training undertaken by ships’ officers in obtaining their certificates of competence rendered them technically expert in matters relating to the safe navigation and propulsion of the ship and the efficient handling of its cargo. Effectively, they were trained to look after the shipowner’s material interest, but they were not formally instructed in the development of shipboard morale. An individual officer, particularly a ship's master or chief engineer, might impress his personality for good or ill upon the seamen aboard a particular ship, but communication between officer and rating

\(^{46}\)Wall, *op cit*, p.171.
\(^{47}\)Section 22 of the Navigation Act 1912 states: "Any master's or officer's certificate recognised by the Board of Trade of the United Kingdom shall be recognised for the purposes of this Act."
\(^{48}\)Nolan, ‘A Possible Perspective’, in Fricke, *op cit*, p.94.
\(^{49}\)Sager, *op cit*, p.108.
was usually limited to matters immediately relevant to the performance of work tasks.\textsuperscript{50} Whether on watch or off, as Lane has remarked, no emphasis was placed by ships' officers upon development of an \textit{esprit de corps}. A common sense of unity and purpose cemented in the shared experiences of danger and discomfort, such as is fundamental to the combat efficiency of warships, was lacking.\textsuperscript{51} While the naval concept of a 'ship's company' was foreign to the merchant seafarer, the social structure of the ship was no less hierarchical than that of a warship. But within that structure there was little or no precedent for any sense of mutual obligation between the merchant ship's master, his officers and the crew members. The relationship, while conceding certain basic rights to the seaman, was essentially one that protected the material interests of the shipowner. It was a commercial relationship established in law and backed by the coercive power of the state - the ship's Articles of Agreement.\textsuperscript{52} Merchant seafarers routinely went to sea in order to earn a living. Any altruistic appeals to a higher sense of moral 'duty' on the part of those officers who were seen by the ratings to represent the economic interests of the shipowner would have been greeted, at least in time of peace, with profound scepticism, if not with resentment.

As Lane has pointed out, the term 'crew' was in fact largely inappropriate to a merchant ship. Departments not only worked separately but also lived and took their meals apart and would oppose any attempt at integration. Rights and privileges, which were the sanctions of skill and formed the structure of authority aboard a merchant ship in the period under discussion, were jealously guarded. This was so not only across the gulf of rank (as borrowed from naval usage) and company identification that separated officer and rating, but also in order to preserve interdepartmental craft divisions and their associated identification within the social stratification of the ship.\textsuperscript{53} Thus deck officers as a caste would see themselves as socially superior to engineer officers who could never

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Lane, op cit}, pp.33-35.
\textsuperscript{51}\textit{ibid}, p.70.
\textsuperscript{52}\textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{53}\textit{ibid}. Also \textit{Poole, op cit}, p.214.
aspire to a command and whose origins lay in proletarian apprenticeship in heavy engineering ashore.\textsuperscript{54} Deck ratings, meantime, were inclined to condescend to engineroom ratings and members of both those departments looked askance upon stewards as a subservient race-apart. And this situation was exacerbated by the perceived need to maintain occupational loyalty and cohesion in the face of the inexorable process of de-skilling inherent in a developing marine technology\textsuperscript{55} which must lead to reductions in manning levels in accordance with Hobsbawm's 'iron logic of mechanisation'.\textsuperscript{56}

And then there was the sea itself. Experiences of seafaring varied not only with shipboard role but also with the trade in which the ship was engaged. Perhaps the most arduous experience of seafaring is that of distant-water trawlermen in high latitudes of the northern hemisphere. In an analysis of crews aboard the relatively sophisticated trawlers of the 1970s, Horbulewicz determined that the seamen suffered deprivation of "psycho-social needs"\textsuperscript{57} In that deprived state each seaman could function normally for only a certain time, which varied with the individual, before deterioration set in. Initially that deterioration took the form of a decreased motivation to work and an increase in faulty activity leading to accidents. It also led to a worsening of personal relations onboard resulting in disciplinary violations, conflict and quarrels. The state of deprivation in which the seaman operated was essentially stressful and could result in an increase in the individual's emotional alertness and aggressiveness. An increase in emotional alertness, in particular, was found to decrease the individual's perceptual and intellectual activity and, in the long term, resulted in chronic fatigue symptoms. In summarising his findings, Horbulewicz advised that the relationship between individual deterioration and the length of the voyage was complex, being more cyclic than linear.\textsuperscript{58} But, in general, the longer the time spent at sea the more serious were the effects upon the psychological health of

\textsuperscript{54}Lane, 'Neither Officers Nor Gentlemen', \textit{History Workshop}, Vol. 19, 1985, pp.128-143.
\textsuperscript{55}Poole, \textit{op cit}, p.216.
\textsuperscript{56}Hobsbawm, \textit{Age of Extremes}, p.414.
\textsuperscript{57}Horbulewicz, 'Psychological Autonomy of Industrial Trawler Crews', in Fricke, \textit{op cit}, p.73.
\textsuperscript{58}ibid, p.83.
seamen and their motivation to work.\textsuperscript{59} That finding could reasonably be extended to those Australian merchant seamen who spent long periods confined aboard the small rudimentary steamships which plied the often stormy southern waters of the Tasman Sea, Bass Strait, and the Great Australian Bight during the first half of this century.

Page, on behalf of the Adelaide Steamship Company, has condemned militant industrial action undertaken by Australian seafarers in terms of intransigence.\textsuperscript{60} McKellar, as apologist for the Australian United Steam Navigation Company [AUSN], attributes the eventual demise of that company to the irrationality of Australian merchant seamen. He speaks of the "senseless disruption to which coastal shipping was subjected."\textsuperscript{61} But, from a detached viewpoint behaviour is easily depicted as ridiculous. The psychologists tell us that in order to appreciate the full meaning of what appears to be stupid behaviour one requires a caring, subjective, association with its origin.\textsuperscript{62} All behaviour is caused, they say, and an understanding of the cause will provide a rational explanation of the apparently irrational.\textsuperscript{63} And, further, to remove the cause of disruptive behaviour is the only sure means to alter that behaviour.\textsuperscript{64} But in practice what is more likely to happen is that:

Instead of seeking causes... when things go wrong, we usually blame someone, and, thereby, sometimes unconsciously, attempt to protect ourselves from criticism for perhaps having helped to bring about the undesirable results.\textsuperscript{65}

This thesis, which extends across most of the first half of the 20th century, endeavours to explain why 'things went wrong'. It explains the antagonism of a particular occupational group. It is not a conventional institutional history. It trumpets neither labour nor capitalist triumphalism. It is not an exercise in apologetics. If polemical, it is not produced by the union [now the Maritime Union], or for the union. It

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{59}ibid, p.73.
\item\textsuperscript{60}Page, \textit{Fitted for the Voyage}, p.226.
\item\textsuperscript{61}McKellar, \textit{AUSN Story}, p.606.
\item\textsuperscript{62}Phares, \textit{Introduction to Personality}, p.297.
\item\textsuperscript{63}Brown, \textit{Social Psychology of Industry}, p.163.
\item\textsuperscript{64}Brown, \textit{op cit}, p.164.
\item\textsuperscript{65}ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
is not necessarily intended for union members, as was Fitzpatrick and Cahill's centenary history. It is neither an account, sympathetic or otherwise, of the economic difficulties of the shipping industry, nor is it a systematic record of the union's gains and losses within the ambit of Arbitration Court legalism. What does concern this thesis is the uneven relationship between the leader and the led. Its theme is the fragility of democracy regardless of prevailing ideology whether that be the socialism of chapter two, the individualism of chapter three, the factionalism of chapter four, the communism of chapter five, the labourism of chapter six or the authoritarianism of chapter seven. In seeking to fill a perceived void, this study reveals the fate of those working merchant seamen whose special industrial circumstances rendered them largely invisible to landward society and who, as a consequence, were extraordinarily vulnerable to manipulation.

The argument that will be presented here is that in the period between 1918 and 1943 the members of the Seamen's Union of Australia became mere pawns, subordinate to the particular agendas of successive leaders of the union. It is also contended that the seamen's behaviour in submitting to that role can be properly understood only in terms of an attitude developed historically within a unique workplace environment. We must begin, therefore, with a consideration of that environment as it was at the beginning of the 20th century.

'THE RIGHT OF LABOUR TO LIVE': 1904-1918.

Upon federation, the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was empowered under Part V Section 51(i) of the Constitution "to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to (i) Trade and commerce with other countries and among the States." That power was further defined by Section 98 to include "navigation and shipping". Being aware of the lack of uniformity which existed as a legacy of colonial times in the maritime legislation of the states, a bill for a Navigation Act was introduced in the Senate in 1904 by the attorney-general in the first Deakin (Protectionist) Ministry. The bill, having been almost immediately withdrawn for further consideration, the matter was taken up by the succeeding short-lived third federal (Labor) ministry of John Watson, in which W.M. Hughes held the portfolio of Minister for External Affairs while the legal eminence, Henry Bournes Higgins, was Attorney-General. Conscious of the complexity and the potentially far-reaching consequences of the matter, parliament referred it to a Royal Commission for consideration and report. Under the chairmanship of William Morris Hughes, that Royal Commission took evidence between July 1904 and March 1905 from witnesses in Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle. Of these witnesses twelve were working seamen or waterfront workers or their industrial representatives, eleven were working ships' officers or their industrial representatives, ten were Australian or British shipowners or their representatives, two were representatives of foreign shipping companies, nine were Australian merchants and shippers, twenty-two were State Government officials, seven were medical practitioners, and two were engaged in an honorary capacity in managing Sailors' Homes. Lastly, two crimps and a policeman emerged from the Newcastle waterfront to relate their sorry tale. All nine royal commissioners were members of the Commonwealth Parliament. Three were members of the Australian Labor Party, four were Free Traders, and two were Protectionists. The

1Commonwealth Year Book, No.17, 1924, p 1053.
most vocal members of the Commission were the ALP members, Hughes, Guthrie and de Largie together with the radical anti-sweating Protectionist, Samuel Mauger. It was principally through the answers elicited by these four professional politicians that conditions existent within the Australian maritime workplace at the beginning of the twentieth century were exposed and the authentic voices of contemporary merchant seamen momentarily heard.

The Australian representative of Britain's P&O Line, Edward Trelawney, in giving evidence before the royal commission on 14 December 1904, said that the published accounts of the Australian companies engaged in the coastal trade showed that they had enjoyed a very profitable trade for at least the previous three or four years, proof being that they were meeting the cost of building new vessels out of revenue and not out of borrowed capital. And, since the coastal trade monopolised transhipments between the many outports and those few major Australian ports where imports were discharged and exports loaded by British and foreign deep-sea ships, "much of that prosperity was due to the large revenue derived from oversea shipping." Robert Grayson attributed the resurgence of the coastal shipowners' fortunes to the formation in 1899 of the Australian Steamship Owners' Federation, of which he was secretary, and its subsequent organisation of a combine. This 'ring' of the major Australian coastal shipping companies charged standard freight rates and provided a rebate of 10% to shippers payable at the end of each year. The delayed rebate was strictly conditional upon shippers using only the companies of the cartel throughout the year. A monopoly, to which Trelawney had referred, was thus established that put an end to internecine competition.

But John Batemen, a merchant who shipped his goods from Fremantle, complained bitterly of the high freight rates charged by the wealthy coastal shipowners' monopoly. Their prosperity was such that they "are building new steamers hand over fist," he said.

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2Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill 1906, Q7374.
3RC 1906, Q15346-47
and complained that the shipowners' prosperity was gained at the shippers' expense.\(^5\)

On the other hand, the Chairman of the Melbourne Steamship Company while acknowledging that "the shipowners have done very well,"\(^6\) questioned the right of anyone to investigate the way they ran their businesses. "I have a very strong objection", he informed the Royal Commission, "to the political influence which is introduced into this Bill."\(^7\)

The Commonwealth Comptroller General of Customs, as the main draftee of the Navigation Bill, had stated at the outset that the bill:

> Was designed to secure the well-being of seamen generally, having special regard to their comfort and health, with a view *inter alia* to improve the status of all grades, and thereby render the marine service attractive to our youth. We wish, if possible, to encourage our young people to go to sea, and it was therefore considered important, if possible, to raise the status of officers and seamen generally. It is also our desire to create a mercantile marine of our own, and with that object in view it was thought that we should do all we could, not only to secure the comfort and well being of ships' crews, but to improve the conditions generally at sea, and thus increase the attractiveness of sea life to the people.\(^8\)

But beyond these admirable sentiments, there were other influences at work. There were other agendas such as that of the Chairman of Directors of the Melbourne Steam Ship Company who, having deplored the fact that ships commonly departed port on a Sunday, advised the Royal Commission on 3 February 1905 that a suitable source of recruits for Australian merchant seamen would be found among waifs and strays, from among "neglected children; I would not say criminals."\(^9\) Doubtless, that particularly vulnerable segment of society would be not only inexpensive to employ but, having been subjected to the discipline of State institutions, would in all likelihood be docile into the bargain.

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\(^{5}\)ibid, Q13574.

\(^{6}\)ibid, Q15655.

\(^{7}\)ibid, Q15175.

\(^{8}\)ibid, p. 84.

\(^{9}\)ibid, Q15175 & Q15951. See Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p. 180.

The Nonconformist Churches... drew their support from the earnest and sober piety of the trading and commercial classes. Individualists in their faith, they were individualist in their interpretation of social morality.
The president of the Newcastle NSW chamber of commerce giving evidence on 15 February 1905 complained of the abuse of alcohol by seamen, stating that Australia was "the worst place I have seen." But he represented the interests of shippers anxious to minimise freight rates, and an obvious means to that end was to reduce costs by cutting the wages bill. The precedent had been set in Imperial England. Inexpensive lascar seamen were employed in the ships of the P&O Line and the British India Steam Navigation Company [BISN] among other established shipping firms whose head offices were to be found at the heart of Empire, in Leadenhall Street, London. Recruited from the sub-continent of India, the lascars' religion forbade indulgence in alcohol. And then there was the United States consul in Newcastle, New South Wales, who denigrated American seamen, commenting that "I think the American sailor is the worst sailor on earth, because if he is any good he will not go to sea." Nelson, in his account of the seamen and longshoremen of the USA, states that by 1915 more than half the ships' firemen on the East Coast of the USA were of Spanish or Latin American origin. By 1917, less than eight per cent of deck sailors employed on the West Coast of North America had been born in the USA. It may be fair to conclude that both the US consul and the president of the Newcastle Chamber of Commerce, was merely reiterating that economically rational policy which sought to replace 'expensive' national seamen with labour hired from less economically favoured countries.

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10 Ibid, Q19152 & Q19159.
11 Between 1890 and 1900 the total number of British seamen decreased by 11,615. The number of 'foreigners' and 'asiatics' increased by 9,666 and 13,289 respectively so that by 1900 the British Merchant Service employed a total of 247,448 seamen, of whom 71.5% were Britons, 14.9% were 'Foreigners' and 14.6% were 'Lascars and Asiatics'. See, RC 1906, op cit, p.9. Bullen, who dedicated his 1900 publication to Rudyard Kipling, declared complacently that:

Shipowners are not anxious to carry foreign seamen, except, perhaps in eastern trades, where lascars and Chinese come in handy. And even in those ships there will usually be found a stiffening of most excellent white seamen, who are usually British.

12 RC 1906, op cit, Q21175.
13 Nelson, Workers on the Waterfront, p. 31.
14 Ibid, p.42.
15 Weintraub observes that "as competition increased and profits grew smaller [in the mid-1890s], seamen began to be cheated. Native Americans refused to accept the lower standards. In seeking replacements, owners utilized the crimps, who found men without previous experience. These men had to be driven to their tasks. This brutality ['buckoism'] drove more American seamen out of the merchant marine, until now less than 10% of the sailors were citizens." Weintraub, Andrew Furuseth, p.39.
There was no law existent that compelled a specific level of manning onboard Australian merchant ships when the Royal Commission interviewed the secretary of the Australian Steamship Owners’ Federation on 1 February 1905. The Sea Carriage of Goods Act of December 1904 stipulated only that at the beginning of its voyage a ship should be "seaworthy in all respects and properly manned [emphasis added], equipped and supplied." The philosophy of laissez-faire, which at least until December 1904 had permitted the coastal shipping monopoly to exempt itself from all and any liability to the shipper for loss or damage to his goods, still extended to the scale of manning onboard. So it was with a certain complacency that the secretary informed the Commission that the federation's ships were manned in "a fair and liberal manning". When pressed by Senator Guthrie as to whether they carried a minimum or a maximum number of crew, the reply was: "We consider that the manner in which we presently man our steamers is adequate for the purposes of the trade."

That trade, on the Australian coast in 1905, involved eleven companies which operated some 113 steamships totalling 195,057 gross tons. While at any one time the ships were manned by 113 masters, 291 deck officers, 343 engineers and 3,153 seamen the disproportionately large number of semi-skilled ratings to supervisory deck and engineer officers was symptomatic of the labour-intensive nature of the vessels of the era while the consistently low net ton per man ratio is indicative of their relatively low efficiency as cargo carriers. The Australian steamship owner of the period, being conscious of his ships' dependence upon complicated and expensive machinery, tended to tread warily in his dealings with marine engineers. Those engineers were for the most

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17 See terms of Adelaide SS Co. bill of lading, RC 1906, op cit, Q3054.
18 RC 1906, op cit, Q15067.
19 ibid, Q15070.
20 Commonwealth Year Book, No.1 1908, p.540. See also Appendix 1. The largest ship on the Australian registry in 1904, the AUSN's Kyarra, carried a stokehold complement of 18 firemen and trimmers. Its triple-expansion steam engine providing an indicated 4,100 horsepower and consumed 80 tons of coal every 24 hours. Pemberton, Coastal Shipping, Appendix II, p.277. Also RC 1906, op cit, p.977.
part skilled British migrants who had obtained their expertise through specialised apprenticeship in shipyards on Clydeside and the North of England. They were naturally anxious to preserve their status and scarcity value since these were reflected in the superior levels of remuneration they enjoyed onboard Australian ships.\(^{21}\)

Demonstrating a lack of solidarity with the other maritime unions, the engineers had taken no part in the Maritime Strike of 1890. Jealously preserving their craft skill they were antagonistic towards any encroachment upon their preserve, particularly from firemen.\(^{22}\) But the relatively semi-skilled firemen, trimmers, greasers and deck seamen had no comparable scarcity value in 1905. Fifteen years earlier, in fact, the shipowners had found recruits ready and willing to perform their tasks among the unemployed.\(^{23}\) That lack of bargaining power is implicit in the paternalistic tone adopted by the Australian representative of Britain's P&O Lines when he dismissed a series of questions on the subject of industrial accidents and compensation for seamen by stating that:

> I think a man is much better looked after as long as there is no hard and fast rule, because an owner might say, 'I am not obliged to give you this, but I will, if you behave yourself... You must not rouse, if it is possible to avoid it, a feeling of antagonism. What we are always trying to do is to cultivate a feeling of friendliness between the owners and the men.'\(^{24}\)

McKellar, the official historian of the Australian United Steam Navigation Company [AUSN], admits that "the men were often bewildered by what appeared to be quite unnecessary hardness of attitude on the part of the Company towards its crews."\(^{25}\) And such hardness was not confined to the AUSN.\(^{26}\) The founders of the Australian coastal shipping companies had emerged from a hard school. They were rugged individualists who deplored any interference in their activities, and sought "only to be left

\(^{22}\) Broomham, *op cit*, p 40. Also RC 1906, *op cit*, Q4855.
\(^{23}\) In 1890 the founder of Burns Philp & Co. defined freedom of contract as "freedom to manage our own affairs." On the labour side he saw it as being "freedom from the thraldom of the labour leaders... it gives every man liberty to take employment where he can get it." See Report of the Royal Commission on Strikes Appointed November 25, 1890, Q5683-5687.
\(^{24}\) RC 1906, *op cit*, Q7207-08.
\(^{26}\) See Page, *op cit*, p 137.
alone to make money."27 But with the passage of the Sea Carriage of Goods Act, at the end of 1904, things began to change for the shipowners. The world, as Page comments in his account of the Adelaide Steamship Company, "began to deny them their original role of carrying passengers and cargo on their own terms."28

Page comments that "seamen left little trace of their passing"29, but we do have the authentic evidence of John Toomey, a ship's fireman with thirty years experience on the Australian coast, who appeared before the Commission on 15 February 1905. He had just signed-off a coastal vessel where routinely, during his stint below, he had been shovelling four or five tons of coal into the ship's furnaces. Twenty-five years earlier the average had been only three tons.30 The pace was becoming too hot for a middle-aged man, he said. "The work has become so hard that unless a man is in tiptop condition and is in the prime of life he need not look for a steamship."31 And then there were the Adelaide Company's Kadina, Willyama, Nardoo, and Tarcoola. No trimmers were employed in these ships to fetch coal to the furnace plates from the bunkers. Just two firemen were signed-on to feed 25 to 30 tons of coal per day into the furnaces. The only way those ships could maintain sufficient steam to operate on their run between Newcastle NSW and Port Pirie in SA was by utilising the services of men who worked their passage by labouring unpaid in the stokehold.32 Labour came no cheaper, but it must be wondered to what extent that amateur, and perhaps seasick, labour in the stokehold of an undermanned and underpowered steamship contributed to the loss of the Willyama off the coast of South Australia in 1907.33

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27ibid, p 57. Fromm described the social character of the nineteenth century capitalist as "essentially competitive, hoarding, exploitative, authoritarian, aggressive, individualistic." Fromm, Sane Society, p.99.
28Page, op cit, p.140.
29ibid, p 136.
30RC 1906, op cit, Q19413-416.
31ibid.
32ibid, Q19484.
33Pemberton, op cit, Appendix II. p.297.
Henry Belfrage, Victorian secretary of the Seamen's Union, recalled a recent case where one of Howard Smith's passenger ships had proceeded to sea with a complement of five men in the stokehold when there should have been twelve firemen and six trimmers. Belfrage did not blame the ship's master. "The onus," he said, "lies with the owner; there is no manning clause in any part of the British Dominions, except New Zealand." But, as he put it, "the life of the ship and the lives of crew and passengers are not being protected, when she is allowed to proceed to sea without a complete crew." Another Howard Smith vessel, the Julia Percy, which had been trading on the Coast since 1876, featured in the testimony given on 17 January 1905 by Adam Ramage, Engineer-Surveyor to the West Australian Harbour and Lights Department. Ramage had persuaded the owners to increase the number of firemen carried from three to six. Even then, he admitted, it was hardly possible to maintain steam in the antique ship.

Senator Mauger, secretary of the National Anti-Sweating League of Victoria, then put the question to Ramage.

11205 [Mauger] The men must have been worked to death? -
[Ramage] Yes.
11206 [Mauger] There is sweating on board ship, as well as on land. Do you know to whom that vessel belonged in Victoria? -
[Ramage] Yes.
11207 [Mauger] Howard Smith is a reputable firm? -
[Ramage] I would not like to answer that question.
11210 [Guthrie] If the owners of the Julia Percy said tomorrow they would carry three firemen, could you force them to carry six? -
[Ramage] No.

The Julia Percy, in fact, ended her long career in 1910 when she sank off Dongarra on the coast of Western Australia.

But what protection was there for those onboard ship from the dangers inherent in under-manning for the sake of cost-cutting? Senator Guthrie investigated that question with Captain James Edie, Superintendent of the Department of Navigation at Sydney, on 8 February 1905. Edie stated that while his department had authority to detain a ship.

34RC 1906, op cit, Q5178.
35ibid, Q5180.
36ibid, Q11204.
37Pemberton, op cit, Appendix II. p.273.
under the existing New South Wales state legislation the department could be held accountable at law by the shipowner for any delay caused. He claimed that he had caused masters of ships to increase their crew numbers prior to sailing, but he knew of no case where a ship had actually been detained because it was under-manned. His inspectors, Edie claimed, had great difficulty in ascertaining whether a ship was in fact undermanned so that "I do not think we have ever had occasion to detain a ship for being undermanned." The Deputy Superintendent of Navigation at Newcastle NSW, in his evidence of 17 February 1905, confirmed Captain Edie's 'difficulty.' Asked how, without benefit of an official manning scale, he could ascertain whether a ship was or was not undermanned, he replied that he could act only if a complaint was made by or on behalf of the crew, "and I have not yet had any complaint." Toomey, the veteran ship's fireman, had been present during the events of 1878 when the ASN, having expressed an intention to man its coastal ships with Chinese labour imported for the purpose, had been dissuaded only when the Seamen's Union took industrial action. J.M. Corby, Secretary of the Australian Institute of Marine Engineers, had no wish to see 'coloured' firemen on the Australian coast. In Australian vessels, he said in answer to a question from Senator de Largie, the firemen worked much harder than in British ships. He thought 3 tons per man per watch a "fair thing", and contrasted it with the output of the "absolutely starved" firemen he had seen in British ships on the west coast of Africa. They had been unable to handle 2 tons. He estimated that the P&O steamers, with their large lascar complement in the stokehold,

38RC 1906, op cit, Q17056-058.
39ibid, Q17063
40ibid, Q20934.
41ibid, Q19549-551.
42ibid, Q3827.
43ibid, Q3829.
44ibid, Q3830. An African tribal group, the Kru, replaced white labour in the stokeholds of ships of Britain's pre-eminent Elder Dempster Line trading to West Africa in the first decade of the 20th century. See Frost, "Ethnic Identity," Immigrants & Minorities, Vol.12, November 1993, No.3, pp.88-106. Bullen's view, in 1900, was that such work was beneath white men, being suitable only for "...negroes, who, from their constitutional experience of heat, must be far better fitted to endure the conditions of the stokehold. Many southern-going ships carry them now. I should not be sorry to see them the rule, and my countrymen doing something better." Bullen, op cit, p.327.
could average only about one ton per man per watch.45 Trimming coal in an Australian stokehold, William Lewis of the Institute of Marine Engineers told Hughes, required no great skill, "a bullock-driver would do if he could do the work," but it did require "a very hard man."46 The ships were run today a great deal harder than had been the case twenty years earlier, said Henry Selfe, a retired Engineer-Surveyor to the Marine Board of NSW. And some owners "would have no consideration for the blood and sinews of the men."47

In his evidence as a practical fireman, John Toomey made the point that British ships outward-bound from England burned good quality Welsh coal.48 On the Australian coast, however, the quality of the locally produced steaming-coal was inferior. It was not the mere shovelling of such coal that was so laborious, said James Shirra the Chief Engineer-Surveyor to the Navigation Department of NSW, in a prepared statement to the Commission on 8 February 1905. The hard labour lay in the constant attention to the fires necessitated by the presence of dirt in the coal and the excessive amounts of ash which its combustion produced.49 And after his watch below had finished, said Harry Belfrage of the Seamen's Union, a man was customarily required to put in another 30 or 45 minutes clearing ash out of the stokehold, hoisting it on deck and dumping it over the side into the sea.50

In common with many other working people of the period, the sailor on the Australian coast in the first decade of the twentieth century worked excessively long hours. In the seaman's case, however, the working week of some sixty to eighty hours constituted a hazard not only to his health but to the safety of his ship.51 Work went on

45 RC 1906, op cit, Q3850. Tabili thinks that suspiciously high death rates among Lascar firemen suggest that many "may have been literally worked to death." Tabili, "Construction of Racial Differences," Journal of British Studies, Vol.33, No.1 January 1994, p.66.
46 RC 1906, op cit, Q6508-09.
47 ibid, Q18602-04.
48 ibid, Q19452.
49 ibid, Q16440-442.
50 ibid, Q5328.
51 ibid, Q19554.
regardless with meals taken at all hours to suit the working of the ship and the tempo of arrivals and departures. Toomey told of eating his midday dinner at 3pm and his supper at 4pm.\textsuperscript{52} Belfrage of the Seamen's Union complained that "the food comes along at all hours of the day"\textsuperscript{53} There were no messrooms. Regardless of the weather the seamen had to fetch their food from the galley aft, and return forward to eat it squatting on the open deck or in the forecastle. "The men have to clamber over one another, and maybe take their food in the quarters where they sleep, and where their wet and sweaty clothes are hung up."\textsuperscript{54} Accidents were the inevitable consequence of the fatigue induced by inhumanely long hours of work. The river trade, in particular, was notorious for the hours involved. Seamen were commonly engaged in breaking out cargo and bringing it up out of the hold as the ship moved from one wharf to the next along the Richmond River for the full sixty hours that the ship was in the river, with only short breaks between getting the cargo ready and coming alongside each of twenty wharves.\textsuperscript{55} Lewis of the Institution of Marine Engineers was adamant that it was the fatigue of the navigating officer, helmsman and lookout which caused the Helen Nicoll, having just emerged from the Clarence River, to ram and sink the Keilawarra in 1886 with the loss altogether of 36 lives.\textsuperscript{56} And the seamen in their cramped forecastle accommodation right forward in the 'eyes' of the ship were particularly vulnerable in case of a collision and hardly less so if the ship foundered.\textsuperscript{57}

When the Commission turned its focus upon the shipowners and their managers, it exposed a startling degree of indifference and downright ignorance underpinning the prevalent attitude of \textit{laissez-faire}. Charles McAllster, Superintendent of both the North Coast and the Illawarra Steamship Companies, told Hughes that he knew of no case where provisions supplied to vessels were deficient in quality or quantity. He considered

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52}ibid, Q19554. See also Appendix 3.
\item \textsuperscript{53}ibid, Q5193.
\item \textsuperscript{54}ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55}ibid, Q26179.
\item \textsuperscript{56}ibid, Q6532. Also, Gleeson, \textit{Shipwrecks, Storms & Seamen}, pp.26-27.
\item \textsuperscript{57}ibid, Q19464-465.
\end{itemize}
that the 72 cubic feet originally allowed by the 1854 British Navigation Act, was sufficient living space for a seaman, but admitted that he had no personal experience of living in a forecastle. The reason he considered that amount of space sufficient was that he had received no advice to the contrary from the navigation authorities. He considered that the seamen got plenty to eat and were comfortably off. But when asked by Senator Mauger, "Do you ever hear any complaints from the sailors in regard to their quarters?" He replied, "Yes, lots of them." William Cuthbertson, Secretary of the Coastal Steamship Owners' Association of NSW, having examined the forecastle of the 22 year old paddle-steamer *Namoi* in which 19 men lived, told Hughes that he "found it remarkably comfortable."\(^{59}\)

6107 [Hughes] Were there any tables in there? -
[Cuthbertson] I do not think there were.
6108 [Hughes] They eat their food off their knees? -
[Cuthbertson] That may be so.

Cuthbertson, having revealed that he did not know in which months of the year southeasterly gales on the coast of NSW were most prevalent, was addressed by Senator Mauger:

6208 [Mauger] Your knowledge is confined to the inside and not the outside events? -
[Cuthbertson] My knowledge is with regard to shipping on the coast of NSW.
6210 [Mauger] You have never been to sea, have you? -
[Cuthbertson] No.

It was that sort of ignorance that James Shirra, Chief Engineer-surveyor and Examiner-in-Steam to the Navigation Department of NSW, particularly deplored. When Senator Mauger questioned the ethics of those who though ignorant of a vessel yet sent men to sea in it, Shirra exclaimed: "That is what I have tried to impress upon everybody since I have been in the Department... I do not interfere with the master; I only wish to get at Managers and Clerks and Shipping Officers who are parties to sending."\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\)ibid, Q5571-5617.
\(^{59}\)ibid, Q6103. Also Pemberton, *op cit*, Appendix II, p.285.
\(^{60}\)ibid, Q16367.
The Royal Commission, in investigating those instrumentalities ostensibly responsible for regulation of both inter and intra-state Australian coastal shipping, found a series of parochial bureaucracies enmeshed in a plethora of outmoded colonial legislation. Officials of those bureaucracies were, for the most part, unwilling to challenge that powerful shipping interest which was not hesitant to enlist the coercive power of the state. Only a dozen years earlier, seamen from the Adelaide Steam Ship Company's *Innamincka* on strike in protest over a wage reduction had been arrested and charged at the instigation of the shipowner and subsequently sentenced to eight weeks imprisonment with hard labour.  

William Forester, one of those officials in February 1905, appeared before the Royal Commission in his capacities as Examiner for Masters and Mates, Shipwright Surveyor and Shipping Inspector for the port of Brisbane. When Senator Guthrie, in addressing the subject of sanitary arrangements, enquired whether Forester ever issued orders to effect an improvement in shipboard cleanliness, the reply was: "No. I cannot say I have. It is rather doubtful whether we can order them to take up the dirt on a ship unless in a case where we thought it was liable to spread plague." When pressed by Guthrie he responded, "I am rather doubtful whether we have the power. I think we would be interfering."  

22579 [Guthrie] Is it not the duty of an inspector to interfere when he sees anything wrong? -  
[Forester] We can suggest that they should give the place a clean up.  

The Secretary of the Marine Board of Victoria, J.G.McKie, told the Commission on 20 October 1904 that under Victorian legislation his board had no jurisdiction over seamen.  

3469 [Mauger] Has it any jurisdiction over the conditions in which seamen shall go to sea? Has it not a general supervision over the whole Act? -  
[McKie] Not over the whole of it. Our inspectors have instructions to inspect the crews' quarters.

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63*ibid*, Q3468.
Has the superintendent of the Mercantile Marine to make any report to the Board? - [McKie] No.

Does he report to anybody? - [McKie] I do not know to whom he reports.

Samuel Johnson, the Senior Engineer-Surveyor to the Marine Board of Victoria, when asked by Hughes on 15 September 1905 to name one ship which provided adequate accommodation, stated, "I could not name one particular vessel." When asked by Senator de Largie if he had any suggestions for the improvement of the working conditions of engineers, firemen, trimmers, and greasers his reply was a succinct "no." John Toomey, the working fireman, when asked the same question, suggested that a bathroom be provided so that men coming from the stokehold and engine room need no longer wash on deck in public. Hot water was not essential, he said. "We do not want these luxuries; merely a room where we can wash ourselves." A week later, Richard Gough, the shipwright-surveyor of the Marine Board of Victoria, said that he could not remember whether any ships had lavatory or bathroom accommodation. It is therefore hardly surprising that he could offer no suggestions for the improvement of seamen's accommodation or sanitary arrangements. But, in any case, they were in accordance with the Act, and he had no suggestions to make for any alteration to the Act.

Are the sanitary arrangements such as you approve? - [Gough] Yes.

Have you ever been to sea in these boats? - [Gough] No; I am not a sailor, although of course I came out in a boat from the old country.

When Captain Deary, the Inspector of Shipping for the Marine Board of Victoria, appeared before the Commission on 28 September 1904, he explained that he lacked the time to inspect every vessel entering the port of Melbourne. He declined to provide evidence regarding the provision made for the health of seamen in his port, explaining that no medical inspector was attached to the Victorian Board. The only responsibility he

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64 ibid, Q1621.
65 ibid, Q19455.
66 ibid, Q2018-2026.
67 ibid, Q2304-2306.
carried under the Victorian Act of 1890 was to ensure that the space occupied by the crew was adequately lighted and ventilated. He was not aware that any systematic examination was made of the provisions carried by ships leaving Victorian ports, but suggested that the commissioners make enquiry of Captain Parsons at the Mercantile Marine Office. When an exasperated commissioner Edwards exclaimed: "Is not the point this; that both of you have the power to examine them, but neither of you exercise it?" Captain Deary replied that he had never consulted with Captain Parsons on the matter. Deary described what happened when a vessel newly-constructed for Howard Smith Ltd came onto the Coast:

When the Bombala arrived here I went aboard for the purpose of seeing the crew space. It was then fixed up with bunks, iron stanchions and spring mattresses. It was not elaborate, but no dirt or filth could accumulate. Almost the first thing, however, which the owners did was to root out the mattresses and put in ordinary wooden bunks.

Traditional maritime conservatism allied with indifference and ignorance prevailed upon the Australian coast.

Navigational charts of Australian waters are studded with reefs and rocks bearing the names of those sailing ships which met with disaster upon them. With the advent of steamships the danger was lessened, but only to a degree. Small and frequently undermanned ships, burning poor quality coal and navigating close inshore in order to minimise steaming distances and avoid adverse offshore currents were never far from danger. But the Victorian Act of 1890 stipulated that a seaman's wages stopped from the moment of stranding. At the same time the Act required the seaman to exert himself to the utmost to save the ship, its cargo and stores. Henry Belfrage of the Seamen's Union provided an illustration from his personal experience:

I was on a ship which got ashore, we were away from the ship, as we had abandoned her, but on going to the beach we found there was a big tide:

68 ibid, Q2554-2556.
69 ibid, Q2557-2568.
70 ibid, Q2619.
71 ibid, Q5238.
72 ibid, Q5239.
orders were given to go onboard, with the result that we saved all the cargo, 
but we got nothing, though we worked night and day. Our wages were paid 
only to the time she struck.73

And if a seaman was incapacitated as a consequence of his duties, then little compassion 
was extended to him. Seamen who shipped under the Victorian Navigation Act were not 
covered under the provisions of the Victorian Employers and Employees Liability Act of 
1890, Part III.74 Since manning levels were unspecified and duties were not defined, 
men were frequently required to carry out unfamiliar duties, particularly in the hazardous 
environment of the engineroom. But a man injured in a steamship was not entitled to 
compensation.75 A disabled seaman, the Victorian secretary of the Seamen’s Union told 
the Commission, would often be paid his wages and abandoned at the next port of call. 
“1 have two cases reported to me today, both broken arms, one in hospital at 
Warrnambool, and the captain does not feel bound to send him to Newcastle, where he 
came from.”76

Conditions in Australian ships were bad, but in British ships they were worse. 
From the evidence of the Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill it is evident that it 
was common for deep-sea British seamen to find employment in Australian coastal ships. 
Many seamen on the Australian coast therefore had had personal experience of the 
treatment meted out by British shipowners - a class of employer noted for its callousness. 
Senator Guthrie, who became general president of the Federated Seamen’s Union of 
Australasia in November 1906, was a case in point. Born in Scotland, he had first gone 
to sea in 1872 and spent some fifteen years at sea as a ship’s officer, serving his 
apprenticeship in British sailing vessels and later transferring to Australian coastal ships. 
His experiences had left him with a concern for maritime working conditions that has 
been described as "intense almost to the point of obsession."77

73 ibid, Q5241. 
74 ibid, Q5339. 
75 ibid, Q5197. 
76 ibid, Q5340. 
77 ADB, pp. 145-146.
British merchant seamen sailed under the terms of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 as amended to a minor degree by the legislation of 1897. The existing legislation was largely a consolidation and rearrangement of the statutes which had been in existence for the previous forty years. Havelock Wilson MP, founder and life-long president of the British National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, had been unable or unwilling to offer any objection to the passage of the 1894 Bill through Parliament, despite the fact that under its Section 225 the Act prohibited strike action at sea or in any port of the United Kingdom or abroad on pain of forfeiture of wages or imprisonment or both. So it was that British seamen, being unable to take industrial action, exercised their 'independence' by deserting in droves. Thus the Harbour Master at Brisbane commented that, "in the sailing ships it is all desertions," while the superintendent of the Melbourne Sailors' Home, told the Commission on 10 August 1904 that "one third of the men whom we place on board deep-sea vessels are deserters from other vessels."

Since there was no obligation for British shipowners to man their ships with nationals, a large proportion of seamen in British ships were foreigners. In fact, the Royal Commission was particularly concerned that the proportion of Indian and Asian seamen sailing under the Red Ensign appeared to be increasing at the expense of British seamen. When asked why this was so, Captain W.C. Bluett, who had sailed for 15 years in British ships and had just spent 18 months as master of an Adelaide Steamship Company vessel on the Australian coast, stated that:

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80ORC 1906, *op cit*, Q22380. Deakin & Seward found that in 1906 of the general cargo ships in the Europe-Australia trade 120 were steam ships and 54 were sailing ships. Additional sailing ships were employed in carrying phosphate and pig-iron. Deakin & Seward, *Shipping Conferences*, p.37.
81RC 1906, *op cit*, Q792.
82Refer Indian Merchant Shipping Act 1883, sec. 29. Also, British Merchant Shipping Act 1894, sec. 125.
83Between 1890 and 1900 the total number of British seamen decreased by 11,615. The number of 'foreigners' and 'asiatics' increased by 9,666 and 13,289 respectively so that by 1900 of a total of 247,448 seamen 70.5% were Britions, 14.9% were "foreigners" and 14.6% were "lascars and asiatics." RC 1906, *op cit*, p.9.
The wages at home have not been substantially increased for the last fifty or sixty years, though in every other trade they have. Seamen's wages have, if anything, decreased. As far as I can understand, the reason is that the men have no organisation. As a whole they are a thriftless lot. After a voyage they go on shore, spend all their money, and must then take anything that offers.84

On the subject of stokehold hands he was careful to draw a distinction between British and Australian seamen.

I will speak of England. I must say that in the Colonies the men are a far better class. But I consider the English stoker to be the dregs of humanity. He has got down so low that he does not care where he goes, or what becomes of him. Probably he ships as a trimmer, and that is his last resort.85

Contrasting the sobriety of Australian to British seamen, he said that he had seen only two or three cases of drunkenness among sailors and firemen during his time on the Coast.86 "They are the same class of men. I think their sobriety is due to their environment; to better circumstances, better wages, better food."87 But whether in British or Australian ships, it was killing work in the stokehold:

I think the stokers' lives are shorter, owing to the strain on their constitutions. They face a fire, heaving coals, and so forth, and then shut the door and stand under a ventilator. The fronts of their bodies are being scorched, while the men are firing up, and their backs probably frozen by the draught from the ventilators.88

The superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office in Port-Adelaide, Robert Smith, confirmed that British seamen might allot a portion of their wages to their dependants upon signing three year articles in Britain, but were not otherwise entitled to draw upon the wages they had earned until the completion of the round voyage, except as

84 ibid, Q10551.
85 ibid, Q10553. Bullen, in 1900, while expressing admiration for ships' engineers regarded firemen and trimmers with horror, exclaiming "...but the fireman! The very thought of such a life is terrifying." Of the trimmer, "...the nature of whose work is so terrible that he should receive the sympathy of every kindly man and woman whom he serves", he observed, "...darkness and danger and want of breath are his inevitable environment. What wonder is it that he becomes a hard citizen? The fact is that no man with longings for decent life would or could remain in such employment." Bullen, op cit, pp.323-324.
86 RC 1906, op cit, Q10556.
87 ibid, Q10557.
88 ibid, Q10560.
a concession allowed by the master. Smith revealed that if the seamen did receive an
advance on their wages, then a high rate of interest was commonly charged.

14651 [Guthrie] The Australian ship-owners pay their men about the first of
every month in any port of Australia where there is a bank; can they keep
their sailors on board? -
[Smith] There is a reason on the coast; the men are mostly married; they
possibly belong to the port, and are steady men. The cases are different; they
have their homes and families. They are all more or less picked men. If the
men on foreign-going boats get their money they would leave.
14653 [ Macfarlane] It is for the protection of the men? -
[Smith] Yes.
14654 [Mauger] Why should that be the case with sailors more than any
other occupation? -
[Smith] I think sailors are different to other people.

Dr Doyle, a medical man of Newcastle NSW, was careful to stress that the Australian
seamen's conditions were superior to those of the 'Old Country.' " In everything I say I
do not refer to the coastal trade, where the seamen are of a better class, and are better
treated and better paid." But he denounced the system, which was "common
knowledge in this town", whereby seamen from British ships wishing to buy goods
ashore, and having been refused an advance of wages no matter how much was owed to
them, were forced to buy from specific establishments using an order from the captain,
in respect of which the latter subsequently received a commission from the merchant, the
total being eventually deducted from the seaman's payoff at the end of the voyage. "I
would compel them to be paid off either in full, as the American crews are, or they should
be allowed to draw a certain percentage of their wages," he argued. If his idea was

89 Under sections 141-143 of the UK Merchant Shipping Act 1894, a seaman engaged in a foreign-going
voyage might make a monthly allotment of up to 50% of his wages to 'a close relative' or a savings bank
account. Under sections 133 & 136 the net balance of wages accrued would only be paid to the seaman
upon completion of the round voyage. Any cash advances made in the interim were by grace of the ship's
master. In the event of his being found guilty of misbehaviour, the seaman was subject under the Act to
fines levied upon his accrued pay. The amount he was permitted to allot to his dependents was therefore
deliberately limited as a means to ensure that he maintained sufficient monetary security onboard to
render that disciplinary code effective. The system had not changed by 1925. See evidence of British
AA.
90 RC 1906, Q23912.
91 ibid, Q23929.
92 ibid, Q23930.
implemented, Doyle was sure that "the men would be more self-reliant, and more like reasonable beings - they are certainly more like children now."\(^{93}\)

But if British seamen were 'childish', the chairman of the Melbourne Steamship Company told Senator Guthrie somewhat ruefully that Victorian seamen, who "have a fund of 3,000 pounds and a union" were capable of looking after their own interests. "I do not think that seamen from abroad are so intelligent as men who have been settled here for some time."\(^{94}\) The Shipping Master for the Port of Newcastle, Charles Hannell, was another who recognised the vulnerability of British deep-sea sailors to exploitation. He said that a seaman unable to obtain an advance on his wages would often be enticed to leave his ship by crimps and boarding-house masters who would promise him a good time and a better ship.\(^{95}\) In reality, what was happening was that:

the men on board generally have a large amount of wages due to them... and some of the captains are only too anxious to get rid of them, and to that end I believe they employ the crimp to take the men away, paying them so much blood-money to supply others. The large amount of wages due becomes forfeited, and all that money goes into the pocket of the master or the owner.\(^{96}\)

And there were ways to ensure that it did:

20588 [Hughes] It has been asserted that sometimes their lives have been made miserable and burdensome, and they are too glad to desert? - [Hannell] I believe that. I have heard a great many complaints about the treatment they receive, and in many respects they are justified in deserting.

A crimp, Andrew Wafer, who had kept a boarding-house for seamen in Newcastle for 19 years, claimed that he shipped seven to eight men every week, and in a good week it might be twenty.\(^{97}\) He charged seamen one pound per week to stay in his house and took ten per cent commission for cashing the advance note on wages they received upon signing articles.\(^{98}\) Crimps commonly took an equal share with the captain of the one pound per head 'blood-money' which the owners paid, and received

\(^{93}\)ibid, Q23935.
\(^{94}\)ibid, Q15684.
\(^{95}\)ibid, Q20592.
\(^{96}\)ibid, Q20584.
\(^{97}\)ibid, Q19758.
\(^{98}\)ibid, Q19774-19780.
commission on the value of work clothes purchased by the seamen against their advance note from marine outfitters in the town.\textsuperscript{99} Being a profitable business, competition was keen, so that another Newcastle crimp felt justified in complaining that:

\begin{quote}
As soon as the vessel drops her anchor there are five or six boarding-house runners or crimps that go aboard the ship and solicit the business from the captain to supply a crew. At one time they waited on the wharf, but now they go on board. It is getting worse; there were twenty men at one time, there are about a hundred now.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

James McVane, Sub-Inspector of Police at Newcastle NSW, who had himself sailed in British ships in his youth,\textsuperscript{101} told the Royal Commission that the law as it existed made it almost impossible for him to obtain prosecutions against those who enticed seamen to desert.\textsuperscript{102} When Hughes suggested to him that a government inspector alone should be permitted to supply seamen, and that it be made mandatory that ships' masters engage their men only through the Shipping Master, McVane replied: "Yes; it would be a very good idea; seamen would then be fairly treated and there would be no blood money."\textsuperscript{103}

Edward Trelawney, the land-bound representative of the business interests of the British P&O Line in Australia, when asked whether he considered that improvements to seamen's living conditions would entice a better class of men to the industry, found it convenient to reply that, "there are a certain number of men that will follow the sea whatever may be the rate in wages or provisions or accommodation."\textsuperscript{104} Henry Doyle, the Newcastle NSW surgeon, provided a less romantic view of seafaring in his evidence before the Commission on 28 February 1905. Doyle had gone to sea as a boy. Later, he had shipped as doctor in the British windjammer \textit{Sobraon} on the London to Australia run, and later still he had sailed in steamships.\textsuperscript{105} In general, Doyle said:

\begin{quote}
I think the condition of seamen today is not one whit better than it was thirty years ago. I remember going Home round Cape Horn nearly thirty years ago, and the condition of seamen at that time was about the same as it is today; in fact, the class
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{99}ibid, Q20053-20054.
\textsuperscript{100}ibid, Q19986.
\textsuperscript{101}ibid, Q20484.
\textsuperscript{102}ibid, Q20383.
\textsuperscript{103}ibid, Q20396.
\textsuperscript{104}ibid, Q7274.
\textsuperscript{105}ibid, Q23911.
of seamen that one sees today is not as good as the class one saw then. As regards
the food, as a rule it was poor, scanty, and badly cooked... the standard of living
today on board ships is about the same as it was then, and the consequence is that
seamen, as a class, have not improved in the same ratio as workers of other classes
have improved. Hitherto the law treated the British seaman either as a child or as a
lunatic.106

Another forthright medical man, Dr Burnett Ham who was Commissioner of
Public Health for the State of Queensland, chairman of the Central Board of Health, and
Health Officer for the Port of Brisbane appeared before the Royal Commission on 21
February 1905 and gave evidence in relation to the construction of ships. He said that
while old ships were often insanitary due to their original construction and also as a result
of wear and tear, he found that supposedly up-to-date vessels, newly built for the
Australian coast, were frequently defective. The reason was, that in British shipyards,
Board of Trade inspectors concerned themselves only with the vessel's hull and
machinery and not with its fittings. "The fittings of the vessel and the equipment, together
with the accommodation to be provided for the crew, are generally left to the builders
themselves. It is usually well understood that everything is to be sacrificed for the
cargo."107 And he was critical of the regulatory 72 cubic feet of living space allotted to
each seaman.

I think this is much too low. This would be equal to a space for each seaman 6 feet
in length, 6 feet high, and 2 feet wide - the sepulchral accommodation which a man
is entitled to at his own internment. This section has evidently been taken from the
Merchant Shipping Act of 1854, practically without amendment.108

Dr Ham told the Commission that lavatory and bath accommodation for seamen "who
often get very dirty" was "conspicuous by its absence." The forecastle "is nearly always
dirty, damp and dark" and while the seaman got plenty of fresh air on deck he got very
little below it. His life at sea was one of "continuous fatigue and strain, especially when
he is on the watch; he is also subject to stress of weather, and he leads a more or less
monotonous existence." During his detailed condemnation of shipboard conditions (the

106 ibid, Q23912.
107 ibid, Q21745.
108 ibid, Q21753.
longest answer recorded in the transcript), Dr Ham stated that "the percentage of consumption cases amongst sailors is high" and that "the death rate amongst sailors compares unfavourably with that of artisans carrying out dangerous callings on shore." 109

Such evidence was supported, if more subjectively, by senior master mariners. Captain Henry Press of the Port Phillip pilot service told the Royal Commission bluntly that "at the present time I would not send my dog to sea. I would not allow my boys to go to sea." He continued:

What has the sailor to look forward to? There is absolutely no inducement for any one to go to sea - no plums, no goal. If you had a system of apprenticeship, if you took the boys from the streets, and put them to sea for a given time, made them pass examinations before they got AB certificates, and gave them proper food, quarters, and pay, you would have a self-respecting lot of men going to sea, whereas now it is only ne'er-do-wells and the scum who go to stay before the mast. 110

Captain John Mackay, an Extra Master of the Queensland Marine Board, who had had some 24 years experience in sailing ships was also of the opinion that the mercantile marine of 1905 held no attraction for the youngster. Sea-going wages were too low to attract self-respecting young men, he said, and there was no provision for an old-age fund, contributory or otherwise. 111 There had been a better class of men at sea, in his day this veteran recalled. 112 Elderly sailors of sixty and seventy were to be found then, still working onboard ship. But "you never see an old seaman on board a ship now." 113 They were only to be found ashore where, debauched and decrepit as a consequence of alcoholism, they were 'beached.' 114 He took a perverse pride in the hardships he had known in his youth, being prepared to concede that when he sailed in American ships, "they were pretty bad... The men were well paid, but were treated rather roughly. If they did not know their duties they were taught by rough means." But, on the whole,
American ships are not all that bad "if you can do your work." Then, the work aboard a sailing ship had been a craft. But now, "I really do not know what a seaman's duties are on a steamer, beyond heaving the lead and steering." For Captain Mackay, as for Joseph Conrad, the ugly steamship with its lubberly deck crew and its grimy stokehold gang was symptomatic of an alienated workforce in an industrial age of materialism:

I think in a great measure when I went to sea there was a halo of romance enshrouding it, and a boy went to sea without looking forward to any emoluments or considering what money he was to make. The advent of steam traffic has dispelled all that. There is now no romance.

From a study of their autobiographical writings, Burnett has found that a characteristic of ordinary working people in Great Britain in the period 1820-1920 was a patient resignation to their lot. Such people left little evidence of any sense of conscious discontent, far less of revolt. Any improvements they sought were within the existing system, they did not seek to overthrow it. For them, "work... was taken as given, like life itself, to be endured rather than enjoyed: most were probably glad enough to have it at all, and to expect to derive satisfaction or happiness from it was an irrelevant consideration." But these were the working people who remained and endured at home. Those who departed for distant Australia sought a better bargain in the new land. Many of the seamen who manned the coastal ships of Australia in 1906 were of that category of expatriate and their occupational heritage is recorded in the interim report of the Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill, thus:

In some respects the British sailor has been treated as a child, and in others denied the rights of a free man... The seaman should be treated more like his fellow-worker ashore... The nature of the seaman's calling doubtless will always differentiate him from Landsmen. But we see no reason why this difference should proceed to such lengths as it does... There does not appear to be any reason, making all allowances for the nature of their calling, why seamen should not be housed, fed, and treated as well as men on shore... Much that can be said about the wretched conditions prevailing in the East End of London, and the slums of New York, can be said with qualifications, not always in favour of the forecastle, of the accommodation provided in a large number of deep-sea British ships. When there is added to these dismal surroundings, the monotony, the hard labour, the dangers attendant on a sea-going

115 Ibid., Q21405.
116 Ibid., Q21316.
117 Ibid., Q21381.
118 Burnett, Useful Toil, p.15.
And if this was his heritage, it was also the Australian merchant seaman's manifesto.

It has been said of the Industrial Revolution that "it became the fiction of the time that the employer had not bought the worker, but merely his labour, and hence the worker's health or living conditions were no concern of his." From a present day study of the transcript of evidence of the Royal Commission of 1906, it is tempting to condemn as irresponsible the attitude displayed by the shipowners and their agents in regard to the living and working conditions of the seamen that they employed onboard their ships. But perhaps it is more accurate to conclude that, true to the ingrained conservatism of their class, the shipowners of that time displayed a patent lack of any sense of moral obligation towards their seamen. They saw their responsibility as extending no farther than the rudimentary limits set by the requirements of the law.

In his investigation of the social psychology of industry, J.A.C.Brown defined industrial morale as a measure of the willingness of the employee to work for his employer. He found that good morale had no direct relationship to the material conditions of the workplace. It was possible for good morale to exist amid bad material conditions and while good working conditions might improve an already good morale they would not by themselves create it. The fact was that "workers, in general, complain about working conditions not because they are objectively bad, but because they are worse than they need be in the circumstances." Work is not merely the means of earning a livelihood. As a social activity, it is fundamental to that sense of identity, self-esteem and status which is crucial to the psychological well-being of the individual. But, as concluded in the report of the Royal Commission of 1906, the heritage of the working

119 RC 1906, op cit, p 11.
120 Brown, Social Psychology, p.32. On the worker's labour as a commodity see also Fromm, Sane Society, p.92.
121 Brown, op cit, pp.194-197.
seaman was one in which he was denied his status as a responsible working-man. The shipowners had the power to create an atmosphere onboard their ships conducive to either a good or a bad morale. The seamen, on the other hand, had only very limited power over their own morale. Thus when the seamen were treated in a contemptuous manner, when the accommodation provided was worse than it need have been, when their health and safety was obviously of little account to the shipowner, then a culture of negative attitudes was created and it is evident that the shipowners and their agents were ultimately responsible for the creation of that unfortunate culture.¹²³

Tawney regretted the materialistic faith of capitalism which he saw as resting upon the doctrine that "every person and organisation have an unlimited right to exploit their economic opportunities as fully as they please."¹²⁴ He attributed the cause of industrial conflict to the fact that in the absence of a superior social principle the only influence acting as a restraint upon opposing interests is fear of adverse consequences, and fear is a notoriously "capricious influence."¹²⁵ Hatred feeds upon fear, and hatred said Hancock is to a greater or less degree "a normal by-product of industry". He saw it as part of the cultural baggage carried into Australia by working-class British migrants, soured by the exploitation of the Industrial Revolution.¹²⁶ In his critique of the 'acquisitive society', Tawney asked, rhetorically, whether it was any wonder that:

> the creed which affirms the absolute rights of property should sometimes be met with a counter-affirmation of the absolute rights of labour, less anti-social, indeed, and inhuman, but almost as dogmatic, almost as intolerant and thoughtless as itself?¹²⁷

Such a 'counter-affirmation' on the part of labour can be effective only in the form of collective action, for as Edmund Burke observed:

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¹²³ Brown, *op cit*, p.185. Fromm, observed that: "The crippling of productive activity results in either inactivity or overactivity. Hunger and force can never be conditions of productive activity. On the contrary, freedom, economic security, and an organization of society in which work can be the meaningful expression of man's faculties are the factors conducive to the expression of man's natural tendency to make productive use of his powers." Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p.107.


¹²⁵ *ibid*, p.179.

¹²⁶ Hancock, *Australia*, p.236.

¹²⁷ Tawney, *op cit*, p.31.
No men can act with effect who do not act in concert; no men can act in concert who do not act with confidence; no men can act in confidence who are not bound together with common opinions, common affections and common interests.\textsuperscript{128}

But even when aware of the oppression to which it is subjected, apathy is endemic among the downtrodden\textsuperscript{129} so that in the case of seamen the London \textit{Daily Telegraph} noted in 1887 that "the despair of Jack's friends has always been that he will not give himself any trouble."\textsuperscript{130} Collectivism, if it is to serve an effective purpose, requires leadership. The voiceless and effaced seamen, whose occupational inheritance was extraordinary in its deprivation,\textsuperscript{131} had need of a vocal leadership that was capable of providing both inspiration and the practical management of their interests that hitherto had been lacking and for which instead an anarchistic 'independence' had been substituted.

If seamen displayed a certain independence, shipowners and governments were peculiarly interdependent. Shipowners must rely upon governments for support and protection and governments must rely upon shipowners for transportation of the nation's produce in a manner that is both economic and efficient.\textsuperscript{132} In fact Lawrence states that:

\begin{quote}
Historically, merchant shipping operations have been regarded as extensions of national commercial life and of national power and prestige. Even after mercantilism was repudiated, shipping operations in many countries continued to rely upon their governments' patronage and protection; governments in turn have looked to merchant fleets as auxiliaries to their naval services and as instruments for commercial penetration of foreign lands.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

For British manufacturers the competitive environment of the first decade of the twentieth century was such that access to developing overseas markets and to sources of raw materials was never more crucial. British shipowners were wholly dependent upon a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{128}{Edmund Burke, cited in Brown, \textit{op cit}, p.18.}
\footnote{129}{"The masses are not easily stirred." Michels, \textit{Political Parties}, p.227. Lenin spoke of "the broad masses" as being "apathetic, inert, dormant and convention-ridden." Lenin, \textit{Left Wing Communism}, p.93. In Fromm's analysis, the 'receptive orientation' is "often to be found in societies in which the right of one group to exploit another is firmly established." Fromm, \textit{Man for Himself}, p.79.}
\footnote{130}{London \textit{Daily Telegraph} 25 August 1887, cited in Marsh & Ryan, \textit{op cit}, p.21.}
\footnote{131}{See Fraser, 'Prisoners of the Sea', \textit{Maritime Studies} 92, January/February 1997, pp.1-8.}
\footnote{132}{Lawrence, \textit{International Sea Transport}, p.52.}
\footnote{133}{\textit{ibid}, p.3.}
\end{footnotes}
growing overseas trade for their continued prosperity. 'Shipping nationalism' therefore decreed that in the liner trade with Australasia, British manufactured goods were given preference while the bulk of Australian and New Zealand primary produce was directed to the British market.

The idealism and the economic nationalism which characterised the fledgeling Commonwealth of Australia in its first decade is apparent in the report of the Royal Commission on Ocean Shipping Services of 2 October 1906, which recommended the establishment of a national fleet of merchant ships. An Australian line of mail steamers was envisaged, that would operate primarily in the interests of the producer and consumer. While making a loss was not countenanced, returning a profit would be of only secondary importance.

So far as its home trade is concerned, Australia has long since recognised the necessity of connecting the rural producer with the city consumer by an ever-extending railway system. The time has come for an application of the same principle to the larger markets of the world, to which the home demand having been met, our producers must obtain access if their occupations are to be considered with the maximum benefit to themselves and the community.

Such was the somewhat naive ideal. The reality was, as the New South Wales Official Year Book 1907-08 states prosaically, that:

The trade of the State is, to a very large extent, carried on under the British flag, the deep sea trade with the mother country and British possession being in the hands of the shipowners of the UK, and the coasting trade chiefly in local hands.

Australian and New Zealand domestic shipping companies, unable to compete with British and foreign ships in the intercontinental deep-sea trade routes, were forced to confine their operations to their respective coasts and to a few 'niche-markets' such as that provided by an established trade with the islands of the Pacific.

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134 *ibid*, p.52
137 *Year Book of NSW*, 1909, p.306.
A colonial merchant shipping conference was held in London in 1907. Presided over by Lloyd George as president of the Board of Trade, it was attended by shipowners and union representatives from Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. After four weeks of deliberation, one unanimous recommendation was that "the coastal trade of the Commonwealth be reserved for ships on the Australian register, i.e. ships conforming to Australian conditions, and licensed to trade on the Australian coast." Thus it was agreed that the Australian coastal trade would be reserved for ships owned by Australian companies and manned by Australian national seamen enjoying relatively superior conditions. The London recommendation was embodied in a draft bill of the Commonwealth which was introduced into the Senate in September 1907, but was then allowed to lapse. The bill was introduced again in 1908 and again in 1910, and in 1911. Each time it was allowed to lapse. Endorsement by both Houses was eventually achieved in 1912, but only after a prolonged process of political compromise and delay.

Bach, in his *Maritime History of Australia*, complains of the "paranoid tone" of the "distinctly nationalist emotive element" which has contributed to "the popular Australian belief that the whole shipping industry is a monopolistic conspiracy seeking to exploit Australian producers and shippers." But, in fact, who stood to gain from the new legislation? Its long and painful gestation period clearly indicated a lack of enthusiasm on the part of some who would be directly affected by the Navigation Act. Certainly, Australian shippers saw themselves as the losers since they were now more than ever to be subject to the freight rates charged by the monopolistic coastal shipping 'ring'. The coastal trade was secured for the Australian coastal shipping companies, but only at the considerable cost of meeting the improved accommodation and safety standards required by the new legislation. The only clear beneficiaries would seem to be the Australian seamen. They were promised much-needed improvements in living and

140 *Commonwealth Year Book No.17*, 1924, pp.1053-1054.
working conditions aboard Australian registered ships, but in fact the Act curtailed their employment prospects. In the long-term they would be effectively restricted to the coastal trade, since the economic consequences of their 'superior' conditions when translated into freight rates would ensure that Australia's overseas trade would be carried in British vessels. As a consequence of the new Commonwealth legislation there would be no place for an unsubsidised national Australian line within the highly competitive environment of the international shipping industry.\textsuperscript{142} The London conference of 1907, in providing approval for the main principles of the Australian Royal Commission's draft Navigation Bill, served in fact to reinforce British shipping nationalism.

Prior to the First World War, most deck and engineroom ratings in Australian coastal ships were members of the Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia [FSUA].\textsuperscript{143} While it was only on 21 September 1906 that that organisation was registered with the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, a Melbourne union and a Sydney union had been established in 1864\textsuperscript{144} and since 1876 had operated as a "loosely federated" body.\textsuperscript{145} In 1906, the first book of rules of the FSUA, as a formal federation, announced that it was composed of "any number of Sailors, Lamptrimmers, Donkeymen, Greasers, Firemen and Trimmers." With its head office initially established in Melbourne, the union had branches in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane together with agencies at Newcastle and Fremantle. Across the Tasman Sea, there were branches in Dunedin, Auckland and Wellington. All financial members were entitled to vote and were eligible to hold office in that branch to which they paid their contributions. But the right of a member of one branch to participate in the proceedings of any other branch was restricted. Members of one branch were excluded from management of another branch's financial affairs and could neither take part in the election of that branch's officers, nor of

\textsuperscript{142}By 1935 no Australian ships were employed in the liner trade with the United Kingdom and Europe. Only 25 of 183 Australian ships (27.2 per cent of the total gross tonnage) traded offshore and not all of these were manned by Australians. See Appendix 8.

\textsuperscript{143}`I am informed that about 7,000 men belong to this Union, and about 98 per cent of the seamen of the Australian interstate ships." Mr Justice Higgins judgment 30 November 1911. 5CAR153

\textsuperscript{144}5C/1/J162.

\textsuperscript{145}Fitzpatrick & Cahill, Seamen's Union, p.31.
its delegates, nor its representatives to the executive council. Branch autonomy was thus jealously safeguarded.146

The executive council of the FSUA performed the functions of a committee of management and, as established in November 1906, comprised nine members with Labor Senator R.S. Guthrie of the South Australian branch as General President.147 Guthrie's personal commitment to reform of seamen's conditions is evident from the transcript of the Royal Commission of 1906, and that it had earned him the gratitude of the membership is evident from his unbroken term of office in the Seamen's Union since January 1888. But even while returning him to office, the rank and file of the union could not have mistaken Guthrie for one of their own. Though he looked and acted the part of the plain and practical 'sailorman,'148 it was as one accustomed to take his stand aft, rather than before the mast. As a senator in the Federal Parliament his social status was superior to that of the common seamen and his knowledge of men and affairs more extensive than theirs. Guthrie, with his established home and large family, his leading position in the Rechabite Movement, and his membership of the Presbyterian Church was of the respectable, Protestant, middle-class. In him could be recognised the stereotype of the master mariner who, though retired ashore, retained an ingrained habit of command. While indefatigable in seeking amelioration of the seamen's working and living conditions, Guthrie abhorred radicalism. Moderate and conservative in his public as well as in his private life, he aligned himself with a conservative section of the labour movement. As a liberal Labor politician he sought practical realisation of the ideal of social reform by constitutional means, no matter how prolonged or compromised that process might prove to be.

And 'Bob' Guthrie in his time was not alone in his antipathy to radicalism. Across the Tasman, 'Big Bill' Belcher, a former British bosun and the veteran secretary of the

146 Union Rules 1906. Box D170/6/21, WUA.
147 ibid.
148 ADB, Vol.9 p.146.
Dunedin Branch of the FSUA was under remorseless attack from younger and more radical men enthused more with incipient class warfare than by the need for reactionary social reform.\textsuperscript{149} And on the west coast of the United States of America, Andrew Furuseth, the founder and secretary of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, and president of the International Sailors' Union of the USA would routinely accuse his critics of "IWWism".\textsuperscript{150} The Norwegian-born Furuseth was another conservative 'practical sailorman' who, having gone to sea in 1873, had worked in Norwegian, Swedish, British, French and American sailing ships.\textsuperscript{151} Of him it was said that the two things he despised most were radicalism and longshoremen.\textsuperscript{152} Meanwhile, in the 'Old Country', centralised control of finance and power was a guiding principle of Britain's National Sailors' and Firemen's Union [NSFU] under the presidency of Joseph Havelock Wilson MP.\textsuperscript{153}

If authoritarian in its dealings with its membership, the FSUA executive took an idealistic view of the union's industrial role. The objective as proclaimed in the 1906 Union Rule Book appears as something between a pious hope and a paternalistic admonition:

To counteract influences that may be working against its members' interests; to initiate reforms; to sweep away [sic] abuses; to enable its members to fill their positions with comfort to themselves and advantage to their employers; to watch over and guard the interests of its members whenever they may be assailed; and while doing this members must bear in mind that the Federated Seamen's Union is not formed to work in antagonism to their employers; on the contrary they are required to show by their ability and strict attention to their duties that their being members of this Union is a guarantee to owners of ships or shipping companies that in employing them they are consulting their own interests. By an adherence to these objects, individual selfishness and disloyalty to one another and to their common interests, which have unfortunately existed among seamen, will be greatly obviated, and the Union may hope to prosper in harmony and concord, and create a feeling of goodwill towards it, which will augment its power and influence for the benefit of the class within its bounds.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150}Nelson, \textit{op cit}, p.73.
\textsuperscript{151}Weintraub, \textit{op cit}, pp.2-3.
\textsuperscript{152}Nelson, \textit{op cit}, p.153.
\textsuperscript{154}Union Rules 1906, D170/6/21, WUA.
The wage rates of Australian national seamen in 1907 had only just returned to the level that they had attained in 1889 on the eve of the disastrous strikes. Nevertheless, Australian rates were far superior to those of the British Merchant Service, where it was acknowledged that each year between 1850 and 1910 some 10,000 seamen, or about 5 per cent of the total, deserted. An Australian AB in an inter-state freighter in 1907 was paid L7 a month, with his victualling, or 'keep,' provided additionally by the shipowner. His basic rate was 40 per cent more than the wage received by a British AB in a comparable deep-sea steamer. Australian firemen receiving L9 and Australian trimmers receiving L7 each month plus 'keep' were respectively 80 per cent and 75 per cent better off than their British counterparts. But the most telling contrast was that between Australian rates of pay and those of lascar seamen. A lascar AB, in a British ship in the first decade of the twentieth century, in return for working unlimited hours, received L1.13/- each month and a lascar fireman received three shillings more.

Mr Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, somewhat optimistically, recognised the AB as a skilled worker - "even a steamboat seaman is" - on the basis of the wide range of accomplishments that was required of him:

The steamboat AB of the Australian coast must be able to overhaul and work the gear for cargo, to rig and unrig derricks, to drive a winch, to make fast lines, to act as handyman carpenter, to stow cargo, to splice hemp rope or wire rope, to paint anywhere on the ship, to work boats and lower them, to steer the ship, to use the compass, to heave the lead.

But below decks, the steamship firemen and trimmers, who laboured in tremendous heat and noise, were an anachronism. These "...toiling helots of civilization", were a

155 SCAR163 &164.
157 Year Book of NSW, 1909, p.316. See also Appendix 2, Table 2.
158 SCAR163.
159 SCAR164.
160 Bullen, op cit, p.305.
spectre from the excesses of 19th century industrialism. They were described by one observer as:

poor wretches black and scorched like the denizens of the nether regions... the stokers still toiled in the bowel of the great ships, before the blazing furnaces, and labor Members of Parliament lolled on the saloon decks and enjoyed the comforts of a modern passenger liner.161

It took many years before the progress of marine technology finally rendered extinct the labouring fireman and his assistant. During that time their presence exerted a baleful influence upon maritime industrial relations.

Within the maritime workplace, the seamen of the deck department were divided into 'daymen' and 'watchkeepers'. The 'daymen' performed the routine tasks of cleaning, painting and maintenance about the ship's decks. By 1907, as a consequence of successive agreements between owners and the union, they routinely worked a 9 hour day six days a week.162 Other than as a consequence of night-time arrivals or departures daymen, unlike watchkeepers, might expect to spend every night in their bunks. The watchkeepers numbered three or four men in each of the two watches - port and starboard - and their concern was with the navigation of the ship rather than its maintenance. They kept lookout, steered, and acted as bridge messenger. While the man at the wheel had little protection from the elements, lookouts had none. Standing their watch on the bridge-wing, or forecastle head, or aloft in a 'crow's nest' they were exposed to the rigours of the weather. Particularly in the long watches of the night, the helmsman and lookouts might well find their tasks both physically and mentally burdensome. Maintaining an accurate course by the steering compass and keeping a sharp-lookout were semi-automatic tasks performed in circumstances where conversation and social distraction were precluded but, nevertheless, unflagging vigilance was demanded of the watchkeeper. And this was particularly so in coastal waters where the

161 Adela Pankhurst Walsh, typescript, 'Peace in Industry', MS2123 Box 11 Folder 103. NLA.
162 SCAR154.
likelihood of oncoming traffic and the proximity of the land provided constant hazards to safe navigation.

The deck watchkeepers worked 'watch and watch' of four hours on duty and four off, with 'dog watches' of two hours each between 4 and 8pm to produce alternation. Thus they worked 14 hours and 10 hours on alternate days, an average of 12 hours per day for seven days a week when at sea. Firemen and trimmers worked in the stokehold, as did greasers in the engineroom, in three consecutive four hour watches so that theirs was an eight hours day, every day of the week when at sea. Similarly, deck and engineer officers worked in three watches, although their administrative tasks inevitably encroached upon their off watch hours.163

The labour of the stokehold staff in a steamer was clearly both arduous and detrimental to a man's health. The work of watchkeeping deck seamen was less laborious, but it was no less pernicious in its ultimate effect, for the watchkeepers were particularly subject to sleep deprivation. And that deprivation was peculiarly severe in coastal ships in which arrivals and departures were more frequent then those of deep-sea vessels. Mr Justice Higgins calculated that in a period of 24 hours at sea the time available for deck watchkeepers to sleep consisted of two widely separated periods of 3 hours 15 minutes and 2 hours 5 minutes respectively and commented that:

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\text{even these few hours for sleep are, at present, liable to be reduced if the watch below be called up, as usual, when the ship enters port... The days on which a ship enters and leaves a port on the same day are exceptionally hard.}^{164}
\]

In sailing the ship, hours of work such as these did not attract overtime rates,165 and even when safely alongside the wharf there might be frequent calls to 'shift ship.' Mechanical facilities such as travelling cranes were largely non-existent on Australian wharves and so it was routinely necessary to haul a ship along the wharf to facilitate the process of

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163SCAR155.
164SCAR156-157.
165SCAR161.
loading or discharging cargo by means of the vessel's own derricks and winches.\textsuperscript{166}

Then, regardless of the hour, the deck seamen would be called out to drive the windlass and adjust the mooring lines, "sometimes even six or seven times in the night."\textsuperscript{167}

On behalf of those seamen whose lives were regulated by the commercial rhythm of Australian coastal shipping, Senator Guthrie, as general president of their union, and Arthur Cooper as its general secretary, arrived at another accommodation with the Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association [CSOA] on 1 April 1909. As a concession, the shipowners agreed that an eight hour day would be worked by all hands when a ship was in port. But, when at sea, the deck seamen would continue to work the 12 hour day. There was to be no increase in the 1907 rates of pay. And payment of the seaman's wages remained merely a monthly concessionary advance on the total amount earned, which would otherwise be paid at the close of the agreed period set out in the ship's articles of agreement in accordance with the British concept and practice of the 'round voyage.' The union's executive officers agreed to stand by this agreement until at least 31 December 1910 and it was further agreed that any dispute arising before that date would be settled by means of negotiation between the general secretary of the union and the secretary of the CSOA. No cessation of work was to occur during those negotiations.\textsuperscript{168} There was to be no direct action. However, when the 'enterprise' agreement between the FSUA and the CSOA expired in December 1910, the membership declined to renew it.\textsuperscript{169} A demand for preference, \textit{vis-a-vis} non-unionists, in selection for employment was in dispute. The union also demanded that an 8 hour day be worked on deck when at sea in the form of three consecutive watches, as was worked by deck

\textsuperscript{166}For the rudimentary facilities prevalent see, Tull, "Blood on the Cargo", \textit{Labour History}, No.52, May 1987, pp.15-29.
\textsuperscript{167}\textit{5CAR}\textsuperscript{169}.
\textsuperscript{168}Fitzpatrick, \textit{op cit}, p.32.
\textsuperscript{169}Higgins disapproved of the agreement, stating: "Up to the present the parties have not had any award under the Act, but they have been working under successive agreements, or rather under the original agreement with many patches. The last of the documents of agreement came to an end with the year 1910, and it contains so many traces of struggle, between the negotiating parties, so many alterations and additions inartificially expressed, that it is difficult to understand, and full of surprises." Higgins Judgment 1911, \textit{5CAR}154.
Though industrial action was threatened, it did not eventuate. Instead, a compulsory conference was called by Mr Justice Higgins and the dispute was submitted to his court.

The Seamen's Award, which Mr Justice Higgins handed down in November 1911, ended the 12 hour day for deck seamen by introducing, with effect from 30 June 1912, the concept of three consecutive four hour watches - an event later to be commemorated by the Seamen's Union as "a milestone in the history of the Australian Seamen". Bach, however, is less jubilant, complaining that from the owners' perspective, with Higgins on the Bench, "things began to take a turn for the worse". Advocates for Australian shipowning interests are adamant that the seagoing awards handed down by Mr Justice Higgins in 1910 and 1911 had an adverse effect upon the coastal companies' profitability. In 1912 the Adelaide Steamship Company was required to appear six times before the Arbitration Court in connection with awards to various categories of seafarers and between 1913 and 1914 the company appeared a further four times. But some good did come of it, as Page concludes on behalf of the Adelaide Steam Ship Company, "at least the arbitration avoided strikes by the seamen." Another historian of the shipping companies, McKellar, goes further than Bach in asserting that the president of the Arbitration Court, by 1914, "was trying to set himself up as a sort of super-manager of the shipping industry." In a significant reversal of roles it is the president of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, rather than the president of the FSUA, who comes under attack from the shipowners' apologists.

170 SCAR154. See also. Fitzpatrick & Cahill, op cit, p.34.
171 SCAR154.
174 Page, op cit, p.174. Higgins himself said that, "I conceive it to be my duty to consider the interest of the public as well as the seamen", and went to describe his Court as "but an instrument created by the public to protect the public from the evils of industrial warfare." SCAR160.
175 McKellar, op cit, p.316.
Mr Justice Higgins' Seamen's Award of November 1911 sought to address in practical if paternalistic terms the ethical contradiction which he identified as the "very real antimony in the wages system between profits and humanity."¹⁷⁶ His 'basic wage' concept as expressed in the earlier Harvester judgment was intended to provide for 'the normal needs of an average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilised community.' With his Seamen's Award Higgins brought the seaman's wages and working conditions within the ambit of more orthodox, shoreside, employment. While acknowledging the seaman's right to be considered 'an average employee' living in 'a civilised community', it went some way towards compensating him in economic terms for the disabilities inseparable from his peculiar industrial environment.¹⁷⁷ And Judge Higgins, while endeavouring to impress upon the shipowners their moral obligation in regard to wages and conditions, had no doubt of the industry's economic capacity to pay¹⁷⁸ and maintained that such expenditure would actually be beneficial to both sides of the bargain, since:

It is those who have leisure rarely who misuse it most when it does come. It is not by treating these men as children, or by holding them in a leash, that they will develop the sense of responsibility.¹⁷⁹

The minimum rates of pay of all ratings were increased by the Higgins Award of 1911 from the levels negotiated by the union executive in 1909. Thus a Donkeyman's monthly basic rate of pay became £1 1s. plus 'keep' while a fireman or a greaser received £1 10s. (an increase of 11 per cent) and a trimmer £1 8s. Those rates might be compared to transport workers' wages ashore such as the £1 3s. 4d. earned by a railway locomotive driver or the £1 9s. 12d. paid to a locomotive fireman, from which they had to provide their own 'keep'. The basic rates of pay for bosuns and lamptrimmers were specified as £1 9s. per month while ABs received £1 8s. (an increase of 14 per cent). Again, those rates of pay were comparable to such other transport employees as railway labourers who received £1 9s. 12d.,

¹⁷⁶Higgins, New Province, pp.76-77.
¹⁷⁷SUA publication: 'Notes on Seamen's Award, 1911', Box D170/6/20, WUA.
¹⁷⁸5CAR157-158, & 164.
¹⁷⁹5CAR156.
and railway signalmen and guards earning L9 and L10.4/- respectively. For the first time, three meal breaks each of one hour's duration - though only when in port - were specified for the seamen. And hours of labour both at sea and in port were regulated. Thus overtime rates and compensation either in monetary terms or in the form of days off were specified for the Sundays and the public holidays unavoidably worked in the course of a sea voyage.\textsuperscript{180}

The 1911 Award is particularly significant in that it went some way towards satisfying the aspirations towards an accepted place within respectable society by men who previously had been commonly dismissed, derided, and despised as immature and irresponsible transients. Higgins commented in his judgment that: "I have frequent indications in my arbitration work that efficiency, sobriety, and morality are intimately dependent on settled family life, and family life on economic conditions."\textsuperscript{181} The Award recognised the role of seamen as responsible working-class family men by making it mandatory rather than concessionary that the seaman be paid his accrued wages on the first day of each calendar month, or as soon thereafter as possible upon arrival in a main port.\textsuperscript{182} And the employer was now required, upon the written order of the seaman, to allot up to 75 per cent of the seaman's monthly wage, instead of the maximum 50 per cent as previously, to the seaman's wife or close relative as he specified.

Under the terms of the Seamen's Award it was now possible for an Australian seaman on articles to quit his job by giving his employer notice of his intention. Although he could give notice only when his ship was in his home-port (the port in which the seaman customarily signed articles), this was a far cry from the choice formerly available to him of becoming either a fugitive through desertion, or of serving out the term of the articles no matter how prolonged or onerous that contract might prove to be. The ship's master, too, might end the seaman's employment by giving him 24 hours

\textsuperscript{180} Year Book of New South Wales, 1911, p.602. See also Appendix 2, Table 2.
\textsuperscript{181}SCAR164.
\textsuperscript{182}SCAR167.
notice of termination. But if the master did so in any port other than in the seaman's home-port then the shipowner was required to provide the seaman with a free passage to his home-port and pay him wages until he arrived there, rather than leave him stranded as had been known to happen in former times.  

Just as the 1911 Award sought to render the Australian seaman respectable, so respectability was the keynote of the rules issued in 1912 by general president Guthrie and the executive of the FSUA. While probationary membership was open to anyone "competent to perform the work required of him, and of good character", the union rules noted that probationary members would be rejected by the union within six months of joining "for bad character, drunkenness, broaching cargo, or missing passages." And, doubtless to discourage the entry of undesirables, the fee upon joining was now raised to L1, equivalent to half the week's wage for an AB, together with a quarter's subscription of six shillings in advance and another one shilling for a membership book. Significantly, the 1911 Award did not make an order for preference to be given by shipowners to FSUA members when 'picking up' seamen for employment. Higgins declined to "fetter the discretion of the employer in selecting his employees," However, the union's executive interpreted the matter of preference in characteristically idealistic terms as amounting to a 'gentleman's agreement', assuring the rank-and-file that "if a union man is available when required, and has a good record, the companies undertake to employ him."  

In recognition of the seamen's new-found status, a Seamen's Compensation Act was passed by the Federal Parliament in 1911. But, there being significant sums of money at stake rather than mere ideals, the Act was immediately challenged by coastal
shipowners in the High Court of Australia. A precedent had been established in 1909\textsuperscript{187} when similar legislation had been ruled unconstitutional by the High Court. This time a majority of four judges reversed the previous decision.\textsuperscript{188} But the new Seamen's Compensation Act, "an Act relating to compensation to Seamen for injuries suffered in the course of their employment,"\textsuperscript{189} omitted any mention of the tuberculosis that was the scourge of those forced in the course of their employment to endure the 'hard-lying' that prevailed in so many ships of the coastal companies.

Unauthorised combination in an anarchistic demonstration of 'independence' by firemen aboard a coastal ship caused an initial refusal by Mr Justice Higgins to hand down his Seamen's Award in November 1911.\textsuperscript{190} It occurred onboard the almost new but ill-fated steamer Koombana,\textsuperscript{191} which serviced the widely dispersed settlements along the West Australian coast.\textsuperscript{192} A dispute, in which the ship's firemen demanded the removal of the chief steward, had left the ship stranded in Fremantle Harbour without its stokehold complement.\textsuperscript{193} Traditionally the owner's man \textit{par excellence},\textsuperscript{194} the chief-steward was a ship's housekeeper. He provisioned his ship and ensured that domestic consumption remained strictly within the limits of the owner's budget. In so doing, his authority extended to control over such sensitive matters of as the quantity and quality of food prepared, and the availability of alcohol and tobacco for purchase by the crew. Firemen, on the other hand, of all seamen were often the most intolerant of authority especially that assumed by stewards.\textsuperscript{195} Guthrie and his executive had previously entered into an agreement with the Koombana's owners of which Higgins was critical:

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{187}Seamen's Compensation Act, No.29 of 1909. \\
\textsuperscript{188}\textit{Fitzpatrick & Cahill, \textit{op cit}, p.48. Also, \textit{Seamen's Journal}, July 1935.} \\
\textsuperscript{189}\textit{Seamen's Compensation Act, No.13 of 1911.} \\
\textsuperscript{190}\textit{SCAR173.} \\
\textsuperscript{191}Built in 1909, \textit{Koombana} sank in 1912 during a tropical cyclone at Port Hedland W.A. Pemberton. \textit{op cit, Appendix II, p.276.} \\
\textsuperscript{192}\textit{Koombana} serviced ports including Port Hedland, Broome, and Wyndham in northern WA where summer temperatures can exceed 40 degrees celsius \textit{outside} the stokehold. \\
\textsuperscript{193}\textit{SCAR173.} \\
\textsuperscript{194}In this context Captain H.G.Burtfield, master of the British ship \textit{Surrey}, stated that the pay reduction of August 1925 applied to all onboard except himself, his most senior officers, and the chief steward. Deportation Board evidence, 5 Sept 1925, A467/1 SF12/1 Box B32, Vol.1, p.70. AA. \\
\textsuperscript{195}Among many instances see Olssen, \textit{op cit}, p.25 & p.31. Also Walker, \textit{Solidarity Forever}, p.246.}
The agreement is not made under the auspices of this Court; and its faulty framework may be a cause of some misapprehension. I know that the men are acting in defiance of the executive of the Union; but the Union has, by its agreement, taken absolute responsibility for its members' acts, and must devise some system whereby unruly members can be brought to book... The employers look to the Union to keep its contract, and rightly so.¹⁹⁶

The dispute in the *Koombana* reached an impasse and Mr Justice Higgins being of the opinion that "you cannot have award and strike too,"¹⁹⁷ the FSUA made hurried arrangements to despatch a complement of firemen to Fremantle willing to displace the *Koombana* men. Only after the ship had sailed from Fremantle did the president of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court hand down his historic judgment.¹⁹⁸ Fitzpatrick has remarked of this incident that it was an early example of 'job control'.¹⁹⁹ Higgins himself was impressed by "what a few men in the *Koombana* can do".²⁰⁰ 'Job control', or as Nelson has described it, "spark-plug unionism, where a militant minority took the lead and called on their fellow workers to come along,"²⁰¹ was a demonstration of spontaneous radicalism on the job - at the point of exploitation.²⁰² It was an attempt to reshape the fundamental pattern of authority and organisation.²⁰³ In the *Koombana* incident the firemen reacted against the shipowner's authority. In so doing they confronted the familiar troika of shipowner, state and the law. But they were actually defeated by the hasty intervention of their own industrial organisation which acted at the behest of the state's instrumentality, the federal Arbitration Court, in order to protect the commercial interests of the shipowner.

Anarchism meant a profound abhorrence of the corruption, compromise and delay involved in the political process.²⁰⁴ Syndicalism, emerging out of anarchism,
brought with it many anarchistic features including a contempt for parliamentarians and a
denial of that dogma long held dear by the 'respectable' middle-class that property is
sacrosanct. In practice, syndicalism in the years immediately before and during the First
World War, was an explicit rejection of the political process which was seen as
inadequate for the purpose of securing the social objectives of the labour movement. In its
place a radical minority looked to direct action at the place of work. Direct action in the
form of job control as demonstrated by the firemen in the *Koombana* was the first
principle of the anarcho-syndicalist *Industrial Workers of the World* (IWW), an
organisation having its origins in the United States of America that first appeared in
Australia in 1908, held meetings in Adelaide in 1911, and in 1913 established its
Australian headquarters in Sussex Street on the Sydney waterfront.

Industrial strength rather than the due process of the law was the mainstay of the
IWW whose constitution stated unequivocally that "the working class and the
employing class have nothing in common". In less didactic terms, Judge Higgins
complained of the alienation resulting from loss of "direct contact between the ultimate
employer and the employees. Neither the shareholder nor the employees see, usually, the
other's point of view." The structure of a modern business company within the
capitalist system ensured intrusion between the ultimate employer and employee of
functionaries who carried on the day to day operations. This managerial class, he
inferred, exacerbated the alienation. But the president of the FSUA was ideologically
aligned with that 'managerial class' and so was opposed on principle to "disruptive
militancy." To Guthrie, the anarcho-syndicalism of the IWW was anathema. In terms
reminiscent of Conrad's caricature of the disreputable Donkin with his "filthy eloquence,"

205 ibid.
207 Turner, *op cit*, p.95.
208 Markey, *In Case of Oppression*, p.84.
210 *ibid*, pp.158-160.
211 Fitzpatrick & Cahill, *op cit*, p.43.
Guthrie contemptuously condemned the IWW as the "scum of the labour movement".\(^{212}\) However, in the rising tide of militancy which heralded the outbreak of world war, the IWW became increasingly influential among itinerant and casual workers, who of all employees were those most removed from sympathy with the viewpoint of the shareholders. Given their workplace inheritance of exploitation and deprivation within a hierarchical social structure where the authority of managerial functionaries held sway, and given further that they were essentially itinerant, and that they were employed on a casual basis, rank and file seamen of the FSUA were particularly susceptible to IWW ideology.\(^{213}\)

Just prior to the First World War, the FSUA had some 7,000 financial members.\(^{214}\) Of these, 5,493 were employed on any one day in 1914 in ships of the Australian coastal fleet.\(^{215}\) The majority signed articles in New South Wales, in either Sydney or Newcastle, so that in 1915 the New South Wales branch of the Union had 5856 members and was the second largest affiliate of the Labor Council of New South Wales.\(^{216}\) With the largest membership of any of the sea-going unions, the FSUA was therefore a formidable body of, at best, semi-skilled working men which enjoyed the benefits of a virtually 'closed shop' unionism aboard ship.

In October 1913, Royal Assent was proclaimed for the Commonwealth's long-delayed Navigation Act.\(^{217}\) Even so, the new legislation was postponed in view of the prospect of war and uncertain consequences for merchant shipping. But even while held in abeyance, the Navigation Act loomed large upon the horizon of the 23 companies which, with their 174 steamships totalling 206,424 tons net, comprised the Australian

\(^{212}\)ibid, p.41. Lenin condemned anarcho-syndicalism as "but the twin brother of Opportunism." Lenin, State and Revolution, p.47.

\(^{213}\)Markey, op cit, p.84.

\(^{214}\)5CAi?153.

\(^{215}\)Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No.13, 1920, p.635. Also see Appendix 1.

\(^{216}\)Markey, op cit, p.82.

coastal shipping industry of 1914. Already experiencing adverse economic effects in consequence of the Arbitration Court's awards to the maritime unions, the coastal companies viewed with dismay the prospect of expensive new statutory requirements onboard their ships. The Australian coast may have had a dismal record of loss and disaster, but what caused real concern to the commercial shipowners was a comprehensive list of measures relevant to the seamen's health, welfare and safety. These measures, the shipowners protested, must so erode the profitability of the Australian coastal shipping industry as to render doubtful its future commercial viability. Viewed from another aspect the Navigation Act, while seeking to ameliorate the seamen's living and working conditions, clearly demonstrated that those in authority retained a conviction that merchant seamen were significantly different from other industrial workers. The precedents for the punitive sanctions contained in Part II Division 12 (Discipline) Sections 99-115 of the Commonwealth Navigation Act 1912 lay in the British Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, which was itself a product of British maritime law in which, during the 19th century, the statutes governing employment relations onboard ship had, as Quinlan comments, "become increasingly comprehensive and interventionist to a degree not matched by any other body of British law regulating labour." By their severity these penalties demonstrated the willingness of the state to deploy its full coercive powers in favour of the private Australian shipowner, both in protection of his property and in support of his enterprise.

The outbreak of world war in August 1914 heralded a novel recognition of the international seaman's role. "Shipping is the jugular vein which if severed would destroy

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218 Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No.13, 1920, p.635. See also Appendix 1.
219 87 lives and 23 vessels of all types were lost on average in each year between 1910 & 1914 incl. according to the Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No.13, 1920, p.636. See also Appendix 5.
221 Bach, op cit, p.216.
222 Merchant Shipping Act 1894 (UK), Part II, 'Provisions as to Discipline', Sections 220 to 238 incl.
223 Quinlan, Industrial Relations Before Unions, p.8.
the whole life of the nation," proclaimed Lloyd George.\textsuperscript{224} The hitherto invisible seamen were now seen as indispensable not only to the nation's well-being but to its very survival. But it was recognition gained only at the cost of heavy loss of life at sea.\textsuperscript{225} By August 1917, as a consequence of unrestricted submarine warfare, British imports were at a dangerously low level.\textsuperscript{226} Among British seamen there was growing unrest.\textsuperscript{227} In the United States of America the La Follette Seamen's Act of 4 March 1915 had decreed, in part, that desertion by a foreign seaman in an American port would no longer carry a mandatory sentence of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{228} By the summer of 1917, in a pragmatic demonstration of their internationalism, British seamen in significant numbers were deserting their ships in US ports. They did so in order to sign-on vessels of the new and rapidly expanding US merchant marine, where wage rates were some 80% higher.\textsuperscript{229} Although the British Government prosecuted any deserter who subsequently returned to the United Kingdom, the only immediately practical and certainly novel way in which shipowners could retain their national seamen in US ports was to compete for them in the international wage market.\textsuperscript{230} Through the offices of the Government's Shipping Board, however, the burden of that cost was borne by the British taxpayer, while the shipowners were provided in 1917 with a requisitioning rate that guaranteed them a rate of return upon their investment equivalent to that which they had enjoyed in 1913.\textsuperscript{231}

By the Armistice in November 1918, the wage rates of British seamen and firemen were between 150 and 190 per cent higher than they had been in 1914\textsuperscript{232} so that

\textsuperscript{225}The wartime Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Shipping estimated that 15,000 lives were lost in the British Merchant Service and 33,500 in the Royal Navy during the war of 1914-18. Money, \textit{Triumph of Nationalization}, p.92. Also, Kinahan, \textit{op cit}, p.101. See also Appendix 4.
\textsuperscript{226}Scott, \textit{op cit}, p.624.
\textsuperscript{227}Mogridge, \textit{op cit}, p.388.
\textsuperscript{228}Weintraub, \textit{op cit}, pp.131-132.
\textsuperscript{229}Mogridge, \textit{op cit}, p.387.
\textsuperscript{230}Evidence of Robert Shore, AB, of British ship Themistocles, Deportation Board, 2 October 1925.
\textsuperscript{231}PDHC, 24 May 1917, p.2572.
\textsuperscript{232}Mogridge, \textit{op cit}, p.387.
a British AB was earning a basic rate of between L14.10/- and L15 each month.\textsuperscript{233} Guthrie, however, in his presidential address to the union in 1915 had announced that the FSUA would abide by arbitration. Thus, when the 1911 Award had expired at the end of 1916 the FSUA, under the leadership of general president Charles Burke and general secretary Arthur Cooper (with the now-deposed president Senator Guthrie in attendance), had entered into an agreement with the shipowners that was certified and filed by the Arbitration Court and that was intended to continue until twelve months after the final declaration of peace by Great Britain.\textsuperscript{234}

Dissatisfaction among the seamen, however, resulted in Mr Justice Higgins' judgment of 18 December 1918 which gave the AB L12.5.0d per month, or 53 per cent more than under the 1911 Award, and the fireman L14.5.0d or 42.5 per cent more, and provided for fourteen days paid leave upon completion of twelve months continuous service in one ship. But the union was unable to secure from the Government any retrospective compensation for war risk.\textsuperscript{235} Higgins based the increase that he awarded simply on a 28 per cent rise in the cost of food in Australia since 1914 and refused to take into consideration the situation existing in Great Britain and the United States,\textsuperscript{236} commenting afterwards that:

\begin{quote}
The men were excited by the exceptionally high rates granted in Great Britain and in the United States as a consequence of the war. Australian seamen had prided themselves on being the best paid in the world, and now found themselves left in the rear. They did not stay to consider that the cost of living had increased far more in Great Britain and in the United States than in Australia.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

In Great Britain, Havelock Wilson CBE CH, has been described as a long-term "unswerving Liberal of the lib-lab variety."\textsuperscript{238} On behalf of the NSFU he had declared

\textsuperscript{233}Evidence of Captain W.K.Wallace master of British ship \textit{Aeneas} and of Robert Shore AB of British ship \textit{Themistocles}. Deportation Board. 10 September and 2 October 1925 respectively. A467/1 SF12/4 B32, p.208 & p.906. AA.
\textsuperscript{234}12CA/R8 & 12CAR752.
\textsuperscript{235}12CAR756-759. Also, Fitzpatrick & Cahill, \textit{op cit}, p.46.
\textsuperscript{236}12CAR756.
\textsuperscript{237}Higgins, \textit{New Province}, p.81.
\textsuperscript{238}Mogridge, \textit{op cit}, p.396.
full co-operation and a postponement of all industrial activity upon the outbreak of war in 1914.\textsuperscript{239} Wilson's jingoistic campaign in support of recruitment and national savings together with his less reputable anti-pacifist activities gained him imperial honours.\textsuperscript{240} But he drew even closer to the British Establishment when an agreement was reached in August 1917 between his executive and the Government that the NSFU would henceforth be recognised as the sole source of supply for seamen and that the supply would be jointly controlled by the union and the shipowners' association, the Shipping Federation. The establishment of joint control by shipowner association and NSFU executive which became established practice with the formation in November 1917 of a National Maritime Board comprised of shipowners and the representatives of the seafaring unions, ensured that an already authoritarian union executive would become increasingly autocratic in its relations with the membership.

Guthrie's control of the FSUA was but a pale reflection of the authority wielded by Havelock Wilson over the NSFU, but it might still be labelled autocratic in that he sought to remain aloof from the rank and file and to impose his policy by means of an oligarchic executive. But in accordance with the well-known characteristic of autocratic industrial leadership that, while justifying its actions on the basis that the rank and file is 'incompetent', it tends to become insensitive to the emotional climate within which it operates,\textsuperscript{241} Guthrie declared himself fully in favour of Prime Minister Hughes' conscription policy in 1916.\textsuperscript{242} Conscription was introduced in New Zealand that same year and while New Zealand merchant seamen were denied exemption from it, labour leaders who spoke out against it were charged with sedition.\textsuperscript{243}

The movement to end Guthrie's conservative rule rapidly gained momentum as 1916 drew to a close. At an Executive Council meeting in September 1916, which was

\textsuperscript{239}ibid, p.387.
\textsuperscript{240}ibid, p.396. Also see Gallagher, Revolt on the Clyde, pp.187-188.
\textsuperscript{241}Brown, op cit, pp.225-226.
\textsuperscript{242}ADB, Vol.9, p.146.
\textsuperscript{243}Rice, Oxford History of New Zealand, p.319.
attended by the New Zealand Union's general president W.T. Young and general secretary Belcher, the vote was 7:1 against conscription.\textsuperscript{244} And after a call by the New South Wales branch for a plebiscite to be taken on Guthrie and his stand, a special meeting was held in Melbourne on 17 January 1917 at which the general secretary resigned his office with dignity.\textsuperscript{245} Later that same year in Dunedin, New Zealand, W. Belcher was deposed from union office with far less decorum by the militants W. Clarke and W. T. Young who then provided the New Zealand union with a radical leadership which Bollinger sees as having been largely influenced in its ideology by the literature of the IWW.\textsuperscript{246} Guthrie had gone, but within the executive council of the FSUA an oligarchy remained in the persons of general president Burke, general secretary Cooper and Con Wallace MP. And it was with that executive in place that the union plunged into the strike which began in the railway workshops of Sydney on 2 August 1917.

It has been argued that the Great Strike of 1917 was a spontaneous protest on the part of labour, with unions in succession entering the fray upon demand of the rank and file and defying the efforts of their leadership to gain control and direction of it.\textsuperscript{247} Certainly it was so in the case of the FSUA. And when, in the end, after eighty-two days on strike the seamen surrendered unconditionally and returned to work on 22 October 1917, they found non-union labour ensconced aboard the coastal ships.\textsuperscript{248} The seamen were defeated when the CSOA withdrew from its 'gentlemen's agreement' and denied the unionists preference while the government, in concert with private enterprise, recruited and deployed volunteer labour onboard the ships.\textsuperscript{249} The executive of the FSUA had shown itself powerless to influence either the Government or the CSOA and now the membership was divided and displaced.

\textsuperscript{244}Fitzpatrick & Cahill, \textit{op cit}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{245}ibid.
\textsuperscript{246}Bollinger, \textit{op cit}, pp.126-128.
\textsuperscript{247}Nelson, \textit{op cit}, p.64. Also, Turner, \textit{op cit}, pp.148-149.
\textsuperscript{249}Nelson, \textit{op cit}, p.64.
Conservatives considered the strike to have been a demonstration of politically directed class warfare.\(^{250}\) From the other perspective, the Labor Party had demonstrated a disturbing timidity in its faltering support of the trade union movement. Industrial militancy as demonstrated in the Great Strike of 1917, together with fears of Sinn Fein activism in the wake of the abortive Easter Rising of 1916 in Dublin and the catholic Irish-Australian vote against conscription, together with the frisson that accompanied the news of social collapse in Russia in October 1917, produced a heady brew for consumption by a largely Protestant Australian middle-class. And that class, as Rickard has pointed out, was already embittered. By 1917 it saw itself as having borne more than its share of the burden involved in sustaining the imperial connection through three years of war.\(^{251}\) Articulate spokespersons in Australia castigated the strikers of 1917 as German agents and traitors as much as 'shirkers' so that Coward has concluded that, "perhaps the most severe pressure acting on the strikers was the question of patriotism."\(^{252}\)

In the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act of 1920 which established a Repatriation Department charged with administration of the benefits allowed by the Act, the definition of the term 'soldier' was broadened into "any Australian man or woman who had served in the military or naval forces of any part of the Empire, provided they could prove that they were domiciled in Australia."\(^{253}\) In his volume of *The Official History of Australia in the War*, Professor Scott states with some evident satisfaction that:

> Parliament passed an act which provided that a pension should be paid for the term of his life to any person incapacitated through service, during the war, in the Commonwealth military or naval forces; and a pension (of half the amount) to the wife of such person; and a pension to the widow of any soldier or sailor who had met his death in the war; and to children up to the age of 16... it was said in Parliament that the Australian pension's scale was the most liberal in the world, and that claim can scarcely be disputed.\(^{254}\)

\(^{250}\)ibid, pp.77-79.

\(^{251}\)Rickard, *Higgins*, p.231. Senator Guthrie lost two sons killed in action, see ADB, Vol.9, p.146.


\(^{253}\)Scott, *op cit*, p.836.

\(^{254}\)ibid, p.838.
In the aftermath of the Great Strike of 1917, however, the recognition that had been provided the seamen *vis-a-vis* more orthodox shoreside workers redounded against them, for the patriotism of the merchant seamen was questioned no less than that of their fellow unionists ashore. Vindictiveness, then, may well account for the total exclusion of merchant seamen from participation in the Repatriation Department's 'liberal' scale of benefits.255

The FSUA, prior to the First World War, was a formidable collective body. But, in 1918, an angry letter from an expatriate Swedish seaman named Jacob Johnson [or Johannsen] addressed to the secretary of the NSW branch, Tom Walsh (himself an expatriate Irishman), provides an insight into the sectarian division and disunity which had by then overtaken the union:

Knowing that the bone-headed section of the British members of the union simply seem to be delighted in it of working his fellow unionist out of it job [sic] because he has the misfortune of being born in a different part of the world... look at the February issue of the Seamen's Journal where the Executive of the Vic Branch in a letter to the Gen Sec, Arthur Cooper, class the foreigners as a lot of undesirables at any time and more so now while the war is on... something must be done to bring them to their bearing even if it means the breaking up of the Seaman's Union, because as it stands now it cannot be called a union because the officials themselves must know that they are working detrimental to unionism and in the interest of the employers and if they don't know that much as officials of a union, well then the sooner we manage to get rid of them the better and should it happen that we cannot shift them, then I propose to shift ourselves, and start another union on a solid foundation where a member is a member in the true sense of the speaking.256

It was the beginning of that time Hobsbawm has termed "The Age of Extremes." The old conservative and paternalistic leadership had been hopelessly compromised. Now a new independent voice of radicalism was heard within the FSUA, proclaiming itself better able to represent the right of labour to live.

256Johnson to Walsh, 24 March 1918. MS2123, Box 7, Folder 61. NLA.
CHAPTER TWO.

SOCIALISM AND DISILLUSIONMENT 1919-1924.

The Melbourne Argus, the voice of business, money and middle-class 'respectability', reported an alarming industrial situation on 12 June 1919. Below such headlines as "Shipping Strike, Coal Position Grave," and "Strikers' Revolutionary Propaganda," the newspaper noted that:

The most important development yesterday in connection with the strike occurred in Sydney, where, as a result of the militant attitude of the seamen at a mass meeting, led by Mr T. Walsh, five members of the executive of the New South Wales Branch of the Seamen's Federation resigned.  

Tom Walsh was clearing the union's decks. He had been elected general president of the FSUA in the annual ballot at the end of 1918. Another result of that ballot, which was to have particular significance for the seamen, was an amendment to the union rules which permitted the immediate recall from office of federal officials upon demand of a specified number of the union's rank and file membership.

The new general president, who took office on 13 January 1919, was a 48 years old expatriate Irishman. The son of a hard-working cobbler, he had gone to sea in the early 1880s as a ship's boy. Conditions for a boy in a sailing ship then could have improved little, given the ingrained conservatism of shipowners, from those which prevailed under the system of child labour institutionalised in Great Britain between 1780 and 1840.4 Certainly, as a young sailor, Tom Walsh experienced hardship and exploitation. Afterwards, he spoke of two years and four months of unremitting toil in the British sailing ship Rangoon without a day's respite and recalled living for nine months on a diet of salt beef and ship's biscuit.5 His knowledge of men and ships, he said in later...
life, was gained "in the forecastles of sailing ships, big and small, coastal and deep sea."6 And it was knowledge gained in American as well as in British ships, since he became a rank and file unionist in the United States, having transferred from Havelock Wilson's NSFU.7 Arriving in Australia in 1894, at the age of 23, Walsh joined the Seamen's Union and found employment in Australian coastal ships. When he finally came ashore in 1908, it was as agent for the FSUA at the busy coal-loading port of Newcastle, 40 sea-miles north of Sydney.

Partisan political bias notwithstanding, it is evident from a report prepared by the Investigation Branch of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Office that Walsh vigorously pursued his ideal of social justice in Newcastle. He "caused needless strife between the shipping companies and the seamen of that port", it was reported, and "his proclivities for stirring up strife have ever been evident, and he is remembered and described at Newcastle as a notorious agitator of the revolutionary type and against all law and order." Later he moved to Sydney and then to Melbourne, where "he was known as a militant socialist but was not a member of the local IWW, although known to be in sympathy with that body and to be in intimate associations with its members." And, as his circle of acquaintances widened it became apparent to the authorities that:

...he became intimate with the worst disloyalists and revolutionaries in the several States and in New Zealand. Letters intercepted from the censor (sic) from various well-known socialists, rebels, and, in fact, from all the rag and bobtail of the revolutionary movement throughout Australia, make references which show that Walsh was at least known to them, which apparently indicates that he must have been in personal contact with many of them in different States for longer or shorter periods.8

It has been observed that "trade union leadership tends to attract ambitious, self-assured individuals"9, and as with so many others who have risen from obscurity to positions of conspicuous leadership, Walsh was fated to lose the common touch.

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6 Walsh to Lord Strabolgi (Labour Party Whip in the House of Lords), 8 February 1939, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 69, NLA.
7 Walsh address to Commonwealth Arbitration Court, 1921. MS2123 Box 12 Folder 119, NLA.
8 A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA.
9 Hearn & Knowles, *One Big Union*, p.71.
Solitary reading amid the rough communal life of the forecastle would have been his only means to remedy the shortcomings of his formal education. So, it may have been as a defensive reaction to a difficult environment that he developed his rather pedantic manner. As is apparent from his letters and articles and the transcripts of his addresses, he lacked sophistication in social relationships and tended to verbal aggression. When later confronted with opposition from within the union he became increasingly stubborn, cantankerous, and given to bitter invective. By middle-age he was demonstrating an austere and moralistic Puritanism, being vehement in his disapproval of such stereotypical waterfront activities as drinking, gambling and swearing. In his later years he engaged in an active and uncompromisingly evangelical Christian outreach. Although his reputation was somewhat clouded by rumours of heavy drinking and financial irresponsibility during the difficult years of his first marriage, he was a serious-minded middle-aged widower with three teen-age dependent daughters when he married 32 year old Adela Pankhurst on 30 September 1917.

Adela was of the English liberal tradition, born in 1885 into a freethinking, humanist, middle-class family in Manchester whose initially comfortable economic circumstances became increasingly precarious. E.P.Thompson considered it a matter of honour that some in Victorian England had preferred to be known as Chartists rather than special constables, and Adela was proud to recall that her mother's grandfather had been a Chartist. Her own parents had helped to found the British Labour Party, so it is hardly surprising that she and her siblings from their earliest days "were instructed in socialism, as if it were a religion." For her the "categorical imperative", was "to overthrow all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned, and

10See Walsh-Pankhurst papers, typescript 11 February 1931, Walsh, Christianity or Communism, MS2123 Box 4 Folder 30, NLA. Typescript 15 August 1935, Walsh, Why I Am A Christian: A Reply to the Hon. Bertrand Russell, MS2123 Box 4 Folder 30. NLA. Receipts and expenditure: 'Lecture Tour by Mr Thomas Walsh and Mrs Pankhurst Walsh Under the Auspices of the Methodist Synod, Armidale District.' MS2123 Box 10 Folder 96, NLA.
11Thompson, op cit, p.902.
12Typescript, 25 June 1929, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, Peace in Industry, MS2123 Box 11 Folder 103, NLA.
13Coleman, Adela Pankhurst, p.2.
despised."\textsuperscript{14} Courageous, energetic, charismatic, and possessing a strong sense of history, Adela was articulate and a skilled organiser. She was also tactless, dogmatic and restless. Arriving in Melbourne in March 1914, her famous name attracted immediate notice in the anglophilic, xenophobic, sectarian and culturally inhibited Australian suburbia that D.H.Lawrence would pillory in \textit{Kangaroo}. Conspicuous, her espousal of the radical Left soon made her notorious. Adela, too, held deeply felt convictions as to what constituted a just society. She would hold passionately to those convictions throughout her frenetic life, while giving them in time an individualistic expression sufficient to render them unrecognisable in all but her own eyes and those of Tom Walsh.

The difficult years of Adela's youth had been spent campaigning in the cause of women's suffrage in the shadow of her famous mother, the ruthless Emmeline. Coleman, her biographer, has pointed out that "Adela Pankhurst had spent nearly ten years of her youth in this historic agitation, but her reward for her exhausting efforts appears to have been almost total elimination from suffragette history for many years."\textsuperscript{15} In England, she had been merely the youngest of the "Fighting Pankhursts." Now, she was the 'star' of the Australian Socialist movement.\textsuperscript{16} When she married Tom Walsh on 30 September 1917 she was on bail, pending imprisonment for 'offensive behaviour' (inciting her followers to smash department store windows) while leading a procession of the Socialist Women's League through Melbourne in a demand for more equitable rationing of food and clothes for the unemployed.\textsuperscript{17} The Walsh-Pankhurst marriage united two militant personalities who, though they came from vastly different backgrounds, shared a sense of social grievance such that functionaries of the conservative Commonwealth Government of the Labor apostate W.M.Hughes characterised their union as, "the collaboration of two dangerous units."\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14}Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" cited in McLellan, \textit{Karl Marx: Selected Writings}, p.69.
\textsuperscript{15}Coleman, \textit{op cit}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{ibid}, p.66.
\textsuperscript{17}Mitchell, \textit{The Fighting Pankhurts}, pp.59-60.
\textsuperscript{18}A467/1 SF12/4 PT2, AA.
Leadership, we are told, is a function of the total situation and the nature of the group, rather than a psychological trait. Brown found that industrial organisations would often elect a leader whose personality was the epitome of contemporary group attitudes. Thus an agitated group may well select an agitator as leader. But as Maier has indicated, "unrest may be utilised by a potential leader, but the causes of unrest lie in the frustrations which are already there. No leader can organise a mass of well-adjusted people into an aggressive movement." Turner has commented of the Australian industrial scene that, by the end of the First World War, Australian merchant seamen in particular were carrying a cargo of grievances. When Tom Walsh was elected general president of the FSUA in 1919, he became leader of a frustrated and antagonised occupational group possessed of considerable latent aggression. His task was to orchestrate that aggression as to make it instrumental in the attainment of the Walshes' ideal of social justice.

In selecting a leader, Michels observed that "it is a point of honour with the masses to put the conduct of their affairs in the hands of a celebrity." But having been selected, he continued, "the most dangerous defect in a leader is that he should possess too blind a confidence in the masses. The danger was that with the passage of time the leader might become divorced from the reality of the total situation and the nature of the group. From Melbourne Gaol, on the night of Wednesday, 1 September 1919, Tom Walsh issued a note addressed to the members of the executive council and officers of the FSUA. Under the heading, "My Protest," it stated:

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23Michels, Political Parties, p.100.
1st. Of this you can be sure, I shall not accept my release on any promise made by you to the Government on my behalf, nor shall I give any promise that I will accept or sign any agreement without first having the members through their Branch meetings order the acceptance of and signing of such agreement.

2nd. I now request that the proposed agreement be not signed by any representative of the Federated Seamen's Union until after the Branches have considered it and discussed and ordered that it be signed.

3rd. I also ask that you explain fully to the members at the meetings of the Branches the dirty trickery used by the Government to keep me here. If this is explained to the members I feel sure they will instruct you not to sign that agreement until I am released.25

With that pencil scribble on a scrap of paper, Tom Walsh demonstrated his belief that, as general president, he enjoyed the full confidence of the rank and file membership of the FSUA.

The sequence of events that had led to Walsh being gaolled stemmed from the seamen's dissatisfaction with the Award handed down by Mr Justice Higgins in December 1918. The Union had claimed a 50 per cent increase in wages, but the President of the Arbitration Court in adhering to the Court's policy of setting a minimum living wage, had awarded a mere 11 per cent increase, raising the monthly pay of an AB from L11 to L12.5.0d., plus 'keep'.26 Higgins later stated that he had recommended to the Government (which was then effectively the major Australian shipowner as a consequence of wartime requisitioning), the payment of a war bonus as compensation for the exceptional circumstances that had existed during the war at sea. But the Government chose to ignore his recommendation.27 The FSUA then applied directly to the federal Government in January 1919 for a 50 per cent increase in wages, improvement in conditions and, among other things, a pension payable to the dependants of seamen who had lost their lives during the war at sea.28 The Commonwealth Government's Controller of Shipping, Rear Admiral Clarkson, having refused to consider the Union's claims and having instead recommended that they go to arbitration, the seamen went on strike in February 1919.

25MS2123 Box 7 Folder 61, NLA.
2612CAR756-759
2713CAR209 and Higgins, New Province, p.98.
2813CAR206-207. See also, A432/97 20/3433 Attachment, AA.
The Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, was in Europe attending the conference of victors at Versailles. So it was the Acting Prime Minister who, on 21 May 1919, directed the Controller of Shipping to apply to the president of the Arbitration Court for a compulsory conference. The conference was held on 26 and 29 May, but no settlement was forthcoming. Since, in his view, the seamen were divided upon the question of whether or not to submit the dispute to arbitration, Mr Justice Higgins suggested that the matter be clarified by means of a plebiscite to be held among the union membership. The question to be answered by the seamen was whether or not they would agree to man the ships and submit the dispute to the court afterwards. On 6 June 1919 the conference reassembled and Tom Walsh reported that the plebiscite had been abortive and that the seamen refused to submit the dispute to arbitration.

Higgins said of the situation that some of the union representatives had told him that they did not believe in arbitration, but rather in 'direct action,' while others had strongly favoured going to arbitration. The position, he concluded, was complicated by internal feuds among the union's leaders and manipulation of branch meetings, so that the plebiscite had been a victim of internal factionalism. Those who were anti-arbitration managed to induce branch meetings to resolve they would have nothing to do with arbitration. Those in favour of arbitration abstained from voting. It was apparent that the radicals had gained control of the FSUA:

A few active, intelligent men have got control of the machinery of the union, men who probably have had their minds saturated with writing from outside countries, men who held the fixed theory that nothing substantial can be gained without extreme courses. There seems, indeed, to be a touch of pedantry in applying the counsels of desperation, imported from abroad to a country like Australia, which is struggling towards a better system for securing justice all round.

A just and equal society could not be achieved in Australia, the President of the Court intimated, when "the two extreme parties in the industrial world have become allies -

29 ibid.
30 ibid.
31 ibid.
those who push the claims of the workers regardless of the pain inflicted on the community, and those who have bitterly opposed all measures for the relief of the workers. 32

Acting Prime Minister Webb met the representatives of the FSUA together with the Industrial Disputes Committee of the Victorian Trades Hall Council on 2 July 1919, and five days later upon the joint application of the Government and the Industrial Disputes Committee the compulsory conference with Mr Justice Higgins was resumed. The president of the Arbitration Court again offered conciliation and arbitration provided that the men first returned to work. The shipowners even agreed that any forthcoming award should be applied retrospectively, if the men would only return to work. But Walsh, on behalf of the union, declined to man the ships unless the seamen's demands were met first. Stalemate provided an ideal opportunity for a demonstration of decisive action on the part of the seamen's leadership.

Tom Walsh, as president of the FSUA, addressed a large audience of radicals and seamen on 13 July 1919 in a favourite venue of the Victorian Socialist Party, the Bijou Theatre in Melbourne. 33 He reminded the gathering that the seaman had always been a "pariah" in the eyes of the government, and of the law, and of the press. The seaman had always been "a chattel slave" who lacked protection or sympathy or a voice. Walsh told his audience that any improvement obtained by the working class in Australia had been obtained entirely by the workers themselves in taking action through their unions. "There are two different classes of people in this country", he told his enthusiastic audience, "the working class and the others, and between these two classes there can be no unity of interest." The end justified the means, he lectured them:

It is your duty to use every means at your disposal to get the change you contemplate and you must have, whatever these means are you must use them if a

32 CAR211.
33 Coleman, op cit, p.78.
change is to be brought about, you have to be the judges as to what the means have
to be (a voice - Direct Action!). Of course you must have direct action.³⁴

Walsh roundly condemned the system of arbitration. He claimed that the press, nearly all
the politicians together with the shipowners and the Director of Shipping all advised the
seamen to seek arbitration. In which case, he asked, was that the place where the working
class might find justice? There was a war between the seamen and the men on the other
side of the table, he said, and the court supported the bosses of industry. Truculently, to
applause, he emphasised that the seamen would not go into the Arbitration Court. "We
are going to get a settlement outside the court, if that is not forthcoming, well then
something else will be forthcoming." ³⁵

Having studied the police transcript of Walsh's Bijou Theatre address, the Crown
Solicitor wrote to the Secretary of the Attorney General's Department on 17 July 1919
giving his opinion that the speech amounted to an attempt to procure sedition in that it
tended to "promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different classes of the
King's subjects". He thought it also an incitement to commit crimes in disturbance of the
peace and that Walsh was guilty of an offence against Regulation 43 of the War
Precautions Regulations of 1915.³⁶ But the Commonwealth Government baulked at a
charge of sedition, which surely would have made a martyr of this agitator. It was on the
more mundane charge of having contravened section 6 of the Commonwealth
Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1918 that Walsh was prosecuted in the Melbourne
Court of Petty Sessions on the morning of Friday 18 July 1919. It was found that he had
encouraged seamen on interstate vessels to cease work and refuse to offer their labour
with a view to enforcing their demands on the employers. Having thus contravened the
Act by encouraging a strike which extended beyond the limits of any one state of the

³⁴Transcript Walsh address 13 July 1919, A467/1 SF12/1 B32, pp.429-435. AA.
³⁵ibid, p.437.
³⁶Crown Solicitor, Opinion No.337. A432/86 29/3433 PT2. AA.
Commonwealth, Walsh was fined £100 and was warned by the police magistrate that any repetition of the offence would render him liable to a term of imprisonment.\(^{37}\)

That same evening, Tom Walsh addressed a meeting of some 500 seamen in the Socialist Hall in Melbourne. This time he ensured that the Government must provide him with the mantle of a martyr. Taunting the police shorthand-reporter who took down his words - "that is clear enough I hope, Mr McLeod" - he told his followers that it was their duty as trade unionists to "throw the City into darkness. Make it impossible for the civil authorities to do without the help or the support of the members of the seamen's union."\(^{38}\) There could be no peace or security in Australia, Walsh announced, as long as a Government elected by the people continued to support men such as Admiral Clarkson and Judge Higgins who were trying to force the seamen into the Arbitration Court. "But the laws held no terrors for a 'Walshevik'. The only place for an honest man in Australia was inside gaol," and he intended to get there by committing this offence tonight. He had been dragged before a court and fined £100 and for what reason? Because he has the courage to do what he thinks right, to tell the seamen to refuse to sell their labor (sic) to the capitalists, to the hungry cormorants, to the unsocial, immoral (sic), brutal robbing class in this and every country on earth. These people speak of their morals, they call us robbers, thieves, extremists, Bolsheviks, pro-Germans and everything they possibly can because we stand and demand the abolition of this damnable system.\(^{39}\)

In the next war, Walsh prophesied, shipping would be in the hands of "the international seamen's union." This was a fact, he assured his audience, that such men as Admiral Clarkson, Acting Prime Minister Watt, Lloyd George and Havelock Wilson did not understand.\(^{40}\) A warrant for the arrest of Tom Walsh was issued on 21 July 1919, and the following day Walsh once more appeared before the police magistrate in the Melbourne Court of Petty Sessions where he was again prosecuted under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1919.

\(^{37}\)Minute. Attorney General's Department to Governor-General, 21 September 1919. A432/86 29/3433 PT2, AA.

\(^{38}\)Transcript Walsh address, 18 July 1919, A432/86 29/3433 PT1, AA.

\(^{39}\)ibid.

\(^{40}\)ibid.
Walsh used the court as a platform from which to voice a sweeping condemnation of the Arbitration Court as an instrument of oppression wielded by the Commonwealth Government and the shipowners in collusion against the seamen. And support, if qualified, was forthcoming from an unlikely source:

[Police Magistrate] - I do not want to hear you... Your long statement might be quite true. You may be suffering a very great grievance, and the seamen may be suffering a very great grievance, and possibly they are. But there is a proper legal constitutional method of having those grievances heard. That is the only method as far as I am concerned by which you can have those grievances redressed.41

To which Walsh replied that the officials of the Union were anxious to bring about a settlement, but it could be achieved only by means of an open conference held outside the Arbitration Court. He was adamant that the seamen would not go into the Arbitration Court:

There is no justice to the seamen in this Court whatsoever. As a consequence we, the members of the Seamen’s Union, refuse absolutely and uncompromisingly to go into this Court... All the forces of law, all the machinery of the Press, and every Government activity today is directed against the seamen of this country... There is not a ship to be moved until I come out of jail.42

Walsh was ordered to pay a fine of £200, which was double that for his first offence and, for contravening section 5 of the Act by taking part in a strike after having been warned not to do so, he was sentenced to a term of three months imprisonment.

The Seamen’s Strike, which lasted from 9 May to 26 August 1919 - longer than the more famous Maritime Strike of 1890 - was eventually settled when the Acting Prime Minister handed over negotiations to Senator Millen, who may well have been as Professor Scott admiringly described him, “nimble, suave and tactful.”43 Ironically enough for the seamen, he was also the Minister for Repatriation. Senator Millen offered a conference with the seamen outside the Arbitration Court, provided that they first went back to work. Eventually, after some procrastination, all the branches of the Union

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41 Court transcript, 22 July 1919, A432/86 29/3433 Attachment, AA.
42 ibid.
43 Scott, Official History, p.672.
agreed to man the ships, and the conference began on 1 September 1919. It was at that point that the general president of the FSUA, demonstrated his confidence in the unanimity of purpose of its members and the democratic structure of the union by issuing his 'Protest'.

When he emerged from gaol on 23 September 1919, Walsh was a celebrity. This militant union leader, this "wild Irishman", had orchestrated the longest strike in maritime history and he had won. In the course of the strike he had overcome a conservative faction within the Union which was opposed to his militant anti-arbitration policy. At the same time he had achieved a materially successful outcome, for the rank and file seamen had obtained improved pay and conditions. In the process, as Morris records, the FSUA had demonstrated its capacity to disrupt coastal shipping and, by bringing industry to a standstill, to inflict severe hardships upon the community. Victoria and Northern Queensland in particular had suffered. And Walsh and his seamen had been seen to flout the Arbitration Court, with impunity. "We have deliberately flouted the Court and we are going to flout it for all time", exulted an official of the FSUA.

Mr Justice Higgins, writing in the Harvard Law Review of December 1920, commented that the federal Government was, at the time of the 1919 strike, the principal Australian shipping employer. The industry at that time had effectively been 'nationalised' and the increase in award rates of pay which gave the AB L14 per month and the fireman L16 in addition to 'keep,' had to be borne by the taxpayer. Of the agreement, Higgins commented acidly: "No reasons were given. It is easy to purchase peace in this way - for a time." And just then the High Court of Australia handed down one of its less than timely judgments when it ruled that an industrial union could not apply to the Arbitration Court for a new Award until such time as the one already existing had expired. Junior

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44Edwards, Bruce of Melbourne, p.111.
45Morris, "Mr Justice Higgins Scuppered", Labour History, No.37, November 1979, p.56.
46Age, 7 June 1919. Also, Higgins, New Province, p.82.
47Higgins, New Province, p.81.
Engineers in coastal ships then found that under their existing Award they were paid ten shillings a month less than the firemen under their supervision. The Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers [AIMPE] promptly went on strike and obtained £19 a month for junior engineers. Immediately stewards, masters and deck officers all demanded proportionate concessions - and got them.48 "An Executive Government, from its very nature, is the worst arbiter or intermediary that can be conceived in industrial disputes" concluded Higgins.49 He resigned his presidency of the Arbitration Court shortly after the Hughes Government introduced its Industrial Peace Act of 1920 which amended the Commonwealth Arbitration Act to permit the establishment of special and temporary tribunals outside the Court in order to deal with seemingly intractable disputes.50

The departure of Judge Higgins from the Arbitration Court no doubt caused rejoicing in the camps of both radical and reactionary. Shipowners had long seen him as the workers' friend. Bach comments that not only did Higgins appear determined to grant every claim made to him by the maritime unions but, moreover, "he was not slow to offer criticism of the behaviour, policies, and values of the ship-owners."51 Walsh, on the other hand, long afterwards said that "it was his unjust award that we were fighting against, we had lost confidence in him."52 In consequence of an aggrieved sense of social justice as much as the pursuit of their immediate material interests, Walsh and his seamen had attempted to substitute direct action for an arbitration system in which they said they had lost faith. And it appeared that they had been successful.

But the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration survived the resignation of its president. In fact, developments tended to increase the demand for its services and extend its influence. In April 1920 the charter party with the federal

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48 ibid, pp.81-83.
49 ibid, p.86.
50 Morris, op cit, p.61.
51 Bach, op cit, p.216.
52 Typescript, 15 December 1935, "The Seamen's Strike", MS2123 Box 7 Folder 67, NLA.
Government was terminated and the coastal ships were returned to their former owners. And now there were also the ships of the Commonwealth Government Line to take into consideration. From the Bench of the High Court of Australia, Judge Higgins' view was that "the ship-owners have now to carry on business as best they can; and the Court has to try to bring order into the chaos created by the Government." And then, on 1st July 1921, the long awaited coasting provisions of the Commonwealth Navigation Act of 1912 were activated. These reserved the interstate trade of Australia for ships manned in accordance with Australian standards of pay and conditions and were followed in a sequence over the next three years by the remaining provisions of the Act.

In Melbourne, on 10 December 1921, Tom Walsh appeared in the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration on behalf of the membership of the FSUA. With the coastal companies back in business, Walsh had no compunction in not only abandoning his intransigent opposition to the Arbitration Court but in pleading for the protection of its award. That about-face on the utility of the Arbitration Court was characteristic of the Walshes as they now set out on a transit across the ideological spectrum that would in time alienate them from an incredulous labour movement and earn them the epithet of renegade.

The Seamen's Award which Mr Justice Powers of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court handed down on 28 April 1922, was varied in April 1923 and then remained in force until the Union was de-registered on 5 June 1925. While raising the pay of an AB to L15 7 0d per month, that of greasers and firemen to L17 7 0d and giving the trimmer L15 7 0d, all plus 'keep', it also ordered that, other than in ships trading overseas, they should be paid fortnightly. The award also ordered that shipowners should supply the seamen onboard their ships with such rudimentary accoutrements of a civilised society as plates and mugs (enamelware not tin) and mattresses (not a 'donkey's-breakfast' of

\[53\text{Higgins, } New\text{ Province, pp.81-83.}\]
\[54\text{Commonwealth Year Book, No.17, 1924, pp.1054-1055.}\]
\[55\text{16CAR145-146.}\]
straw).\textsuperscript{56} Walsh, still apparently confident that his leadership had achieved unanimity among the rank and file, had argued before the Court that stopwork meetings should be given formal authorisation on the basis that they had become the custom since November 1919. Such meetings, he pleaded, were particularly important for the seaman who was “very peculiarly situated,” in that:

His periods ashore are so limited that the ordinary trade union conditions as to meetings could not be applied to him very successfully. Prior to the inauguration of stop work meetings... it was possible for a dozen men or so to assemble and adopt resolutions committing the whole of the workers in the maritime industry to some very drastic policy or action, but since the present officials have been in office that danger has been completely eliminated, and they have made such alterations in the rules of the Union - with the consent of the members - that it is now impossible... for any click (sic) or coterie to commit the Seamen’s Union to any policy without the consent of the members of the Union.\textsuperscript{57}

And the Arbitration Court demonstrated its confidence in Walsh with a provision that was afterwards to be of great significance for the union and its members. Clause 30 of the 1922 award stated that:

The employers shall allow all crews of ships then in the ports of Fremantle, Port Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane to attend a stopwork meeting of the Union on the last Tuesday of each month between the hours of 9am and noon, without any deduction from wages on that account.\textsuperscript{58}

And a sub-clause ordered that seamen who failed to report for duty onboard their ships by 1.30pm after a stopwork meeting should forfeit one day’s pay.\textsuperscript{59}

Elsewhere in the Seamen’s Award of 1922, Clause 37 stated specifically that in providing employment the shipowners undertook to give preference to members of the FSUA, provided that those members agreed to work under the terms of the award. A special Clause 43 was inserted to deal with those unionists who declined to work in accordance with the terms of the Award or who attempted to exercise ‘job control.’ And job control was defined as:

\textsuperscript{56}16CAR152.
\textsuperscript{57}Transcript, address on behalf of the Seamen’s Union, 10 December 1921, Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. No.60 of 1921. MS2123 Box 12 Folder 119, NLA.
\textsuperscript{58}16CAR153.
\textsuperscript{59}Transcript Judgment 1922 Award. D170/6/20. WUA.
Any attempt by members of the organisation, or any of them, to enforce industrial conditions other than those prescribed or recognised by the Court or by the Navigation Act or any competent authority thereunder either by refusing to offer for or accept work on any particular vessel or vessels, by refusing to or failing to carry out the work on any particular vessel or vessels, or by any methods other than those provided by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act or by the methods of ordinary negotiation.60

Reflecting upon this period of the union's history, some fifty years later, E.V. Elliott saw job control as having been the basis of the seamen's policy in the 1920s. Elliott observed that so long as that policy was directed and controlled it produced economic benefits for the membership. But a problem arose which split the union into factions and thereby seriously weakened it. And that problem arose primarily from "the inability of the union leadership to distinguish between listening to the seamen to learn what action to organise in the interests of our class and capitulation to backward moods of the workers."61 In fact, the Walsh and Johnson factions, into which the Union split in the 1920s, were each too preoccupied with their own perceptions of events to identify contemporary reality from the perspective of the rank and file. That omission together with the inappropriate application of job control, the partisan manipulation of stop-work meetings, and the loss of preference in selection for employment acted to the severe detriment of the seamen, as we shall see.

Jacob Johnson, who in 1918 had advocated disbandment of the union, was acting secretary of the Sydney Branch by 1923. In October of that year he sent Tom Walsh a copy of an article he had written, entitled Walsh Wanders Further and Fares Worse, which was not only highly critical of Walsh's policies but personally abusive. "With the few corrections which I have made," Johnson wrote blithely, "I think it will serve the purpose intended for. Please publish same in the November issue [Seamen's Journal] and oblige."62 Continuing his attack on 13 November 1923, Johnson

60 ibid.
61 Elliott, "Leninism Has its Influence on Seamen", Transport Workers of the World, p.5.
62 Johnson to T.Walsh, 6 October 1923. MS2123 Box 14 Folder 135, NLA.
addressed a letter to the union's executive committee of management in which he queried the authority of the general president:

Can he for example - where the interests of the Seamen are in question - turn the Journal into a 'coward's castle' to silence the uncompromised expression of their interest? Can he deny me space to express the Seamen's interest and at the same time spill over the pages of the Journal through other person's an echo of himself? Will the Committee of Management state what space I can claim in the Journal without editorial tinkering, to prove that officials of the Seamen's Union are renegades on the question of Labor Party support?63

And so it continued. One wonders to what extent the aggressive vituperation which Johnson routinely employed may be attributed to the institutionalising effect of his occupational environment, a migrant's inability to discern what was appropriate in terms of Australian culture, or was it simply, as Judge Beeby came to believe, that Johnson was mentally unstable?64 Certainly his personal feelings seem to have determined his interpretation of events, regardless of reality. At any rate, Tom Walsh, who was the editor of the Seamen's Journal, wrote on 29 November 1923 in his official capacity as general president of the Union informing Johnson that the editor "was fully justified in declining to continue the controversy in view of the abusive nature of your articles."65

But Johnson's 'boots and all' style evidently appealed to the anarchistic element among the seamen. It certainly enabled him to carry the day at rowdy stop-work meetings of the large and influential Sydney branch of the union. Such a stopwork meeting on 28 January 1924 resulted in a resolution, carried by an overwhelming majority, that:

In consideration of the General President's refusal to sanction publication of the Sydney Branch Report as directed by the December stopwork meeting, and regarding the report as containing information of value to members, we instruct the Sydney Branch Executive to have same printed, with explanatory preface by writer, and distributed as a supplement to the Seamen's Journal.66

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63 Johnson to General Secretary and Committee of Management, FSUA, 13 November 1923. MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63, NLA.
64 Royal Commission in the Case of Jacob Johnson. Report of Judge George S.Beeby, 1 October 1931, A460 Item D5/45, p.5, AA.
65 Walsh to Johnson, 29 November 1923. MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63. NLA.
66 "Supplement to the Seamen's Journal" 28 January 1924, MS2123 Box 13 Folder 128, NLA.
It was duly published, entitled "Suppressed Sydney Branch Report" by Jacob Johnson, Acting Secretary, November 18, 1923" together with copies of Johnson's correspondence with Walsh and more uninhibited criticism of the general president.

Jacob Johnson, or Johannsen as Australian anglophiles on the Right of the political spectrum persistently misnamed him, no doubt in order to emphasise that he was 'foreign' and therefore suspect, was a naturalised Australian. Born in Sweden, he had settled in Australia about 1911. He was working on a sugar lighter out of Mackay in Northern Queensland in 1918, and may well have been a deck sailor in the Scandinavian tradition rather than a fireman. But from his first appearance in the affairs of the Seamen's Union, he appears to have had the proverbial 'chip on his shoulder' which, as a defensive mechanism, is perhaps understandable given the overt racial prejudice displayed by Australian society at that time.

Jacob Johnson led the smaller of the two groups of communists which were part of the 'All Australia' Trade Union Congress when it assembled on 20 June 1921, the larger group being under the leadership of J.S.Garden. Turner says that the policy of the Garden group was to infiltrate the Labor Party and the trade unions, in accordance with the then current Comintern line. On the other hand, the Johnson communists expressed total opposition to any compromise with 'reformist' politicians and trade union leaders. Apparently, they took their inspiration from the 'Left' communism of a faction in the United Kingdom led by Tom Walsh's sister-in-law, Sylvia Pankhurst, which held that the Communist Party must keep its Marxist doctrine pure and unsullied by 'reformism', and in so doing lead the way without diversion to the world revolution and the final attainment of the communist state.67

But Sylvia Pankhurst was specifically criticised by Lenin himself in his Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder, of December 1920. Lenin referred to

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67 Turner, op cit, pp.219-220.
"Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, a 'Left' Communist", with her "strange conclusion". In absolute contradiction of the policy advocated by Sylvia Pankhurst, Lenin expounded the necessity for compromise and collusion. If need be, Lenin stated unequivocally, communists must "resort to various stratagems, artifices and illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, as long as we get into the trade unions, remain in them, and carry on communist work within them at all costs." It was fundamentally wrong, Lenin warned, and "detrimental to the interests of the revolutionary proletariat" to refuse to participate in reformist parliamentarianism.

We have only to say, as the German and British Left Communists do, that we recognise only one road, only the direct road, and that we will not permit tacking, conciliatory manoeuvres, or compromising - and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused and is causing, very grave prejudice to communism.

And in August 1921, only a few weeks after the 'All Australia' Trade Union Congress assembled, Sylvia Pankhurst, mentor of the Johnson communists, was expelled from the Communist Party of Great Britain. Whatever causes they might espouse, the Pankhursts were never mere functionaries.

Tom Walsh and Adela had been present as founder members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) when a new and united party had been announced in Sydney in October 1920. The initial appeal is evident since, as Blake has said, "from the beginning the Communist Party was the result of the impact of the Russian revolution on militant Australian workers whose background was trade unionism coloured by Socialist Party and IWW influences." But Adela, long after the event, recalled that

In 1921, I joined the Communist Party which was just formed. I did so because I thought the Communists in Russia had achieved power there without bloodshed. In fact, I believed, from the information I then had, that they had effectually checked the shedding of blood. I thought that they had wiped out poverty, abolished alcoholism

68Lenin, Left-Wing Communism, p.83.
69Ibid, p.55.
70Ibid, p.63.
71Ibid, p.103.
72Mitchell, op cit, p.102.
73Farrell, International Socialism, pp.52-55.
and brought about peace. I thought that in Russia, socialism, my life long dream, had come true. I remained a member of the Communist Party about one year.  

And Adela was the ideologue of the partnership. Walsh acknowledged as much when he stated that it was Adela who:

...first realised that the objective of the Communist Party in Australia was different to what we had supposed... Her research warranted her formulating an attack on the party; she challenged them with not being a working man's party and not functioning in the interests of the workers but, on the contrary, opposed to their advancement and happiness... I attended only two meetings of the party during my membership... I sent in my written resignation in February 1923.

Mitchell considers that the Walshes were sceptical of the CPA from the start, and that the Victorian Socialist Party, to which Adela returned as an honorary organiser after her communist 'flirtation', while being "mildly Marxist" had at least the appeal of "a sturdy home grown vision of social justice."

"Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action," Friedrich Engels assured a correspondent. Accordingly, upon the premise that a theory which ceases to be useful should be jettisoned and replaced with another more appropriate, the Third Congress of the Comintern in June-July 1921 ordered the implementation of a united front policy. It had become apparent that, in the face of reactionary opposition, a communist world revolution was not imminent. The original policy of fostering world revolution independently of and in opposition to existing labour movements was dropped and replaced by one of infiltration. The technique, no matter how immoral, which Lenin had advocated in *Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder* was to be implemented. Communists were to concentrate on gaining positions of power and influence within trade unions and political labour parties in order to provide the workers with a vanguard of revolutionary leadership.

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75 Typescript, Adela P.Walsh. MS2123 Box 9 Folder 83, NLA.
76 T.Walsh to Mr Bradely, 12 December 1938, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 69, NLA.
77 Mitchell, *op cit*, p.214.
78 Cited in Lenin, *op cit*, p.71.
Lenin, the advocate of *realpolitik*, was thought to have legitimated compromise with reactionary Labor politicians and trade union leaders as a means to an end. But the rank and file Australian seamen had had recent practical experience of the consequences of placing their trust in liberal Labor politicians in the persons of Guthrie and Hughes. At the same time, it was part of seafaring folklore that J. Havelock Wilson, as an ostensibly Lib-Lab member of the House of Commons on 25 August 1894, had raised no effective objection to the passage of the Merchant Shipping Act through the House. Many seamen in Australian registered ships had experienced life onboard British ships, so that an official of the SUA would claim that even as late as 1935 the majority of Australian seamen were immigrants. Consequently, from their own experiences and those of their shipmates coastal seamen were well aware of the conditions 'enjoyed' by members of the NSFU. Ostensibly, there had been some improvement in those conditions by means of the provisions of the British Merchant Shipping Acts of 1897 and 1906. But the draconian disciplinary sanctions of 1894 remained applicable, and the shipowners' actual practice went unchallenged by the reactionary leadership of the NSFU. Thus a British seaman, on 2 October 1925, would complain that "ever since I started at sea, there has never been any contentment among British seamen. The conditions will not allow you to be content... It is absolutely a dog's life. It is an existence."

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The inadequacy of a position like Lenin's, which simply subordinates morality to a doctrine of political success... however powerful the Marxist critique of morality, it will not do simply to replace morality with politics... in considering the problem of political means, we may find inescapable the notion of distinctively moral constraints which may conflict with political effectiveness.

80 Wilson was general president of the bankrupt National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union. That union went into voluntary liquidation on 31 December 1894. He immediately emerged as general president of the NSFU. See, Marsh & Ryan, *The Seamen*, pp.32-38 & 86-87.

81 See Joseph Keenan letter in *Seamen's Journal*, July 1935. Also former seaman of the 1940s N. Cunningham to author, 11 June 1997.

82 60 & 61 Vict. 1897. And, 6 Edw. 7. 1906.


When, in 1924, the Socialist Party of Australia [SPA] was re-formed in Melbourne, it included among its membership such leading figures of the FSUA as Jacob Johnson and 'Bill' Casey and another, William Job Clarke, who would soon become equally well-known. The SPA found its inspiration in the Socialist Party of Great Britain [SPGB], a splinter from the Social Democratic Federation, whose members on principle, in accordance with De Leon's doctrine, eschewed involvement in parliamentary politics. 'Red Clydeside' was the home of Emanuel Shinwell's British Seafarers' Union [BSU], a breakaway from the NSFU. And it was on Clydeside that such fiery socialist activists as the self-sacrificial John MacLean and 'Wullie' Gallagher, a former ship's steward turned brassfounders' shop-steward, were imprisoned during the First World War for advocating direct action within 'essential' industry while, on behalf of the workers, combating collusion between employers and trade union officials among whom Havelock Wilson was condemned as the greatest 'patriot' of all. 'No compromise' was the moral dogma of the SPGB. And it was in that received truth that the seamen members of the SPA put their faith.

The Communist Party of Australia [CPA] boasted a total membership of only 750 in 1922, according to Davidson's estimate. And membership dwindled between 1923 and 1925, so that Lance Sharkey when addressing the party's political bureau in August 1937, could remind it that there was a time when "we had only three or four or five hundred members in the whole of the country." Davidson says that by 1925, in fact, the total membership amounted to a mere 250. CPA members were expelled from the Australian Labor Party [ALP] in accordance with a resolution of the federal conference of October 1924. That resolution, which was shortly afterwards replicated by state branches, declared against affiliation of the CPA with the ALP and further declared that

85A member of the BSU was shot dead in a melee in Glasgow in 1913 when members of the NSFU broke through a BSU picket line. See Marsh & Ryan, op cit, pp.46-47.
86Gallagher, Revolt on the Clyde, p.120. See also McLean, Red Clydeside, p.103, p.243, p.244. And, Mitchell, op cit, p.82.
87Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, p.33.
88MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15, ML.
89Davidson, op cit, p.34.
avowed communists were ineligible for membership of the ALP. At the same time, Guido Baracchi, a prominent founding member, resigned from the CPA with the suggestion that the Party be dissolved. J.S. Garden and most of his group of 'Trades Hall Reds', meanwhile, returned to the Labor fold. And Tom Walsh joined the ALP. Revolution, according to Lenin, is subject to a fundamental law in that it can succeed only when "the lower classes do not want to live in the old way and the upper classes cannot carry on in the old way." Australia might not have been ready for revolution, but within the FSUA the situation was such that the general president was unable to carry on as a radical militant and Jacob Johnson and his supporters were unwilling to accept Walsh's ideological move towards the Right.

But do ideological differences wholly account for the bitterness which was characteristic of the growing split within the Union? Mr Justice Higgins in 1922 had commented, somewhat cynically perhaps, "'Socialism in our time'. Perhaps so; but which brand of socialism? The morrow's breakfast is of more immediate concern than the millennium." In December 1920, as General President of the Union, Walsh was drawing a salary of £8 15 0d. per week. In comparison, the basic rate for an AB under the Higgins Award of December 1918, was £12 5 0d per calendar month, plus 'keep'. By December 1923, Walsh's pay was a handsome £10 10 0d. per week. That compares with the basic rate for an AB which, under the Powers Award of April 1923, amounted to £15 5 0d per month plus 'keep'. Tom Walsh, who was 52 years of age in 1923, had a large family to provide for and Adela could help only to a limited extent, earning some payments from the Union for editorial work on The Seamen's Journal.

90 Ibid., p.31. 
92 Lenin, op cit, p.85. 
93 Higgins, New Province, p.148. 
94 Auditor's Report and Statement of Receipts and Payments for six months ended December 31st 1920. MS2123 Box 13 Folder 129. NLA. 
95 12 CAR 758. 
96 Twenty years later the General Secretary of the SUA was paid £9.0.0d. per week. See SJ May 1943. 
97 FSUA publication, 28 April 1922, Judgment and Award of His Honour Mr Justice Powers, Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, Melbourne, p.13. D170/6/20, WUA.
Walsh's three daughters by his first wife were still wholly dependent upon him. He and Adela by then had four children of their own, of whom the eldest was not yet seven, and the youngest an infant of six months. That this large family had little money to spare is clear from the Union's financial statements and from auditor's reports which show that the General President routinely claimed a cash payment in lieu of holidays and also claimed payment for overtime worked. He was also careful to claim reimbursement for all expenses, no matter how trivial, that were incurred in the performance of his duties.

But the Union funds upon which Walsh depended for his income were straitened. So straitened were they that, on 21 November 1922, it had been necessary to borrow from the New Zealand Seamen's Union. W.T. Young, the New Zealand General Secretary, in sending Walsh a bank draft for £2,000, stated that it was in "redemption of our promise indicated in previous letters" and "I trust this will see you over your financial difficulties in Australia." But the financial situation did not improve. The auditor's report for the half year ending 31 December 1923 showed a closing credit balance of only £384.17.7d. in the bank and two shillings cash in hand.

Tom Walsh by 1925 saw nationalisation rather than Communism as a realistic means to overcome the contradiction inherent in capitalism. Public ownership of industry through a representative system of government was to be that antidote to class alienation about which Mr Justice Higgins had commented, "I see no answer to it but to give the workers 'a say' as to what they produce and how they produce." In November 1924 Tom Walsh was telling John Curtin, editor of the Westralian Worker, that "what the

98 Typescript, MS2123 Box 9 Folder 83, NLA.
99 "Balance sheet for period January 1st 1926 to June 30th 1926. General President's Account". MS2123 Box 11 Folder 108, NLA. Also, "Statement of amounts due to Thomas Walsh for wages and disbursements made for and on behalf of the Seamen's Union," MS2123 Box 12 Folder 111, NLA.
100 Young to Walsh, 21 November 1922, D170/6/1, WUA. The loan depleted the New Zealand Union's fighting fund. The NZ seamen had become embroiled in a dispute on 31 October 1922 which developed into a prolonged and bitterly contested strike in which they were defeated. That circumstance led to Young's eclipse. The loan was not repaid until 1951. Bolinger, op cit, p.138.
101 Auditor's report 25 March 1924, D170/6/1, WUA.
102 Higgins, New Province, p.155.
workers want is ownership and control of industry", but that it should be obtained by constitutional means. And he added that, "I never said that the Working Class has nothing to expect from electing to Parliament men from their own ranks. I know they have." But the choice of that representative was crucial. Walsh's demonstrated skill within the arbitration process had earned him notice. Perhaps that had aroused in him an ambition for an entrance into politics.\textsuperscript{103} So, it may have been with his own prospects in mind that addressing a future, distinguished, Labor Prime Minister of Australia, he wrote:

"People with little, if any, affinity with Labor, or but a superficial knowledge of working class history and its terrible struggles, are not those who should represent the workers in Parliament. Men who say that this world will be a splendid one to live in, when the master class and the workers resolve to adjust their differences with a view to mutual advantage, are not likely to put up a proper fight for Labor. Unfortunately, we have many Parliamentary representatives of this sort, today. If the workers are to achieve freedom from economic insecurity, they will cease looking to the landed interests for their representatives, nor will they seek them in the ranks of the pseudo-socialists.\textsuperscript{104}

Given his personal economic circumstances and the absence of any alternative source of employment, it would seem that by 1925 Walsh had come to regard the leadership function he exercised within the union as his inalienable right.\textsuperscript{105} Certainly, that is indicated by the fight he was about to put up in defence of his position.

Among disillusioned rank and file seamen, meanwhile, it was becoming apparent that, in contrast to the situation in 1919, the FSUA was reacting to events rather than shaping them. The Commonwealth Government, in 1924, granted the state Government of Western Australia exemption from the coasting provisions of the Navigation Act 1912. Consequently, Australian standards in regard to wages and conditions were no longer mandatory onboard the fleet of State Ships of West Australia, which serviced the remote north-west coast. In response to that situation, the \textit{Seamen's Journal} of July 1924 could only fulminate about a conspiracy between state and shippers to subvert the provisions of the Act.\textsuperscript{106} And again, the union could only protest at the continued loss of life among

\textsuperscript{103} Coleman, \textit{op cit}, p.92.
\textsuperscript{104} Walsh to editor, \textit{Westralian Worker}, 28 November 1924.
\textsuperscript{105} Michels, \textit{op cit}, p.207.
\textsuperscript{106} Stateships' larger vessels traded beyond the coast to Singapore & Dutch East Indies.
seamen which it alleged was the result of maladministration of the Act by government officials amounting to collusion between shipowners and the Commonwealth Department of Navigation to avoid implementation of expensive safety provisions. The Melbourne branch report, as published in the union's periodical of March 1925, complained that the Law, whether administered by High Court, Supreme Court, County Court or Police Magistrates when dealing with cases involving seamen, "exhibit[s] an almost brutal antagonism towards the seamen on one hand, whilst extending to the shipowning class every consideration and assistance on the other hand."  

Conrad's clerk did not suffer the "stupid" sailors gladly and it is apparent from the transcript of evidence of the 1906 Royal Commission on the Navigation bill that few officials felt any compassion for seamen. Relations had not improved by 1925, as the Melbourne branch of the union reminded members:

The rank and file of the seamen of Australia must never forget that the majority of the officials of the Navigation Department and the Mercantile Marine officers are, as their actions have proved in the past, their bitter enemies. Do not forget to treat them as such, and not as some seamen do at the present time look upon the Shipping Masters and Deputy-Shipping Masters as superior beings.

And in the forecastles of Australian ships, the seamen would have recalled the New Zealand seamen's strike, which had collapsed in November 1922. Then, the New Zealand Government had suspended the restricting clauses of the New Zealand Shipping and Seamen Act in order to facilitate the recruitment of 'free-labour' by the coastal companies. As a result, sixty ships were able to trade on the New Zealand coast with

108 The Australasian Seamen's Journal, 2 March 1925.
110 SJ op cit. this article is held in the papers of Sir Robert Garran (Commonwealth Crown Solicitor), A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA. In contrast, Lenin stated in 1919 that:

We are not utopians, we do not indulge in 'dreams' of how best to do away immediately with all management, with all subordination; these are anarchist dreams based on a want of understanding of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship. They are foreign to the essence of Marxism... they serve but to put off the Socialist revolution 'until human nature is different.' No, we want the Socialist revolution with human nature as it is now; human nature itself cannot do without subordination, without control, without managers and clerks.

Lenin, State and Revolution, p.51.
'scab' crews when striking New Zealand seamen were dismissed and replaced with non-union labour.111

A major source of frustration among Australian seamen was the fate of the Commonwealth Government Line of Steamers. Sir Leo Chiozza Money, in his publication of 1920 had been enthusiastic about Australia's venture into establishing an Australian national line of foreign-going steamships, stating that "two of the British Dominions, Canada and Australia, have embarked upon shipping nationalisation on a considerable scale and with great success."112 The Australian Commonwealth Government, said Chiozza Money, had wisely built up a national fleet during the First World War, with more building in the United Kingdom and in Australia. The control of these ships was vested in the Commonwealth Government Line of Steamers [CGL], and the author of *The Triumph of Nationalization* claimed that "the enterprise has been brilliantly successful, despite the bitter hostility of the British companies plying to Australia."113

The Line *was* successful, at first. The CGL returned a profit at the end of each financial year between 1917 and 1921.114 But in 1922 it made a loss of L1,171,569. In 1923 the loss amounted to L1,626,150 and the Line continued to make a financial loss each year thereafter. Broeze says that in 1923 the CGL owned 54 ships totalling 302,000 gross registered tons.115 And it was on 9 February 1923 that S.M. Bruce having ousted his leader, 'Billy' Hughes, the anglophile and anti-socialist Bruce-Page coalition took office. Thereafter, between 1924 and 1926 the Australian Commonwealth Line of Steamers [ACLS], as it was known from 1 September 1923, largely withdrew from the

111 Bolinger, *op cit*, pp.138-142.
112 Money, *op cit*, p.216. For an account of the Canadian Government’s acquisition and disposal of Merchant Marine Limited, which Kaplan says incurred a total loss of Canadian $82 million, see Kaplan, *Everything that Floats*, pp.3-5.
113 Money, *op cit*, p.217.
115 Broeze, *op cit*, p.20.
interstate trade, selling off its coastal ships wherever buyers offered. Among the buyers was the Broken Hill Proprietary Company (BHP) which, in April 1921, had set up its own industrial shipping department. Some ACLS ships were sold to the coastal companies. Many more were sold to European buyers and the remainder were disposed of to Japanese shipbreakers. Meanwhile, the ACLS was making a determined effort to enter into competition with the British-controlled conference in a bid to force down the freight rates charged in the liner trade between Australia and the UK. For this purpose it retained its five 'Bay' class and its two 'Dale' class ships. In contrast to the nondescript, slow, coal-burning tramp ships with which W.M. Hughes had originally founded the CGL, these were large modern oil-burning steam-turbine ships whose service speed of 15 knots allowed each of them to maintain a monthly service between London and Australia. But, as Burley has pointed out, their total refrigerated space of some 6 million cubic feet was only about one sixth the volume provided by the British lines regularly employed in the UK-Australia trade.

Aboard the TSS Moreton Bay in October 1922, Cadet Clive Henderson wrote home that all hands expected the worst, that the Line would be sold to the Inchcape group, in which case "that would mean the sack for almost everyone, and a big reduction in wages. ABs about L8 and second mates L14. Also 4 hour watches, and the food cut down, so you will see how we're watching for things to turn out." The ACLS, being unable to beat the conference in the matter of freight rates, was eventually forced to join it. Consequently, political support dwindled. But unless support was forthcoming from the Government in the shape of a direct operating subsidy, it was patently obvious that

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116 For disposal of the CGL ships, see Pemberton, Australian Coastal Shipping, Appendix II, pp.250-299.
118 McDonnel says that in September 1923 the fleet comprised 54 ships - half of them laid-up. By the end of 1923 the total was 42 ships. On 1 January 1925 it was 32 ships. By 1926 there were only 7 ships left and these were the modern 'Bays' and 'Dales'. McDonnel, Build a Fleet, p.216.
119 Burley, British Shipping, p.54.
120 By 1919 Lord Inchcape’s group, which included P&O and BISN, had become the British Empire’s largest shipping combine. See, Broeze, op cit, p.16.
122 Broeze, op cit, p.21.
Australian national ships manned to Australian levels and enjoying Australian conditions and rates of pay could not compete with 'cost-effective' British ships such as that visited by Clive Henderson and described in a letter of 31 July 1923 from Port Sudan on the scorching western shore of the Red Sea:

And talk about bad times! Whenever you see a ship with the Red Ensign up, you can say to yourself: 'There's one of England's Grand Mercantile Marine Fleet.' Think how noble to feel that you are serving the King and Country - L6 per month - and two rounds of corned beef, a lump of bread and 'coffee' without milk or sugar or tea. We went aboard the Largo Law and that's what we found - watch and watch at sea and only two mates [deck-officers]... The crowd turn to at 6.0 in port and can be made to work all hours, for nothing... Even these men told us that they were lucky to be there instead of Arabs, Lascars, or Coolies in their place... The second mate of the Largo Law nearly swooned when he heard our conditions - ABs making L20 or more [per month] with overtime and he getting L12 and working day and night in port and watch and watch at sea. That's how England does things...

Lord Inchcape's response to the initial Australian challenge had been an offer to purchase the remaining ships of the Commonwealth fleet. But despite the foreboding of Clive Henderson and his shipmates, the sale of the 'Bays' and 'Dales' did not immediately take place. It was not until January 1928 that the federal Government of S.M.Bruce offered them for sale as a job-lot. Between May and August 1928 as each ship berthed in London, it was handed over to the purchaser, another peer of the realm, Lord Kylsant. Thereupon, rates of pay for all hands onboard were halved.

123 Cited in Shorten, op cit, p.5. Henderson was then a seaman in the CGL's Boonah, which was sold in 1925. Pemberton, op cit, Appendix II, p.257.
124 McDonell points out that more than half the crews of these ships were composed of British seamen who were only too anxious to sign-on under Australian articles of agreement and enjoy the relatively superior Australian conditions onboard as determined by the Commonwealth Navigation Act. McDonell, op cit, p.203.
125 The following exchange took place in the House of Representatives on 9 September 1942:

Sir Earle Page - Shipping, of course, is of vital importance to Australia.
Mr Ward - Evidently the right honourable gentleman did not think so when he gave away the Australian Commonwealth Line of Steamers.
Sir Earle Page - It was not given away; it was disposed of in order to save the primary producers of Australia millions of pounds, and to preserve the British shipping connexion [sic], which has been of incalculable value to Australia during this war.

126 McDonell, op cit, p.223.
The process of dismantling Australia's national fleet, prolonged as it was, could only have meant uncertainty and frustration for Australian national seamen. And that process may go some way towards explaining the attitude and subsequent behaviour that is reflected in statistics compiled by the Crown Solicitor's Office of the Commonwealth Government. These indicate that during the year 1924, as a result of industrial action taken by the Seamen's Union, some 18 ships were delayed for a total of 524 days. The statistics also show that between 1 January 1925 and 19 June 1925, again as a result of the activities of the Seamen's Union, 42 ships were delayed for a total of 657 days. In addition, it is claimed, there were innumerable 'nuisance' actions when ships were delayed at sailing time by less than one day.127

A report prepared by the Crown Solicitor's Office in Melbourne, on 21 April 1925, refers to previous complaints by the interstate shipowners who were experiencing difficulty in maintaining services in the face of incessant attack by the FSUA. Seamen, it was reported, absented themselves from their vessels at sailing time, other members of the Union refused to offer for employment to fill the vacancies so created, and the rest of the crew then refused to sail without a full complement. Disputes were being manufactured for frivolous reasons and ships delayed as a result. The chairman of one interstate company was apparently on the point of recommending to his shareholders that they dispose of their ships and the Government itself had announced that it must go out of the shipping business. And it was all due to the anarchic activities of one small section of the community.

In short, the Seamen's Union in particular, and other Unions to a lesser degree, are in open defiance of the law and of the Arbitration Court Awards. Every legal means has been exhausted in the endeavour to punish them but have only proved the utter ineffectiveness of the existing legislation. The members of the Unions are given the privilege of making demand after demand as one body for improved conditions, and practically on no occasion without securing some additional benefits, yet at the same time are openly committing breaches of Awards and exercising job control, and yet no law can be successfully applied to punish them as one body.128

127Memorandum, Crown Solicitor's Office, 21 April 1925, A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA.
128ibid.
It was apparent that, particularly in the matter of Australian coastal shipping, the Arbitration Court lacked the powers of enforcement necessary to make its awards effective. For the Bruce-Page Coalition Government, the situation was intolerable since shipping, even as a private activity, impinges directly upon the national interest, and "the work of the country must be done."  

Burley sees 1925 as the year in which shipowners recognised that their difficulties were long-term. Business was flagging. Freight rates continued to fall. Shipping costs continued to rise. And the perennial problem of excess shipping capacity defied a solution. In shipping company boardrooms there was pessimistic talk of depression. International shipping was afflicted by an infection from which the Australian coastal trade could not be quarantined. That was the alarming environment in which the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor closed his criticism of the Australian merchant seamen with a submission that:

The Government should no longer tolerate such a condition of affairs and that pending a complete and drastic amendment of existing legislation consideration should at once be given by the Government as to what immediate action can be taken.  

Clearly, the forces of reaction were gathering. Only a firm hand on the helm would enable the rank and file seamen of the FSUA to weather the coming storm.

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132 Memorandum, Crown Solicitor's Office, 21 April 1925, A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA.
CHAPTER THREE.

INDIVIDUALISM AND DISCONTENT: 1925.

Upon the application of the Australian Commonwealth Shipping Board and the CSOA, Deputy-president Webb of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court deregistered the Seamen's Union of Australasia [SUA] on 5 June 1925 and cancelled its award. It was a premeditated action that was not taken lightly. In fact the deputy-president first went to the extraordinary length of obtaining confirmation from the full bench of the High Court, sitting in Sydney as a matter of urgency, that he did in fact possess the power to take such drastic action.

During the hearing of an earlier application for deregistration before the president of the Arbitration Court, Mr Justice Powers, on 23 January 1925, counsel for the CSOA, Owen Dixon KC (who was assisted by R.G. Menzies), informed the court that "this union is at present and has been for five years or more deliberately destroying the industry, and... it intends to proceed with that ruinous course of conduct." Owen Dixon dismissed Walsh's claim that the seamen's union was a democratic organisation. The fact was, the eminent counsel stated, "that there is a central mind working and planning the whole of these events." The shipowners could not work with the seamen's union, he went on, and "I do press as strongly as any advocate is capable of pressing that the Court at this stage should exercise the power which it has and which may save this industry." The Seamen's Union was designed to wreck the industry and was doing so, as an examination of the finances of the coastal shipping companies clearly indicated. There was need for the formation of a new union whose interest would be industrial rather than political and which would be at peace rather than at war with the employers. Owen Dixon

121CAR730.
2"I have done nothing in this matter in haste." Deputy-president Webb, 21CAR729.
3Minute. Crown Solicitor to Secretary Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, 17 August 1925, enclosing reasons for judgment published by the High Court in Sydney on 13 August 1925. A432/86 29/3442 PT4, AA.
called upon the Arbitration Court to enforce obedience to its decrees. But Mr Justice Powers regretted that he lacked the necessary power. Instead, he called upon Tom Walsh for an assurance that the rank and file of the union would obey the instructions of its executive committee of management rather than those of Jacob Johnson and William Casey of the Sydney Branch. Having obtained Walsh's assurance, the president of the Arbitration Court in his judgment of 6 February 1925, spoke approvingly of the efforts of Walsh and the executive in persuading the members to obey the terms of the award despite the disruptive efforts of Jacob Johnson and a minority of some 60 members of the Sydney Branch.

Mr Justice Powers' refusal to deregister the SUA was not well received in commercial circles. The Daily Commercial News & Shipping List of 18 February 1925 demanded that Prime Minister Bruce take steps to re-establish freedom in Australia in the face of a situation where, it claimed, law-abiding unionists "are in the grip of foreign and foreign-paid anarchists who are working for world-wide revolution... it is the duty of Australia and the Australian Parliament to rescue our workers from this thrall." The Prime Minister, in fact, should look to the example set recently in Italy where:

F ortunately for Italy, the leader, when he appeared, was not on the side of Communism. Mussolini once an aggressive Socialist organiser, like St Paul, had a vision, and, the scales falling from his eyes, he saw the desperate plight of his country... Italy had got right to the edge of the precipice, but Mussolini had succeeded in hauling her back to safety. It is urgently necessary that Prime Minister Bruce should abandon the policy of sweet toleration he has so far pursued, and take drastic steps to enforce the law... It is useless to temporise with men so faithless as these seamen and wharf lumpers. They do not know what good faith is. There is only one way with such unscrupulous individuals; SMASH THEM!

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4 Transcript, Application for determination of award and cancellation of registration, 23 January 1925, Commonwealth Arbitration Court, A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, pp.32-37. AA.
7 C15. See also, Minute. Crown Solicitor Melbourne to Secretary, Commonwealth Attorney General’s Department. 6 February 1925. A432/86 29/3442 PT4, AA.
8 The Daily Commercial News & Shipping List, 18 February 1925.
And Australia's wealthy, middle-class, and intensely anglophile Prime Minister Bruce, whose own background was that of commerce and shipping, was naturally responsive to the views of Business.9

Telegrams exchanged between the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department confirmed that the maritime situation was being closely watched. "Immediately any evidence justifying the making of a further application for deregistration or the institution of proceedings against any Union or individual is obtained, the matter will receive attention." The shipowners too, it was reported, were watching the situation with a view to making a further application when the facts justified it. State and shipowner in combination awaited their opportunity.10 The scene was therefore set for the Deputy President of the Arbitration Court to pronounce that the object of the union, as disclosed by its conduct, was not industrial and was therefore inconsistent with the objects of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act.11

Walsh later recalled that Jacob Johnson had called a special meeting of the Sydney branch of the union during which he obtained passage of a resolution which instructed the committee of management not to defend the deregistration action. The committee acted upon that instruction and, Walsh claimed, it was upon the instructions of the committee that he did not oppose the deregistration procedure.12 Once deregistered, the Seamen's Union had no legal power to enforce its rules or to collect dues from its members.

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9ADB, Vol.7, p.455. Trainor says that in the period 1865-90 40% of prominent company directors in New South Wales were also politicians. Trainor, *British Imperialism & Australian Nationalism*, p.183. Similarly, in Britain, Tabili traces a close connection between City and Parliament. In 1924, 66 members of the House of Commons and 70 members of the Lords were known to be directors of Shipping Federation affiliated companies, while a President of the Board of Trade, W.Runciman, was proprietor of the Moor Line. Tabili, "Construction of Racial Difference," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.33, No.1, January 1994, pp.67-68.

10 Telegrams, A432/86 29/3442 PT4, AA.

1121CAR728-730. See also, Minute, Crown Solicitor to Secretary Commonwealth Attorney General's Office, 17 August 1925, containing transcript of Judgment in the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. His Honor Deputy President Webb, 5 June 1925, A432/86 29/3442 PT4, p.4, AA.

12 Typescript. 1 March 1938, MS2123 Box 13 Folder 124, NLA.
At the time, Walsh did not seem overly concerned by the deregistration, although later he would attribute it to Johnson's policy of job control, of "stick her up." In a pugnacious statement, he told the press that the seamen felt that time given to the court was wasted and could be used elsewhere more profitably. The Age, in Melbourne on 6 June 1925, reported the deregistration under such headings as "Job Control. Scene in Court. Seamen's Union Case. Registration Cancelled. T. Walsh flouts the court. Foreign ideas denounced by Judge." Tom Walsh had demonstrated "defiance of the Arbitration Court, unmistakable and audacious." Walsh, however, rationalized the seamen's attitude in terms of their past experience and their aspirations for the future:

With regard to the position of the Seamen's Union, now that it is deregistered, we are simply in the situation we found ourselves in in 1919. I might say, in passing, that up till then the position of the seamen on the Australian coast was a deplorable one. Although the Arbitration Court had in 1911, and again in 1918, attempted to relieve the situation of some of the disadvantages under which the men labored, yet, after the court had dealt with these, the seaman found himself, in the words of Mr Justice Higgins, 'With the fag-end of things as his portion'. In 1919, acting on my advice, the men struck work for better conditions, and the result of the strike was that their position was materially improved. Alterations in conditions and other improvements were brought about as the result of the strike. As to the future... I am expecting that the seamen will insist on the same ratio of progress as to the improvement of their working conditions as they have obtained in the past. The seaman is no longer, as some people look upon him, international scum.

In fact, the seamen were identified once more as outcasts, alienated from society in general. When a deputation from the 'Transport Group' called upon the Prime Minister on 30 June 1925 seeking his intervention to avoid a damaging confrontation in the wake of the union's deregistration, S.M.Bruce listed the maritime and associated trade unions which remained content to operate under awards of the Arbitration Court, and stated shortly:

It now remains for the seamen to be brought into line, and not for the rest of the community to be dragged at the tail of the seamen... the Government has functions which it must carry out and must use its full strength to see that those functions are given effect to... the Seamen's Union have brought this trouble on themselves, and they must surely recognise the folly of what has been done.

And there was no lack of agents ready to ensure that they did.

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13 ibid.
14 Age, 6 June 1925.
15 Minutes deputation to the Prime Minister, 30 June 1925. A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA.
The Seamen's Union delegate onboard the CGL ship *Esperance Bay*, on 26 June 1925, reported to the union's head office that while the ship was berthed at Tilbury on 12 May (deregistration took place on 5 June 1925) the seamen and firemen had refused to sail because the ship's chief officer had employed an AB in London who was not a member of the SUA. The delegate claimed that this occurred while several Australian members of the union were unemployed in London and were offering for work. The non-unionist having been signed on the ship's articles, the rest of the crew was coerced into sailing upon threat of imprisonment. It was reported that the Line's London marine superintendent, Captain Moss, informed the union members that the SUA was already deregistered and consequently they had no means of redress. This was the forerunner of other cases of coercion, as when eight greasers from the CGL vessel *Jervis Bay* were jailed in London in 1927 as a consequence of an industrial dispute. These actions were demonstrations of the authoritarianism of marine superintendents. Senior master mariners, these were company men who had risen to positions of managerial responsibility only after long periods of diligent service within the institutionalising environment of seafaring. It was an example of the arbitrary intrusion of an 'interested' third party between the ultimate employer and his employee. Mr Justice Higgins had regretted it. Tom Walsh condemned it when he observed in retrospect that, "the shipowners are too busy in their offices to see what is going on. They depend on those in charge on the waterfront and just there all the weakness lies."

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16 SUA delegate to General Secretary SUA 26 June 1925, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63, NLA.
17 Minutes, stopwork meeting Port Adelaide, 29 March 1927, A467/1 SF12/14 PT2, AA.
18 Musing on the meaning of the phrase "other things being equal" contained within an application by the SUA for preference to be granted to its members in selection for employment, Mr Justice Higgins commented in 1911: "Does this refer merely to sobriety and skill; or does it also include the personal likes and dislikes of the employer (or his manager)?" SCAR170.
20 Tom Walsh to Mr Bradely, 12 December 1938, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 69, NLA.
In later years, Tom Walsh recalled that "after deregistration we got an agreement with the employers embodying all the conditions given us by the Court in its two awards. I conducted all the negotiations both inside and outside the conference room". What happened in fact was that immediately after its deregistration the Union demanded that the articles of agreement of each ship should contain a clause embodying the conditions of the award which had just been cancelled. Should that clause not be inserted then as the articles of each ship terminated the seamen would refuse to re-engage. On 6 July 1925 the Australian Shipping Board, which managed the operations of the CGL, announced its agreement to the Union's demand. Fitzpatrick says that this caused consternation in Federal Cabinet. But the CSOA would not similarly accede to the seamen's demand. Mass meetings of the SUA held in the Sydney and Melbourne branches then announced that a general strike of seamen would commence on 14 July 1925 unless the shipowners changed their minds. The CSOA being adamant in its refusal, the strike began on the 14 July. Immediately, the Government struck at the Achilles heel of the Australian seamen by introducing a Bill to suspend the coasting provisions of the 1912 Navigation Act.

At the end of July 1925, a conference was held and a settlement obtained between the shipowners (who now included BHP with its industrial fleet) and the union. That settlement was brokered by a 'Transport Group' comprising representatives from the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and seven other interested unions. Since BHP was not a member of the CSOA, a separate copy of the 'Memorandum of Agreement' was prepared. Significantly, that document was signed on behalf of the Seamen's Union at the top by Tom Walsh (General President), in the middle by the members of the Executive Committee of Management, and at the bottom by Jacob Johnson (Assistant Secretary Sydney Branch).
The agreement, which was "for the purpose of regulating the relations between the members of the Union and their Employers" noted that the union would abandon all and every form of job control. It was agreed that the union would endeavour to assist the shipowners in manning their vessels, would avoid any action that might result in any ship being delayed, and would specifically avoid any incitement directly or indirectly to direct action to settle any dispute. In return the shipowners would not "unreasonably" reject any member of the union who offered for employment. It was agreed that in the event of a dispute arising, both parties would immediately resort to a 'Conciliation Board' consisting of one representative each from the Union and the shipping company.25 This was a 'gentleman's agreement' and couched in much the same terms as Guthrie's ineffective accommodation of April 1909.

The General Secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, E.J. Holloway, a staunch critic of the Arbitration Court, an advocate of the nationalisation of essential industries, and a close personal friend of Tom Walsh recalled in euphoric terms that:

> It was a very successful conference, probably the most successful; the best spirit was displayed at that conference of probably any conference... both parties congratulated themselves upon the splendid achievement that they had brought about, and they expressed the hope that the timetable of Australian ships would be kept going in the future. They agreed, knowing that some small disputes would be sure to crop up, while the arrangement was being put into proper working order, that they would meet each other from time to time in order to keep the ships going and consider any points requiring consideration, and they have successfully done so, up to now.26

In similar fashion to the one that Walsh had obtained as a result of the successful strike of 1919, this agreement was obtained outside the Arbitration Court. But in 1919 the Government had been the majority shipowner, since as a war-time expedient most of the coastal fleet had been effectively 'nationalised'. By 1925 times had changed. The Commonwealth Government, under the conservative anti-socialist and pro-private enterprise leadership of Prime Minister S.M. Bruce, was finding its loss-making national line to be an expensive venture into public ownership. The exigencies of war, which had

25 Ibid.
26 Transcript, evidence of E.J. Holloway, General Secretary Melbourne Trades Hall Council, Deportation Board, 26 September 1925. A467/1 SF12/3 B32, Vol.3, p664. AA.
necessitated the creation of the CGL in the first instance, no longer existed. The national seaman was no longer at a premium. And, as a result of a progressive process of capital investment, the larger coastal companies were now controlled by British shipping interests whose strategy was formulated in London.27

In Australia, in June 1925, the unemployment rate among trade unionists was 10.2 per cent.28 There were 41 shipping companies, many of them very small organisations, trading on the coast. A total of 209 Australian registered ships were manned, at any one time, by 684 masters and deck officers and 645 engineers together with 5190 seamen.29 Never again would there be so many Australian seamen employed on the coast.30 And those Australian seamen had before them always the example of the treatment meted out to British seamen under the terms of the United Kingdom's Merchant Shipping Acts. For many, such treatment was a spectre from their own recent past. And it continued to haunt them, as when 47 of the crew of the British ship Zealandic were arrested en masse in Brisbane in January 1925 and jailed on charges of desertion. "The laws governing seamen today are a shuddersome relic of an age of medieval barbarism" wrote 'Jack Cade'31 in the Westralian Worker:

"Despite the progress towards a decent life... secured in the face of the hostility on the part of wealthy shipowners, and of an indifferent, ignorant public, seamen today in many instances are still kept subject to most slavish and degrading laws and regulations. Britain more than any other country, retains to the utmost of the power of its law givers that brutality of treatment and denial of justice to seamen which marks the history of British seafaring."32

It was disgraceful, he protested, that the blatant inequity of British merchant shipping legislation should be upheld in Australian courts of justice.

27 Broeze, Private Enterprise" p.20. Also, Burley, British Shipping, p.6.
28 Markey, In Case of Oppression, Appendice Table A4, p.569. See also Appendix 7.
29 Commonwealth Year Book, No.21, 1928. & No.26, 1933.
30 See Appendix 1.
31 John 'Jack' Curtin was then editor of the Westralian Worker. His biographer remarks that Curtin's mentor was the former British seaman, Frank Anstey, who went to sea as a ship's boy in 1876 and joined the Seamen's Union in Australia in 1883. Ross, John Curtin, pp.10-11. Also, ADB, Vol.7, p.79.
32 Westralian Worker, 9 January 1925.
The failure of the world economy in the 1920s to generate demand sufficient to sustain expansion with resultant over-production and speculation was apparent early in the international shipping industry where, as freight rates continued to slump, a worldwide shipping depression was underway by 1925. Meanwhile, in Britain, which lacked the concept of the basic living wage as enshrined in the Australian system of arbitration, the seaman's rate of pay was directly related to the freight-rate obtained by the shipowner, without the safeguard of a minimum. And in those times of increasing unemployment in a depressed industry, Mogridge says that it was Havelock Wilson's policy to obtain the best bargain that offered rather than to engage in strike action and be forced to resume work on the shipowners' terms. And such pragmatism would seem eminently sensible, until one recalls the self-interested relationship which had previously been established between the executive of the NSFU and the shipowners, at the expense of the seamen in the ships.

The Sydney press, in August 1925, reported that in many ports of the United Kingdom every available laying-up berth was occupied by surplus tonnage and "in order to enable British vessels to continue in commission and so avert additional unemployment, [a] reduction in rates has been effected." That reduction amounted to a 10 per cent cut in the seamen's monthly rate of pay and was effective from 1 August 1925. It was applied regardless of the fact that when signing articles for a foreign-going voyage, a certain rate for a set period of time had been formally agreed between the seaman and the owner's representative, the ship's master. This particular reduction, however, was only the latest in a series which effectively reduced the monthly pay of a British AB by 38 per cent from £14 10 0d. in November 1918, to £9 0 0d. in August

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34 Mogridge, 'Militancy', International Review of Social History, Vol.6, 1961, p.394. Wilson himself reasoned that "the strike is a weapon which nearly always breaks in the hands of those that use it and it is therefore better to press along the paths of amity and negotiation." The Seaman, 8 July 1921, cited in Marsh & Ryan, The Seamen, p.112.

35 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 August 1925.
1925. The reduction was bitterly resented by seamen, many of whose families in Great Britain were already forced to draw upon the Poor Law Authorities for material support despite the fact that the breadwinner was fully employed.36

The Australian Prime Minister, in August 1925, was informed by the British shipowners' federation that British ships were threatened with strike action in Australian ports and that it was understood that British seamen were being urged to refuse duty by extremist leaders of the Australian seamen's union.37 S.M.Bruce was appalled. Through the medium of the conservative press on 24 August, he condemned the SUA's involvement in tones of moral indignation. It was a particularly serious matter because "we are literally dependent for the carrying on of our whole commerce and industry upon the regular export of our surplus production." Notwithstanding that and the additional fact that the reduction had been agreed by the executive of the NSFU, "the extremist leaders of the Australian Seamen's Union, Mr Walsh and Mr Johannsen, had induced these men to defy their leaders, and to hold up the British ships trading in Australian ports."38 Addressing his remarks to the striking British seamen, Bruce continued:

I would urge the British seamen involved in the present trouble not to allow themselves to be made the tools of extremist leaders in this country, who will only lure them to their undoing, and be powerless to assist them or their wives and children when they are faced with the inevitable disaster which must follow... I would remind them of the results which have flowed to them under their own trusted leaders, and which have ensured for them a continuous period of employment for the last ten years, and peace in their industry. I would ask them to compare those conditions with what has happened to the Australian seamen under the extremist leadership - they have had constant strikes, unemployment and industrial turmoil.39

Referring to the "inane counsel of a few extremists" Prime Minister Bruce concluded that rather than a contest between capital and labour, the present fight was one between the

37 The authorised historians of the NUS, Marsh & Ryan, say that the strike was instigated as an attempt to unseat Wilson when an unofficial strike committee was formed in the port of London on 8 August by the Communist Party and the Minority Movement. They make the erroneous connection that "the Minority Movement's Australian ally was Tom Walsh." Marsh & Ryan, op cit, p.123.
38 Age, 24 August 1925.
39 ibid.
leaders of the British seamen and the extremists Walsh and Johnson and their unfortunate followers.

From his office in St George's Hall, Westminster Bridge Road, London, the veteran president of the NSFU, J. Havelock Wilson, CH CBE, had sent cablegrams to Prime Minister Bruce and to Tom Walsh on 21 August. Both communications were reprinted in the conservative Sydney Morning Herald of 24 August 1925. In his appeal to the Australian Prime Minister, Wilson said that his NSFU repudiated the activities of Walsh and his colleagues which amounted to interference with the affairs of seamen in English vessels. He said that over 50,000 of his members had signed articles under the new rates of pay without protest. It was the ‘Reds’ who had made difficulties together with a few non-unionists who sought to displace his unionists from their berths. It was impossible to believe, he told Bruce, that such a thing could be allowed to happen, far less be encouraged, by trade unionists in Australia:

The object of the Reds can be understood. We beg you to give full protection and support to members of our union fulfilling their contract and restrain Walsh and others from interfering. This movement is a menace and is highly prejudicial to the system of collective bargaining, and full recognition of our union. These are principles for which we have struggled for 40 years and the action is treachery to the whole trade union movement.41

In the telegram that he addressed to Tom Walsh, however, Havelock Wilson sounded a more personal note in stating that:

Your conduct in interfering with the men on British owned ships is treacherous and dirty in view of the fact that you sent me a telegram asking whether we would recognise the transfer of any members of the Australian union to the British union on this side. By your unreasonable conduct you have destroyed the prestige of the Australian Seamen's Union which was built up by able men. You have destroyed your trust and I suppose you hope to destroy the British Seamen's Union.42

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40 Havelock Wilson, some-time ship's boy, able seaman, ship's cook and temperance hotel proprietor formed the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union in 1887. In late 1894, the NASFU collapsed and was replaced by the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU). The name was changed to National Union of Seamen (NUS) in 1926. Wilson's term of office as general president of the union was unbroken until his death in April 1929. Mogridge, op cit, p.376 & p.409. Marsh & Ryan, op cit, p.38 & p.120.
41 SMH, 24 August 1925.
42 Ibid.
At a mass meeting of striking British seamen held in the Sydney Town Hall on 26 August 1925, Tom Walsh addressed some 2,000 strikers and told them in forthright fashion that they should not allow themselves to be driven back to the ships. If they were not prepared to fight for their rights then they did not deserve to have any. And he would have nothing to do with Havelock Wilson. He "declined to have anything to do with a man who would betray his class. Wilson was the greatest industrial failure in the history of the working class." With such an organisation as the NSFU, said Tom Walsh, "it was a standing disgrace that the men had to fight 12,000 miles away from the centre of the Empire against a reduction of wages [to] which Wilson and other officers had acquiesced."43 A Sydney Morning Herald journalist, Roy Cooper, who made a shorthand transcript of Walsh's speech, later recalled that during his address Walsh read extracts from a book to the assembled British seamen. "He seemed to advocate nationalisation", said Cooper.44

Havelock Wilson and the executive of his NSFU were condemned by British seamen around the Australian coast. Members of the crew of the British steamer Inkun at a special meeting of the Port Adelaide branch of the SUA on 21 August described the officials of the NSFU as "sabotagers" [sic] who had betrayed the seamen and had browbeaten and threatened them with unemployment should they mention their grievances. True to the seamen's ethic of internationalism, "they were glad and thankful for the assistance given to them by the Australian Seamen's Union and for their grip of friendship."45 A mass meeting in Sydney's Domain on 23 August heard Wilson denounced by British seamen as "the prince of Labor renegades."46 The stop-work meeting at Port Adelaide on Tuesday 25 August 1925 heard the men of the Zealandic state that they had nothing but contempt for Havelock Wilson and his officials of the NSFU. The seamen had been carrying Wilson and his officials on their backs for years, it was

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43 Transcript, evidence Roy Cooper, 14 September 1925, Deportation Board, A467/1 SF12/11 B32, p.393A. AA.
45 Minutes special meeting 21 August 1925. SUA Port Adelaide Branch. E183/3/1, ABL.
46 Age, 24 August 1925.
said, and it was time that they were overthrown. And the British crew of P&O's branch line steamer, *Balranald*, who were also present, wholeheartedly agreed with that sentiment.48

The British Seamen’s Strike, or the ‘Homeboat Strike’ as it was known colloquially in Australia and New Zealand, was not confined to Australia. Ships were also held up in South Africa and New Zealand.49 But these hold-ups only occurred where the crews were British nationals sailing under British articles of agreement. In Australia the strike lasted from mid-August until the beginning of December. In the United Kingdom, however, where Wilson’s lieutenant Edward Tupper actively assisted the chairman of the Shipping Federation in replacing strikers with seamen selected from the British pool of 30,000 unemployed, “it was the strike that never was.”50 The SUA received a letter from the “Seamen’s Strike Committee Relief Fund Section” of Dock Road, Tilbury, which reported that the strike in the United Kingdom had failed but hoped that it might continue under the leadership of Tom Walsh in Australia, from whom they hoped to receive instructions:

...as far as the men of Tilbury are concerned the National Sailors’ and Firemen’s Union is a wash out. We quite understand what a big fight you have in front of you and the ordeal you have gone through. We in England were helpless for Scab a Lot Wilson could have manned double the number of ships we attempted to hold up. Some of us even now are determined to carry on with the struggle until Australia wins. The principle object of us who are remaining is to smash the N.S.&F.U.51

But these ‘men of Tilbury,’ were British national seamen who sailed under British articles. These were not levies from the Imperial reserve of tractable.

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47 In 1925 P&O ‘branch line’ cargo ships trading between the UK and Australia did so via the Cape of Good Hope. They were crewed by British national seamen. P&O ships trading to India and the Far East were crewed by Lascars, as were P&O mail ships, ie. cargo-passenger liners on the UK-Australia run via the Suez Canal. In every case the ships’ navigating and engineer officers were British nationals. Transcript, evidence Captain Allin, master of P&O ship *Beltana*, 14 September 1925, Deportation Board, A467/1 SF12/11 B32, p.297. AA.

48 Minutes stopwork meeting 25 August 1925. SUA Port Adelaide Branch. E183/3/1, ABL.

49 One such was P&O’s *ss Ballarat* delayed in Cape Town from 25 August to 10 October, see Roe, “Strike-bound in Cape Town, 1925”, *Labour History*, No.53, November 1987.


51 Grays and Tilbury District, Seamen’s Strike Committee, Relief Fund Section to SUA (undated). MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63, NLA.
Indian and Asian seamen. Originally employed for voyages east of Suez, these 'lesser-breeds' within the law provided a colonized labour force that, kept structurally separate on the basis of race by means of Asiatic articles of agreement whose terms ensured its enhanced exploitability, was understandably popular with British shipowners and their sea-going representatives, the British ships' officers. Here was another aspect of the internationalism of seamen. The ready availability to British shipowners of competent Asian, Indian and African seamen made it more difficult for British national seamen to obtain improvements in conditions and amounted to an ever-present threat to those that had been won.

"Coloured Crews Refuse to Participate" announced the Melbourne Age on Monday 24 August 1925. The British officers of the steamers *Lorenzo, Anchoria, Clan Morrison*, and *City of Naples* stated that their lascar crews had been approached to attend the strike meeting in Melbourne on the 22nd but had 'loyally' refused to participate. In fact, the *City of Kimberley*, an Ellerman Line ship with British officers and a lascar crew had sailed from Melbourne for South Africa on the morning of the strike meeting. And the 150 lascar seamen aboard a P&O mail ship, the cargo-passenger liner *Chitral*, which was due to sail from Sydney on the 26th, also held aloof from the strike.

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54 Reported in the *Age*, 24 August 1925.
In early September 1925, acting upon the instructions of their owners, the masters of a number of strike-bound British ships began taking out writs charging their seamen under the disciplinary provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 with "continued disobedience of lawful commands." Police in ports throughout Australia then began to round up the strikers. In Melbourne, on 9th September, 329 warrants were signed for the arrest of striking British seamen. This resulted in a demonstration on the Yarra Bank and, a few days later, a march by British seamen through Melbourne after which 99 seamen were each sentenced by a local magistrate to three weeks imprisonment and a fine of two days pay. It was on this occasion that the seamen displayed banners bearing legends such as: 'Down With Traitor Wilson Who Sold Us' and 'Prison Before Slavery' and 'Heroes in 1914, Slaves in 1925'.

But the strikers themselves, scattered in ports across the world, were destitute. They were far from home and in conflict with the law. There was no central international strike directive. Local organisation, initially enthusiastic, was ad hoc, and became divided. Faced with the shipowners' powerful international combine the seamen had no real chance of success. When they sailed back to the United Kingdom at the end of 1925 they had gained nothing other than some working class sympathy in Australia. Individually, in their home ports of the United Kingdom, they faced the certain prospect of victimisation at the hands of that "corrupt oligarchy composed of their union officials and the British shipowners.""
At the end of 1924, a leading article in the conservative press proclaimed that it would be to Australia's advantage "if... Mr Tom Walsh were 'invited' to leave the Commonwealth for the more congenial environment in Russia - where his peculiar attributes would have a more appropriate setting." The federal Government of S.M. Bruce was evidently of similar mind since Walsh and Jacob Johnson were summoned separately to appear before a 'Deportation Board' at the High Court in Sydney on 3 September 1925. There they were "to show cause why you should not be deported from the Commonwealth of Australia," on the basis that while not being Australian-born they had engaged in activities detrimental to Australia's trade and commerce and that their continued presence in Australia "will be injurious to the peace, order or good government of the Commonwealth in relation to matters with respect to which the Parliament has power to make laws."

The recommendation of the Deportation Board was a foregone conclusion. The Minister for Home and Territories ordered that Walsh and Johnson be returned to their countries of origin. Adela Pankhurst Walsh's graphic account of what happened then in a somnolent Sydney suburb is disturbingly prescient of what was soon to occur in Europe and the Soviet Union under totalitarianism.

On November 20th 1925 we were all asleep when at 5.45am a violent knocking at the front door awakened me. The next thing I knew was that somebody called out 'We have come to arrest Mr Walsh by order of the Deportation Board.' I got out of bed at once, Mr Walsh opened the front door and two men in plain clothes entered the house... The arrest therefore came as a great shock to me. When the men took Mr Walsh away in the car, the children began to cry with fright and it took us some time to quieten them.  

Dictionary of Labour Biography, p.205, refers to Tupper as "acting in his well-known role of hatchet-man for Wilson."

58 West Australian, 31 December 1924.

59 A.W.Foster, a barrister and future judge of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, protested at the time that the tribunal was "not a court of law and not even a jury of peers but simply appointees of the same government that was requesting the deportations." Larmour, Labor Judge, p.102.

60 Deportation Order. MS2123 Box 11 Folder 109, NLA.

61 Typescript, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, MS2123 Box 9 Folder 83, NLA.
Adela recalled that she went to the Communist Hall in Sussex Street where the SUA was holding a meeting and warned the members of what had happened. She spent the rest of the day in the City, in pouring rain, frantically trying to ascertain the whereabouts of her husband. It was not until 4pm of that day that she discovered that Tom Walsh was being held at the naval base on Garden Island, in Sydney Harbour. There, Walsh and Johnson were imprisoned while arrangements were made to find a ship in which to deport them.62 Walsh might write altruistically that “the removal of one or two men is a very small matter when compared with the importance of strike [action] to the working class,”63 but in practical terms it was no small matter given the domestic situation of his family. Adela recalled that:

We were in no way prepared for a European winter and we had not money to buy warm clothes suitable for the children. We have no friends in England who could possibly help us in a financial direction and Mr Walsh had no prospects of obtaining work.64

Both prisoners appealed to the Supreme Court of New South Wales for a writ of *habeas corpus*, but while the legal process was underway, counsel representing the Commonwealth Attorney General made an application on 23 November 1925 for a hearing before the High Court of Australia.

The next day, being the last Tuesday of the month, a stopwork meeting was held by the South Australian branch of the SUA in Port Adelaide. At that meeting, the secretary of the branch, A.C.Woodsford, read correspondence received from Sydney to the members assembled regarding the deportation. He suggested that as the matter was of vital concern to the membership the agenda should be left temporarily in abeyance. But his suggestion was strongly opposed. A motion was actually carried that the ordinary business of the stopwork meeting should be adhered to, despite voices raised in protest that the fate of the union’s general president should be their immediate concern. The minutes record that proceedings became so disorderly that the chairman declared the

62 *ibid.*
63Walsh to Joseph Morris, General Secretary WWF, cited in Hirson & Vivian, *op cit*, p.57.
64Typescript, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, MS2123 Box 9 Folder 83, NLA.
meeting closed five minutes early. It was a far cry from that unanimity of purpose of which Walsh had been so confident when he issued his "Protest" from gaol in 1919.

Jacob Johnson and Tom Walsh were confined together on Garden Island until released by the decision of the High Court of Australia on 11 December 1925. The stress incurred by that situation, together with his concern for his family's welfare could have done nothing to improve Walsh's composure, so that Adela described him as "very nervous and shaken." And this time it was Johnson who sounded a confident note of self-sacrificial leadership with his 'protest' to the rank and file of the SUA which he issued from his cell on 31 November 1925. Addressed to "Fellow Seamen and Trade's Unionists of Australia" it appealed to them not to be diverted from their purpose by the deportation issue:

Since my sojourn in Australia has apparently almost reached its final stages, I appeal to you, before my departure, to make a strenuous effort in order to win the British Seamen's Strike... Deportation in Australia, as elsewhere, will only become the established order of the day if this adventure on the part of the Capitalist becomes a successful medium of strike-breaking tactics. On the other hand if the workers do not allow themselves to be side-tracked by this issue and thus continue to fight for their original goal and objective, (the British Seamen's success in this particular instance) then the powers that be, will be impressed in the near future with the falacy (sic) of their own stupid activities.

Jacob Johnson, the Assistant Secretary of the Sydney Branch of the Union, emerged from the deportation crisis with his status as a radical leader considerably enhanced, in marked contrast to that of the shaken and silent general president, Tom Walsh. The other winner was the Prime Minister. S.M.Bruce had called a snap election, his first as Prime Minister, on 14 November 1925, while the Deportation Board was still sitting. He toured the country and unashamedly conducted what his biographer has termed "the first of the full-scale 'Red scare' campaigns... and it was a vote-winner." So convincing was the Nationalist Party's victory that for a time it seemed that Bruce might even be able

65Minutes stopwork meeting 24 November 1925, SUA Port Adelaide Branch, E183/3/1, ABL.
66Typescript, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, MS2123 Box 9 Folder 83, NLA.
67Johnson to "Fellow Seamen and Trade's Unionists of Australia", 31 November 1925, D170/6/1. WUA.
68Edwards, Bruce of Melbourne, p.114.
to dispense with the Country Party's coalition partnership.\textsuperscript{69} For Labor, it was a \textit{debacle}. The ALP at its federal conference of 1924 had with difficulty disassociated itself from the CPA by ruling out affiliation. Now Labor had lost seven seats to Bruce's Nationalists.\textsuperscript{70}

But the real losers were the seamen. Although Walsh and Johnson had appeared together on the same platform and had been seen to uphold the traditional internationalism of seamen, the SUA's involvement in the British seamen's strike had only exacerbated the division that existed within its own national organisation. Now, with the General President still held in custody, the assistant secretary of the Melbourne branch reported a deteriorating situation to "Dear Mrs Walsh":

Regarding the overseas seamen, we held out as long as we could and have the honor of being the last port in the world to go back to work... With reference to the Victorian Branch, things are in a deplorable state. As you are aware I have not been able to pay any attention to branch matters for the past three months, and the result has been that the members' interests have been sadly neglected. This has had the effect of making the members disgruntled, and when their complaints are not attended to they become antagonised towards me for being absent from the branch for so long. This antagonism is fostered by Jack O'Neill and Barnett whose incompetency (sic) is being exposed and whose only excuse to the members is to the effect that Charley O'Neill should be at the branch office instead of paying so much attention to the overseas seamen. Both John O'Neill [Melbourne branch secretary] and Barnett [vigilance officer] have tried to sabotage the strike from the start by refusing to accept levies. By slandering and maligning me they have been guilty of the most despicable conduct that one could ever imagine... there has been so much intrigue and plotting against me during my absence from the branch that I should not wonder if I were beaten... it is impossible for me to leave the men stranded. We will have nearly two hundred men here without ships and I have not a penny piece to carry on... Now dear Mrs Walsh this is what I want you to do in the event of Tom being deported. Tell Tom to leave behind for me a letter giving particulars of the £200 donation by J.W [John Wren] to John O'Neill for the \textit{Volumnia} Relief Fund, and which was not handed over to the seamen, but misused by John O'Neill. If I hold such a letter from Tom this will be the means of keeping John O'Neill straight, because of fear and exposure. In the interests of the SU it is imperative that I should have such a letter, otherwise it is probable that in view of the present feeling that the grafters and corrupters will get control of our organisation and eventually smash it to smithereens... Give my fondest regards to poor old Tom.\textsuperscript{71}

A trade union is a formal association of workers who have combined for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their employment. As Price has pointed out, discontent is intrinsic to that situation, and management of that discontent is the function

\textsuperscript{69}ibid, p.116.
\textsuperscript{70}Farrell, \textit{International Socialism}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{71}Charles O'Neill to Adela P Walsh, 3 December 1925, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
of the union's leadership. Given the seamen's continued alienation from 'shoreside' society, there was no lack of opportunity for the leadership of the union to exercise its function. But internecine discontent was also apparent. There was a breakdown in the relationship of trust within the social body of the union that can only be attributed to mismanagement. Sydney was numerically the largest Branch of the union, and under the influence of Jacob Johnson and his faction it had for some time been antipathetic to Walsh. Now, here was a clear warning of division in Melbourne, the second largest branch. A mere seven years after Tom Walsh had acceded to its leadership, the Seamen's Union of Australasia was once more a house divided.

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72 Price, Masters, Unions and Men, p.16.
73 In August 1928, Jacob Johnson stated that Sydney accounted for at least 50% of the membership, Adelaide 15%, and Newcastle 10%. Transcript, evidence of J. Johnson, 14 August 1928, Longmore v Johnson, Central Police Court, Sydney. A432/86 29/170 PT5. AA.
CHAPTER FOUR.

FACTIONALISM AND IMPOTENCE: 1926-1929.

At the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch of the Seamen's Union of Australasia (SUA) on the last Tuesday in January 1926 it was resolved, upon a motion by member William Casey which was strongly supported by Tom Fleming (Sydney branch secretary) and Jacob Johnson (assistant Sydney branch secretary), that an investigation committee be formed by the Sydney branch and sent to inquire into matters in the Melbourne branch. In Melbourne, not only had a series of fires destroyed union records, but the branch secretary had absconded with union funds. Disregarding the protests of the general president of the union, Tom Walsh, that investigation of the matter was the prerogative of the union's executive committee of management, Johnson, together with W.J.Clarke and another of his supporters set themselves up as a committee and proceeded to Melbourne, leaving Casey behind to act as assistant branch secretary in Sydney.

Tom Walsh later claimed that out of this action, "arose all the internal squabbings which has (sic) existed ever since." In fact, the competition between the Walsh and Johnson factions for control of the SUA had been underway for some years. Now, however, it escalated into a faction fight that absorbed the attention and dissipated the energies of the union's officials until the end of 1929.

In late March 1926, J.Havelock Wilson, the founder and life-long general president of the British National Sailors' and Firemen's Union [NSFU], communicated with Tom Walsh, general president of the SUA, regarding their mutual interest in removing Jacob Johnson from his position of influence within the SUA. Apparently

1 Typescript, 9 March 1937, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 67, NLA.
2 ibid
3 Typescript, "Short History of the Matter", MS2123 Box 12 Folder 111, NLA.
4 Memorandum, Special Enquiry Officer Yates to Acting Attorney General Daly, 23 September 1930, "In the Matter of Jacob Johnson", A432/86 29/170 PT4, AA.
Walsh had proposed the establishment of a new seamen's union, the Australian Seamen's Union [ASU], as a means to neutralise Johnson. The ASU would be headed by Tom Walsh and would exclude Johnson.\(^5\) Walsh's antipathy to Johnson as an aggressive rival is easily understood. But one might ask what interest did a distant Havelock Wilson have in seeking the removal of Jacob Johnson from the SUA? In fact it was an interest that was very dear to the heart of Wilson. It was the matter of protecting a major source of NSFU income.

Jacob Johnson was a socialist. Together with 'Bill' Casey and W.J.Clarke he had helped to re-establish the Socialist Party of Australia [SPA] in Melbourne in 1924.\(^6\) Johnson's antagonism towards the Communist Party of Australia [CPA] was already marked and would deepen,\(^7\) but such ideological differentiation meant nothing to Havelock Wilson. Wilson saw Johnson simply as a 'Red' who, as had been demonstrated during the course of the British Seamen's "Homeboat" strike in 1925, was engaged in activities designed to disaffect seamen onboard British ships in the regular liner trade between United Kingdom and Australian ports. Johnson posed a threat to the income of the NSFU and consequently to Wilson himself. In a letter to Walsh, Wilson said that:

> The Minority Movement of the Communists is hard at work trying to knock me out and destroy the prestige and power of the seamen's union of Great Britain. All their efforts have been in vain. The real acid test of this is the income of the union.\(^8\)

He boasted that the income of the NSFU would soon amount to £5000 per week, stating that the "Tidal Basin branch" of his union which, he said, "is practically the centre of the Australian trade" was taking £1000 per week. "Just think of it", he enthused, "one branch of a union doing the equivalent of £52,000 per year! So Johansen and his gang are not succeeding in disaffecting the men in the Australian trade."\(^9\) But Walsh, too, as

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\(^5\)ibid.
\(^7\)Transcript evidence, J.Johnson 14 August 1928, Central Police Court Sydney, A432/86 29/170 PT5, AA.
\(^8\)Wilson to Walsh, 17 June 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
\(^9\)ibid.
recently as 1925 with his involvement in the "Homeboat Strike" had tried hard to 'disaffect the men in the Australian trade', and it is hardly likely that J.Havelock Wilson would have forgotten that fact.

On 'April Fool's Day', 1 April 1926, a special meeting of the Sydney branch of the SUA passed a resolution calling for the removal of Tom Walsh from office as general president of the union.\(^{10}\) Five days later, Jacob Johnson, still only assistant secretary of the Sydney branch, published a denunciatory pamphlet which bore the formidable title, *Who Are The Union Smashers? Copy Of Mr Walsh And Company's New Rules As Filed In The Arbitration Court, Melbourne, For The Purpose Of Forming A New Seamen's Union, And A Brief Survey And Criticism Upon These Rules.*\(^{11}\) Johnson had evidently obtained a copy of the rules which Walsh and his associates had drafted and filed with the industrial registrar's office in Melbourne for the purpose of obtaining registration of the ASU. In his pamphlet, under a sub-heading, "The Face Of Walsh With The Brain Of Wilson", Jacob Johnson warned the membership of the SUA that many of the rules proposed for the new union were in fact replicas of those institutionalised by Havelock Wilson in his NSFU. "They were", he said, "his stepping stones to power, and Australian seamen can see in the dark and helpless conditions of the British seamen a living picture of their own sad future should they accept the rules of Wilson's windy imitator."\(^{12}\) It was a case of "Mr Walsh the would-be Havelock Wilson". Officials of the NSFU, Johnson said, could not be dismissed by the members. "Wilson can sack any official, with the result that he can, by selection, surround himself with those who are prepared to do his bidding. Walsh can do the same, and, knowing him as we do, to do it is only a question of opportunity."\(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Typescript "Short History of the Matter", MS2123 Box 12 Folder 111, NLA.
\(^{11}\) SUA publication, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63, NLA.
\(^{12}\) *ibid.*
\(^{13}\) *ibid.*
Tom Walsh responded with a pamphlet of his own in which he accused the Johnson faction of disrupting the SUA by means of unconstitutional and undemocratic special meetings held in Sydney. Walsh pointed out that at these meetings, where a quorum was 150 members, a mere 76 persons in Sydney who had never been elected to any responsible position could disrupt the policy agreed upon by the entire union membership, which he claimed was 8000, distributed as it was around the extensive coastline of Australia.14

It is quite apparent that Johnson did manipulate the meetings of the union's Sydney branch by means of the 'machine-vote' of a clique of supporters few of whom, even if they were bona fide seamen, ever went to sea.15 Walsh was justified in his denunciation of that situation. But he was less than candid in disclaiming his own association with Havelock Wilson and the NSFU.16 Wilson had sent a representative, 'Pat' Flynn, to Sydney in May 1926. While in Sydney, Flynn engaged in a covert dialogue with Walsh.17 And it is worth noting that while his emissary was in Sydney, Wilson made use of the good offices of Mr Barclay, the founder and life-long secretary of the extreme right-wing anti-Communist Sane Democracy League [SDL], as a post-estante.18

At this time the SUA employed both a general president and a general secretary. It was the union's policy to receive nominations from those members desiring to contest official positions in the union and, subsequently, to hold a ballot for office at the end of

14Typescript, "My Reply to Johnson's 'The Union Smasher', MS2123 Box 7 Folder 63, NLA.
15See transcript of evidence of Australian seaman Henry Ford, 15 September 1931, 1931 Royal Commission "In the Case of Jacob Johnson", A432/86 29/170 PT4 Attachment, AA. Also denunciation by John Curtin in West Australian, 1 January 1925. And Walsh, "Short History of the Matter", MS2123 Box 12 Folder 111, NLA.
16From 1926 the NSFU was renamed the National Union of Seamen [NUS].
17Memorandum, Special Enquiry Officer Yates to Acting Attorney General Daly, 23 September 1930, op cit.
18Exhibit of Evidence, 1931 Royal Commission, "In the Case of Jacob Johnson", A432/86 31/1597, AA. See also obituary A.De.R.Barclay, SMH, 6 March 1950. See report on the SDL by Director Investigation Branch Commonwealth Attorney General's Department to Solicitor General, 19 August 1932. The aims of the SDL are set out on its letterhead. Both items see A467/1 SF7/43 B20, AA.
each year. In the ballot held at the end of 1926, Jacob Johnson was elected general secretary of the SUA for the forthcoming year. Tom Walsh easily retained his position as general president, but now found that Johnson had outsmarted him by gaining effective control over the union's funds. The Sydney branch, with some 50 per cent of the total membership, was the largest of the six branches. Consequently it was the main source of financial support for the federal office. But the Sydney branch had been persuaded to authorise Johnson and Fleming and another official of their faction to withdraw the branch funds and bank them in an account accessible only by those three. And although now elevated to federal office, Johnson still retained his signatory authority. But Tom Walsh had only himself to blame for his predicament, Johnson had simply taken advantage of the lackadaisical business practices that characterised the union.

And the SUA was in financial difficulties. At the end of November 1926 it had liabilities nearly twice the value of its assets. It was operating on an overdraft from a Melbourne bank and had still not repaid a loan of £2000 which the Seamen's Union of New Zealand had advanced it in 1922. At a committee of management meeting in October 1927, the Sydney branch secretary remarked that the union had only avoided bankruptcy by means of a one pound levy upon each member.

Upon application by the Commonwealth Shipping Board and the Commonwealth Steamship Owners' Association (CSOA), the SUA had been de-registered by the federal Arbitration Court on 5 June 1925. One result of that deregistration was that SUA members had no claim to preference over non-unionists in the process of selection for those jobs that were available in the diminishing number of Australian registered ships. And while there were 44 Australian coastal shipping companies operating 216 ships in

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19 See transcript evidence J. Johnson, 14 August 1928, Longmore v Johnson, Central Police Court, Sydney. A432/86 29/170 PT5, AA.
20 Typescript, 21 December 1926, Walsh to "Officers and Members", MS2123 Box 11 Folder 109, NLA.
21 Auditor's report, MS2123 Box 11 Folder 107, NLA.
22 Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide, 30 November 1926. E183/3/1, ABL.
23 Report & Minutes, committee of management meeting, 18 October 1927. D170/6/1, p.53. WUA.
1926, by 1929 there were only 29 companies and 181 ships. Meanwhile the dismantling of the Commonwealth Government Line of Steamers, which had operated 54 ships in 1923, was all but complete by 1926. Only 7 ships were left in the UK-Australia liner trade and in these more British seamen were employed than Australians. And, then, in April 1928 these last ships were sold as a job-lot by the Commonwealth Government to a British shipping company. Throughout the period considered here, members of the SUA watched as their jobs disappeared, and their conditions deteriorated.

At the same time the union lacked the means, or the will, to disseminate information to its peculiarly isolated and peripatetic membership, other than by monthly stopwork meetings ashore which, by nature of their employment afloat, few seamen could make a practice of attending regularly. The union's bulletin, The Seamen's Journal, had ceased publication in 1925 and it would not reappear for another ten years.

Throughout 1927 Tom Walsh as general president and Jacob Johnson as general secretary maintained their jealous rivalry for control of the SUA. Nominations for office for the forthcoming year closed on 29 November 1927, and this provided an opportunity for Walsh and his faction to take the war into Johnson's camp. Walsh nominated for general secretary, which would have taken him into direct competition for the job with the incumbent, Johnson. But Johnson, according to Walsh, 'squibbed it'. Instead of

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25McDonell, Build a Fleet, p.203 & 216. And see CPD Vol.177, p.951, in reply to a question upon notice in the House of Representatives on 3 March 1944. Prime Minister Chifley stated that: The amount still outstanding in respect of the sale of the ships to White Star Line Limited is - principal L309,265, interest L104,486, total L413,751. As the final dividend in the liquidation of the White Star Line Limited has been paid, it is expected that no further repayments will be received... The seven Commonwealth ships consisting of five Bays and two Dale steamers were sold for L1,900,000. The original cost of the seven steamers in 1916 was L7,527,500... In 1932 the White Star Line Ltd went into liquidation and the Commonwealth exercised its rights under debenture to sell the six remaining ships, one having been lost, on which the insurance L205,128 was paid to the Commonwealth. The amount realised from the sale was L500,000.
27Typescript, "Rule Bursting, Fund-Raiding and Union Smashing", 1 March 1938, MS2123 Box 13 Folder 124, NLA.
running against Walsh, Johnson nominated for the position that Walsh must vacate, that of general president! However, subsequent to these nominations, but before the results of the ballot for office for the year of 1928 were announced, Johnson and his faction organised a counter-move that was designed not only to eject Tom Walsh from office, but from the union as well.

Johnson formally charged Walsh on 15 December 1927 with having engaged in a series of activities each of which contravened the rules of the union. Then, upon notice of only an hour or two, a series of five special meetings were held in Sydney at which the charges were heard progressively and Walsh found guilty by attendances that at no time exceeded 260. At the final special meeting, on 5 January 1928, it was resolved by a majority vote that Walsh be called upon to resign from office. All the action took place in Sydney, at poorly attended special meetings, organised by the Johnson faction at short notice. Walsh refused to resign.

The normal stop-work meeting of the Sydney branch of the SUA took place on Tuesday 31 January 1928 between the hours of 8am and 12noon. Working seamen, of necessity, had to quit stop-work meetings at 12noon since they were liable to forfeit a day's pay if not back onboard their ships ready to turn-to at 1pm after the midday meal-break. And since stop-work meetings in Sydney normally were held at Miller's Point, many seamen with some distance to walk back to their ships at their berths would have left promptly. It is not clear how long the branch business took, but upon its completion the stop-work meeting was converted into a special meeting. This was despite the objection of the chairman, who was thereupon replaced by Johnson's close associate, Tom Fleming. It was then resolved unanimously, upon Johnson's motion, that Tom Walsh be removed from office on the basis that he had been found guilty of misdemeanours dating back to 1925, including fraud, embezzlement and attempting to

28 Transcript, 29 October 1928, Judgment, Long Innes J, in the Supreme Court of NSW in Equity, MS2123 Box 10 Folder 100, NLA.
form a 'bogus' union with new rules giving himself full executive control. When Walsh attempted to have the attendance of the meeting counted and to ascertain how many of those present were financial members of the union, he was howled down.\(^{29}\)

But if an 'interested' minority of the membership rejected Walsh, the majority rejected Johnson. That was made clear when the result of the annual ballot for office was announced on 7 March 1928, at another special meeting in Sydney. A total of 4,499 ballot papers had been issued and Johnson had been unsuccessful in his bid for office as general president, having been defeated by an unknown - Arthur Baker.\(^{30}\) And since Tom Walsh was the sole nominee for the position of general secretary, he was entitled under the rules to be declared elected unopposed. But he was not. Instead, the meeting hurriedly carried a majority resolution that "by virtue of Mr Walsh's recall, the position of general secretary is now vacant, this special meeting instructs Mr Johnson to continue in office until his successor has been appointed by ballot."\(^{31}\) Thereupon, the union's federal returning officer, whose responsibility it was to conduct the ballot in accordance with the union's rules, declared the ballot result for general secretary to be null and void and called for fresh nominations for that office.\(^{32}\) From that date, Jacob Johnson consistently denied that Tom Walsh was the democratically elected general secretary of the SUA, while taking upon himself the duties of that position.

As radical leader of the SUA, Tom Walsh had been gaoled in 1919 for defying the law. Now, he sought the law's vindication. On 16 March 1928 he entered a suit in the Supreme Court of NSW in Equity seeking an injunction to restrain Johnson and his associates from interfering with him in the process of carrying out his duties as general secretary of the SUA.\(^{33}\) The suit was first heard on 5 April 1928, but the judge soon adjourned the hearing and ordered that a ballot be taken of the entire membership of the

\(^{29}\)ibid.  
\(^{30}\)ibid.  
\(^{31}\)cited in ibid.  
\(^{32}\)ibid.  
\(^{33}\)ibid.
SUA in order that the will of the membership might be definitely ascertained as to who should be its general secretary. But as the returns of that ballot accumulated, the will of the membership may have become all too apparent to Johnson and his faction. At any rate, on 8 May 1928, while the ballot was still in progress, and with only minimal notice having been given to the membership, yet another special meeting of the Sydney branch of the union took place. At that meeting Johnson proposed that two new rules be added to the union's official rule-book, and it was agreed that the membership be asked to indicate their acceptance or rejection of these new rules by means of a ballot.34

Two ballots were now underway. One was the Equity Court-induced ballot that was conducted in order to decide who the members wanted as their general secretary. The other was the Johnson faction-induced ballot to decide whether the members would accept two new rules. It took from 27 April until 18 September 1928 to complete the two ballots.35 But while that protracted procedure was underway, another event occurred that was to prove decisive for the outcome of the faction fight.

A strike that began as a manning dispute in one ship between marine cooks and the coastal company of Huddart Parker Ltd., escalated into a general stoppage by marine cooks on 4 June 1928.36 Support for the cooks among the other maritime unions was noticeably lacking. It was lacking to the extent that the Adelaide and Newcastle branches of the SUA announced that their members were prepared to sail without cooks.37 In fact, the Barwon of the Adelaide Steamship Company had arrived in Sydney from Adelaide without any cooks onboard.38

This event prompted 'general secretary' Johnson to call a special meeting of the Sydney branch of the SUA on 21 June 1928. At that meeting Johnson spoke of the SUA

34 ibid.
35 ibid.
36 “Pit Cobbeu Lecture”, 12 June 1928. D170/7/52 WUA.
37 ibid.
38 ibid.
members onboard the Barwon and of the union's South Australian branch secretary in the following terms:

Their attitude was a scabby one and they were primary to blame (sic) for even taking notice of any official who was of a scabby nature, and a traitor to the working class movement. And incidentally mentioned the fact that the organisation would deal with Mr Woodsford in good time.39

Two firemen from the Barwon, Rigby and Powell, called upon Claude Dillon, the New South Wales secretary of the CSOA, in his office in Sydney on 26 June 1928.40 Rigby, who was the president of the South Australian branch of the SUA, related to Dillon how he and Powell had been confronted by Johnson in the federal office of the union. Johnson had accused Rigby and Powell of "scabbing" on the cooks' union and had told Rigby that he must get out of the Barwon. Rigby claimed that, when he refused to quit the ship, Johnson said to him, "we will master your destiny and we will deal with Hussock [Newcastle branch secretary] later."41 On 3 July 1928, Dillon of the CSOA handed affidavits signed by Rigby and Powell and another member of the crew of the Barwon to an investigation officer of the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department. That officer had been directed to Dillon by a Mr Barclay.42 Dillon recalled this matter when giving evidence nearly three years later before the Beeby Royal Commission.

(Q) You had the idea of prosecuting Johnson? - (A) Yes. We had the idea to stop the activities of Johnson.
(Q) Because he was a nuisance? - (A) Yes.
(Q) He was a very vigorous fighter? - (A) Very vigorous.
(Q) A bit of a nuisance? - (A) Yes; he was a nuisance.
(Q) But you had no desire to prosecute him? - (A) Yes.
(Q) You had? - (A) Yes.
(Q) Were not these statements by Rigby and Powell taken by you for the express purpose of a prosecution? - (A) No.43

39Exhibit copy minutes, special meeting Sydney branch SUA, 21 June 1928. A432/86 31/1597. AA.
40Transcript, evidence of Claude Dillon, 1931 Royal Commission "In the Case of Jacob Johnson", A432/86 29/170 PT4 Attachment, p.66A. AA. See also, Labor Daily, 5 September 1931.
41Transcript, evidence of W.Rigby, 14 August 1928, Longmore v Jacob Johnson, Central Police Court, Sydney. A432/86 29/170 PT5, p.16. AA.
42Statement of George Longmore, Investigation Officer, Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, A432/97 29/170 PT4. AA.
43 Labor Daily, 5 September 1931.
When asked whether at the time he had favoured the Walsh or the Johnson faction, Dillon stated candidly that he had favoured the Walsh faction.44

Jacob Johnson appeared in Sydney's Central Police Court, on 14 August 1928, charged with intimidation under the Commonwealth Crimes Act 1914-1928. He was found guilty, on 28 August 1928, of attempting to intimidate men to leave their employment by the use of inflammatory language and the implied threat of physical violence against them. Sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour, he was released on bail pending an appeal. When that appeal was dismissed, on 23 October, he was committed to Long Bay Penitentiary in Sydney.45 He was subsequently transferred to an afforestation camp far from the waterfront, at Tuncurry, in inland New South Wales.46 Jacob Johnson had been removed, if only physically, from his sphere of operations, for a time.

Perceptibly, Tom Walsh was coming under the influence of, and becoming dependent upon, J.Havelock Wilson. After the British General Strike of 1926, in which its general president ensured that the NUS took no effective part, Wilson became involved in activities connected with the establishment of district 'non-political' miners' unions, as breakaways from the Miners' Federation. These activities led to the expulsion of the NUS from the Trades Union Congress in September 1928.47 At the same time Wilson joined forces with some large-scale employers in forming the "Industrial Peace Union." Industrial peace was to be achieved simply by co-operation between employees and employers. The inherent contradiction between the interests of labour and capital was to be resolved at one stroke. In June 1928 Tom Walsh's wife, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, the youngest of the "fighting Pankhurts," seized upon that simplistic notion with all her

44 ibid.
45 Report of Judge Beeby, 1931 Royal Commission "In the Case of Jacob Johnson", op cit.
46 Certificate of Release, 23 February 1929, A432/86 29/170 PT1. AA.
customary enthusiasm and energy. She started an Australian branch of the Industrial Peace Union. Adela was engaged in a life-long transit across the ideological spectrum from extreme Left to extreme Right. The Industrial Peace Union was but one more stage on that journey, and as travelling companions she and Tom were inseparable.

In July 1928 Tom Walsh delivered an address to the ultra-conservative Constitutional Association of NSW. The speech had been written conjointly by Tom and Adela. It was an argument for the replacement of the Marxist class war with a new era of co-operation. Industrial output should be expanded, unemployment tackled, and European migrants attracted to Australia which would become a bastion against the Communist wreckers who sought to admit the hordes of Asia. He then went on to make a similar speech to the Melbourne Constitutional Association. Concord and prosperity were his watchwords. ‘Concord and prosperity’, too, had been the watchwords of J.Havelock Wilson in his peculiarly individualistic relationship with the British shipowners.

Havelock Wilson wrote to Walsh on 17 June 1928. He said that Walsh was to understand that he, Havelock Wilson, was not influenced by the rumours that were going round. Rumours that Walsh was a trickster, that his changed attitude was a sham, that he had adopted his latest role in order to establish himself as the new president of the NUS did not impress Havelock Wilson in the least, he said. The NUS was thriving, it was strong, and attacks upon it by the Minority Movement were ineffective, he said. Meanwhile he was sending Adela £250 to fund the initial expenses of her Industrial Peace Movement in Australia.

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49 Mitchell, Fighting Pankhursts, p.216.
50 Wilson to Walsh, 17 June 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64. NLA.
Tom Walsh addressed a special meeting of the South Australian branch of the SUA in Port Adelaide on 27 July 1928. It was the day after a formal complaint of intimidation had been made against Jacob Johnson. Walsh was at pains to explain why he had addressed the Constitutional Club. It was because "the Communist menace was a danger to the trade union movement, as well as the whole of the community." He was concerned that the SUA was heading for industrial chaos and considered that the only remedy was to regain registration in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. Categorically denying claims made by the Sydney branch of the union, Walsh stated that he had no connection with the Industrial Peace Union and he was not going to England to take the place of Havelock Wilson - no such offer had been made. At the end of the meeting, the South Australian branch secretary, Woodsford, moved a vote of confidence in Tom Walsh. His motion was agreed by a "large majority", but not unanimously.

Walsh addressed the South Australian branch again, at its stop-work meeting on Tuesday 31 July 1928. Statements made by Johnson and his supporters that he, Tom Walsh, was engaged in forming another seamen's union were deliberate lies, he said. He denied that he had been involved with Paddy Flynn in forming an Australian branch of Havelock Wilson's NUS. To bring the SUA back to the security it had enjoyed before the advent of Jacob Johnson, it had to be re-registered and, said Tom Walsh, it had to adopt a policy of peace in industry.

Even while Walsh was addressing the seamen in Port Adelaide, Havelock Wilson was writing him another letter. On 31 July 1928 Wilson wrote:

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51 Minutes, special meeting, South Australian branch SUA, Port Adelaide, 27 July 1928, E183/3/2, ABL.
52 *ibid.*
53 *ibid.*
54 Minutes stopwork meeting South Australian branch SUA, Port Adelaide, 31 July 1928, E183/3/2, ABL.
55 *ibid.*
I hope the Industrial Peace Movement has caught on. I gather from your last cable of a week ago that it has so I trust that finance is coming along in plenty in order to carry on a first class campaign.  

Havelock Wilson wrote again to "My Dear Tom Walsh", on 18 August 1928. He said:

Up to the time of writing, I believe I have despatched L2200 odd. I again repeat what I said in a former letter. This money is under your own control with the exception of L250 which has been sent to Mrs Walsh...

I have got my Committee to agree that in the event of you not coming out top in the Ballot, or you find it impossible to carry on in consequence of the action of Johnson and his crowd, we will make you our representative for NSW, and if we can arrange with Flynn we will make him our representative for Victoria. The details of the scope of your duties will have to be worked out later on.  

A defeat for Tom Walsh in the ballot for general secretary of the SUA had obviously been taken into account in the formulation of Wilson's plans.

Wilson wrote to Walsh on 23 August 1928. Again he stated that should Walsh be defeated in the ballot, then the NUS would be prepared to appoint him its agent in NSW. Flynn would take over in Victoria, and they could share offices with the Peace Union. "At least you are not without finances to fight with", Wilson reminded Walsh, "and that is the most important part of the business." A financially insecure Walsh must surely have agreed with that sentiment. "Go ahead my friend, and win, is the best I can wish you," Wilson wrote reassuringly. But, by its mere repetition, it is clear what Wilson really wanted. He said it again in his letter of 3 September 1928, "should you find it impossible to carry on with the old union, you can be one of our representatives." And then there was yet another reminder of the source of Walsh's material support, "with regard to finance, what has been sent you is absolutely under your control, every penny of it is from the funds of the British Seamen's Union." Tom Walsh was effectively in the pay of Havelock Wilson, if not yet officially in his employ.

56 Wilson to Walsh, 31 July 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
57 Wilson to Walsh, 18 August 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
58 Wilson to Walsh, 23 August 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
59 ibid.
60 Wilson to Walsh, 3 September 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
61 ibid.
And then, on 18 September 1928, the result was announced of the long-awaited ballot that had been ordered by the Equity Court in Sydney to decide who should be general secretary of the SUA. On the basis of the 'first past the post' system of voting favoured by the SUA, Tom Walsh had won. He was confirmed by the membership to be their choice of general secretary. Of the 3533 formal votes recorded, Walsh had obtained 36.9 per cent. Johnson had polled 26.2 per cent. The balance was divided among the remaining six candidates. On that same day the result was announced of the plebiscite of members for the adoption of the two new rules advocated by the Johnson faction. Both new rules were agreed to by a large majority. And why should they not be agreed? Both rules appeared to be eminently desirable. New Rule number one stated that:

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the 1925 Rules, any member of the Union its branches or agencies, shall not be eligible to be nominated for, or hold an official position in the Union, its branches or agencies, if he has been found guilty by a special meeting of the members of the Union for any of the following reasons:
1. Misappropriation of Union funds.
2. Fraud.
3. Embezzlement.
4. Betrayal of confidence on vital union matters.
5. Aiding and/or abetting in the formation of another seamen's union in Australia, either directly or indirectly.

New Rule number two, which came to be known as the “runner-up” rule, stated that:

Where a vacancy occurs in any official position in the Union, its branches or agencies by resignation or dismissal, or by cancellation of his appointment due to the returning officer not declaring him elected by direction of these rules, such vacancy shall be filled for the unexpired term of such year by the candidate who polled the next greatest number of votes for such position at the election immediately preceding the occurrence of a vacancy, such vacancy shall be filled as directed by members in special meeting of the union assembled in the branch where the vacancy occurs.

The new rules may have appeared innocuous to the membership, but as a consequence of the adoption of new rule number one Tom Walsh was effectively disbarred from holding office in the union. By means of new rule number two, he was supplanted by Jacob Johnson.

63 Transcript, 29 October 1928, Judgment, Long Innes J, in the Supreme Court in Equity, op cit.
64 ibid.
65 ibid.
Johnson was now on bail awaiting the result of his appeal to the Quarter Sessions against his conviction. The day after the announcement of the new rules, on 19 September 1928, he categorically refused to surrender the position of general secretary to Tom Walsh.66 A week later, five hundred members of the SUA assembled in a special meeting in Sydney. At that meeting, on 27 September 1928, which neither Walsh nor Johnson attended, members were referred to the previous series of meetings in December 1927 and January 1928 at which Walsh had been found guilty of fraud, betrayal of confidence on vital union matters, aiding and/or abetting in the formation of another seamen's union in Australia either directly or indirectly, and neglect of duty. By a unanimous decision, Walsh was declared to have contravened new rule number one. He was thereupon removed from office, and declared ineligible to hold any official position in the union.67 But if the total of 4499 ballot papers that had been issued during the election of 7 March 1928 is taken as indicative of the total financial membership of the SUA, then this unanimous vote of 500 meant that a mere 11 per cent of the membership had participated in the dismissal of the general secretary.

When Johnson's appeal against his conviction for intimidation failed and he was gaol on 23 October 1928, the Sydney Sun carried a report of a demonstration by seamen:

Seamen in Sydney, at their meeting today, decided to attempt a monster demonstration of trades unionists in the event of any effort being made to deport Jacob Johnson and as a protest against his imprisonment they also decided that his pay will go on while he is in gaol. At times the meeting was rowdy... Discussing the position of the General Secretary, one speaker alleged that Tom Walsh was responsible for Johnson's present position and that the tactics adopted in the prosecution were inspired by him.68

66ibid.
67 ibid.
68 Sun, 23 October 1928.
But though Johnson was in gaol, the faction fight continued unabated and Walsh's outspoken supporter in the South Australian Branch of the Union was the next casualty. The Sun in Sydney reporting that:

It was also officially stated that the South Australian branch secretary Mr A.C. Woodsford had been recalled from his official position by the Seamen's Union of Australasia. The charges against Mr Woodsford were based upon his alleged activities from 1926 to the present time in assisting Mr Walsh to form a 'scab' union.69

Clearly the recall of Woodsford was facilitated by the weakening of branch autonomy that Johnson had engineered. Peter McKernan took office as South Australian Branch Secretary on 5 November 1928. In giving evidence before the Beeby Royal Commission of 1931, he was induced to explain what had transpired.

(Q). Just tell the Commission how you came to take over office in South Australia at that time? -
(A) I was sent from Sydney after a special meeting had been held to take the position in South Australia...
(Q) Were you elected according to the rules of the Seamen's Union? -
(A) Yes I was.
(Q) That is to say, the Sydney Branch can elect a secretary for the other branches? -
(A) No, a special meeting was called and the other fellow in Adelaide was recalled.
(Q) There was a meeting called, and did the Adelaide people have any vote in the selection of the secretary? -
(A) The Adelaide people have a vote in the selection of the secretary, but in the event of an official being recalled he shall be recalled at the place where the Head Office was situated, and a special meeting was called in accordance with the rules.
(Q) And the special meeting was held in Sydney? -
(A) Yes, I had been a runner-up and so was sent to take the position of the man recalled.
(Q) Did that Adelaide branch select you as secretary? -
(A) No.
(Q) All I wanted to know is, before you were sent across, were you selected by the local branch, you say you were not, but by the rules of the organisation? -
(A) That is so.
Judge Beeby: It is quite clear then.70

It was evident that he who controlled the Sydney branch, controlled the union.

And then, belatedly, on 29 October 1928, Mr Justice Long Innes of the Equity Court pronounced his judgment. He found that Walsh, on 7 March 1928, was entitled to be declared elected as general secretary of the SUA and that he had not since lost that right.

69 Ibid.
70 Transcript, evidence of Peter McKernan, Beeby Royal Commission 1931, "In the Case of Jacob Johnson", A432/86 29/170 PT4, pp.514-515. AA.
or become disentitled or ineligible to be declared general secretary. The judge then granted an injunction restraining Johnson and any other member of the SUA from preventing or interfering in any way with Walsh in the exercise of his duties as general secretary. The question of costs was reserved.\textsuperscript{71}

The working seamen in their ships may not have had a clear picture of what was happening within their union, but Mr Justice Long Innes most certainly was aware of the situation. In delivering his judgment he commented that the two new rules had been deliberately drafted by Johnson and his faction to ensure that should Johnson be defeated in the ballot then he would have a 'second string to his bow.' In fact, the judge said, these new rules were intended to make quite sure that Walsh would be excluded from holding office in the union for all time. And, he went on, it was clear from the ballot results that a considerable number of SUA members who voted for Walsh as general secretary also voted for the adoption of the new rules - without apparently being aware of the object to which those rules would be put.\textsuperscript{72}

The Equity Court's order was served upon the federal office of the SUA at 12 King Street, Sydney, by a sheriff's officer on 30 October 1928. Tom Walsh was present, but when he attempted to enter the union premises he was threatened and physically ejected by a group of Johnson's supporters.\textsuperscript{73} A second attempt, this time with police protection, resulted in a noisy demonstration by seamen in the street outside. Even the SUA office clerk refused to work with him. Walsh eventually left, having been jostled and jeered by the seamen present.\textsuperscript{74}

It might be thought that, at this point, Tom Walsh was at his lowest ebb. The SUA may well have been, but Walsh certainly was not. In fact he had high hopes of

\begin{footnotes}
\item Transcrip, 29 October 1928, Judgment, Long Innes J, in the Supreme Court in Equity, \textit{op cit.}
\item ibid.
\item Walsh to Bradely, 12 December 1938. MS2123 Box 7 Folder 69. NLA.
\item Mitchell, \textit{op cit,} p.218.
\end{footnotes}
regaining control of the seamen in his own right. He wrote to his "Dear Friends", of the provisional executive of the Australian Seamen's Union on 30 October 1928. Of the SUA, he commented, "the organisation is now a total wreck."75 The situation was, he said, that:

We could get a conference with the Shipowners tomorrow if I asked for it, but I am not so foolish as to do any such thing. I am not sweeping up the decks and making things nice and tidy for the Dutchman and his criminal pals when he comes out of gaol. The Australian Seamen's Union will be registered and working smoothly when the Dutchman's sixer has expired; when he comes home he will find his occupation gone, and so will Fleming and all that talent... I expect we shall be in full swing within a week or two. Immediately the rules are filed, I will get in touch certain people and ask them to give absolute preference of employment to the Seamen whose names are on the lists. I am also going to interview certain other people with the view to dealing with the pickup places.76

Having thanked his friends for maintaining their faith in him, Walsh pronounced by way of benediction, that:

Our victory over the criminal element within the Seamen's Union spells salvation for the Seamen of Australia. It may be hard to get the men to realise all our victory means for them, but time is the great educator, and we must wait for the lesson of experience to do its great work.77

Three weeks later the Sydney press announced that the New Australian Seamen's Union had at last taken shape.78 Rules had been completed, the newspaper reported, and an application made to the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar in Melbourne for its registration. Financial members of the SUA were eligible for transfer to the ASU without payment of fees - "subject to certain conditions."79 And, in regard to the rules of the new union, the newspaper quoted Mr Tom Walsh who, it said, had "studied them exhaustively." He stated that the new rules had returned democratic power to the seamen members.80 The Sun listed the officials of the new union, among whom were general president Woodsford, late SUA branch secretary in South Australia. Also prominent were

75Walsh to Houghton, Woodsford, Rigby, Hussack and Moore, 30 October 1928, copy, exhibit of evidence 1931 Royal Commission, A432/86 31/1597. AA.
76ibid.
77ibid.
78Sun, 21 November 1928.
79ibid.
80ibid.
vice-presidents Houghton and Hussack, who were also respectively SUA branch secretaries in Fremantle WA and Newcastle NSW. And, among the members of the committee of management, was William Rigby. The new union's address was Wingello House, Angel Place, off Pitt Street in the business and commercial heart of the city of Sydney, strategically removed from the waterfront. And, while the result of the application of the ASU for registration in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court was impatiently awaited, Tom Walsh and Havelock Wilson exchanged further correspondence.

Wilson wrote to Walsh on 12 November 1928. He referred to a letter of Walsh's of 8 October, just received (it took over a month for a letter to travel between Australia and the United Kingdom). Walsh, having been confirmed by the court-induced ballot as rightfully the general secretary of the SUA, had evidently been in a buoyant mood when he wrote. But a resurgent Walsh at the head of the SUA, or of the ASU for that matter, independent of the NUS, was evidently not in accordance with Wilson's plans. Here was a potential threat. So, Wilson replied that:

With reference to your appointment as our agent in Australia I am pleased to tell you that if necessity arises that it will be quite in order, but before doing anything definite we have to consider the question of a new Seamen's Union of Australia. It is impossible for the old show to be carried on it must be killed and buried and then on the ashes we can build a brand new Union. I question very much whether you have the men on your side to run a new Union and for that reason you must hang on for the present.

Flynn was not coming back to Australia. Wilson wrote that "we shall have to wait until things are straightened out before definitely committing ourselves in Australia." But Walsh was not to worry about his own situation. "Rest assured as far as you are concerned when the time comes you will be all right."
In the meantime, however, Walsh was without an income. The money that Wilson had allowed him had presumably been spent on legal costs incurred in the unduly prolonged Equity Court suit. Some of it, too, must have gone on living costs, his own and that of some of his supporters. Certainly there was no salary to be drawn from the SUA. A meeting of the Sydney branch on 23 October 1928, while protesting at Johnson's gaoling, had resolved that Johnson would continue to be paid as general secretary of the union while he was in prison. Tom Walsh, as he informed a friend, was "on the bread line or pretty near."

Wilson wrote to Walsh again on 10 January 1929. Walsh, evidently still exhilarated by his victory in court and Johnson's gaoling, had proposed a visit to the United Kingdom. The response, from Havelock Wilson, was less than inviting.

Nothing would give me more pleasure than to see you, but I am afraid until you get things settled in Australia on something like a permanent basis it will not be possible for you to venture on a journey.

But when Wilson next wrote, on 4 February 1929, his tone had changed. He referred to Walsh's letter of 26 December 1928. Evidently, the Australian shipowners were 'not playing the game'. Those 'certain people' that Walsh had confidently expected to provide his ASU with preference for employment, had let him down. It was only to be expected, Wilson wrote consolingly. After 40 years experience of shipowners he knew them to be perfidious. He placed no reliance upon their good faith. And then Havelock Wilson got to the point. "I think you and your colleagues will have to abandon for a while the idea of getting the men in the coasting trade, that is to say running a self-supporting union for them," he said.

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85Sun, 23 October 1928.
86Walsh to Pelin, 12 December 1928, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
87Wilson to Walsh, 10 January 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
88Wilson to Walsh, 4 February 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
89ibid.
90ibid.
The Johnson faction was now resorting to intimidation to dissuade seamen from transferring their membership from the SUA to the ASU. Wilson seized upon this to drive home his message that the NUS should take over in Australia. If the men would not transfer, he said:

This means, of course, that the new outfit is bereft of income. I take it that yourself and colleagues scattered amongst the ports number about 10 and if we are to maintain you it will mean L100 to L150 per week. As a solution of the difficulty I would suggest making you all officials of the British Seamen's Union to do propaganda work on British overseas vessels.

Wilson wrote again the next day, 5 February 1929. Now, his tone was one of barely suppressed glee. He referred to Walsh's letter of 1 January 1929, which he had just received, and said:

I... should think that at the time you wrote it you had the pip badly. Never mind Old Boy remember you have the old fighting tiger Havelock Wilson well behind you. You may have your disappointments with regard to registering the new Australian Seamen's Union, but that will by no means end the fight, in fact it only marks the beginning of a renewed struggle. I do not think the majority of the Australian seamen have yet learned their lesson.

As far as Havelock Wilson, founder and lifelong president of Britain's NUS was concerned, both the SUA and the ASU were defunct. And that must have caused him little regret, given the harsh words that had been spoken about himself and his union by British seamen - members of his own organisation - in 1925, under the tutelage of their colonial mentors during the unofficial strike.

Wilson's interest now was to make use of this new opportunity to pursue his original plan of expanding the influence of his organisation into Australia. The situation must have given him much satisfaction, and his tone to Walsh became condescending.

I can quite see that as far as Australia is concerned we shall have to dig ourselves in by establishing agencies of the British Seamen's Union in all the principal ports. You will recollect that one of my early suggestions was that you should be the chief agent in Australia and appoint your subordinates. I understand that you have Woodford (sic) and 5 or 6 others working for you. It will be the duty of the British

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91 Labor Daily, 6 November 1928. Also, J.G.Lathan, Attorney General, to Sullivan Bros., Solicitors, 22 June 1929, A432/86 31/1597, AA.
92 Wilson to Walsh, 4 February 1929, op cit.
93 Wilson to Walsh, 5 February 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
Seamen's Union to afford you sufficient financial assistance to establish a proper agency on businesslike lines. 94

And with Walsh before him 'cap-in-hand', Wilson reminded him of the presumption of his ill-advised criticism during the British Seamen's strike of 1925.

It is a grand thing to be able to do things yourself and I am proud of what I have accomplished. I know some of the Bolshies think I am dependent on the shipowners, but the silly fools do not know what is going on; we are merely working in harmony and my one thought is to improve conditions for the men. 95

Now, the visit to the United Kingdom, was not so much a matter of Walsh's choice, as a summons to head-office by his employer. "It looks as though you and Mrs Walsh will have to make an early trip to Great Britain and I am just studying out the best time for you to arrive." 96 And then came the final qualifier. "Of course, all that I am saying now will depend on our future prospects." 97 As Jacob Johnson had earlier pointed out, if Havelock Wilson had his way the future prospects of Australian seamen would be no better than those of Great Britain.

Then, on 16 April 1929, J. Havelock Wilson died. Lord Inchcape, the premier British shipowner, head of the Empire's largest shipping combine, had eulogised Wilson a few months earlier. He said, on that occasion, that "there is no man who has done more for what we are all striving for, and which the Government is striving for, and that is peace in industry for our beloved country, than Mr Havelock Wilson." 98 Tom Walsh paid similar tribute in a telegram on 17 April 1929, addressed to the general treasurer of the NUS.

Received with deepest regret sad news of your father's death. The seamen have lost the greatest leader they ever had. The great beneficial schemes laid down by him for the seamen's progress should be carried and firm adherence given to his great example in his splendid work for industrial peace. Please convey to national union my sympathies in its irreparable loss. Tom Walsh. 99

94 ibid.
95 ibid.
96 ibid.
97 ibid.
98 Cited in Hirson & Vivian, Strike Across the Empire, p. 94.
99 Walsh to J.B. Wilson, Seafaring London, 17 April 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
In sentiment, it was the antithesis of his denunciation of 21 August 1925. Then, before a
mass audience of striking British seamen in the Sydney Town Hall, Walsh had said that:

Australians hardly realise that the British shipowners are free to work their vessels
with cheap Asiatic labour - Chinese, Japanese, Arabs - and unfortunates of all races,
who are paid only a few shillings a month and that the representative of the seamen
(Mr Wilson) acquiesces in this. 100

On 26 August 1925, Walsh had pronounced Wilson to be "the greatest industrial failure
in the history of the working class." 101 But Walsh's bitterest foe had become his sole
source of material support. With that source removed, no further support would be
forthcoming. Late in 1929 an official of the NUS, who had been sent to Australia in order
to ascertain whether any of the funds provided to Walsh by Wilson were recoverable, 102
commented to the office clerk of the SUA Sydney branch that a total of L3600 had been
sent to Tom Walsh. "But", he said, "we regard that as gone." 103

The Australian Seamen's Union [ASU] was refused registration in April 1929. In
that same month, the application of the Seamen's Union of Australasia [SUA] for re-
registration was rejected. 104 Lacking both preference and registration, possessing neither
funds nor a stable membership, the ASU disintegrated. Tom Walsh, at age 57, with a
large family to support, was without an immediate source of income.

When he first assumed the leadership of the SUA in 1918, Tom Walsh was a
militant socialist. At the start of his odyssey from altruism to egoism, he may have been
attracted to the cause of the Australian merchant seamen in terms of a moral duty. Later,
his commitment may have become the means to self-fulfilment in accordance with a

100 Transcript, evidence of R. Cooper, 15 September 1925, shorthand note of Walsh address, Deportation
Board, A467/1 SF12/11 B32, p.391. AA.
101 Ibid, p.393A.
102 In his last letter to Walsh, Havelock Wilson wrote, "I would like to know how you are faring
financially. Of course I know how much we have sent, but I don't know how much you have spent."
Wilson to Walsh, 7 March 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
103 Statement of J.F. Mulligan, SUA office clerk, A432/86 29/170 PT4, AA.
104 Decision of the Industrial Registrar, Melbourne, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65, NLA.
Marxian need for meaningful work. Later still, his leadership role may even have represented some Freudian internalisation of an existent authority, such as that of J.Havelock Wilson. But events now dictated that Walsh choose where his loyalties ultimately lay. In September 1929 he noted against a statement of personal expenses and outstanding liabilities that:

If we remain in the field I shall have to sell my few sticks of furniture to raise sufficient to pay the bills, but I don't see why I should. I have four little children to feed and if I sell my furniture to meet the above calls, I will be bringing these little ones all the nearer to hunger. You will note that I make no allowance at all for paying any assistance, nor for myself. I don't know how long the men who are acting as officials will be able to hold out, but as I have nothing to give them, economic pressure will compel them to throw in the towel - in fact, I must throw it in myself and go elsewhere to seek a crust. At present I have nothing in view.105

As for the seamen, unemployment among them had already reached drastic proportions.106 Now, divided and leaderless, they were more than ever vulnerable in the face of a looming economic crisis of international proportions. By October 1929, Tom Walsh had abandoned them and Jacob Johnson was in gaol. As the international economy slid inexorably into the vortex of the Great Depression, the material prospects of the Australian seamen were no better than those of their erstwhile militant leaders.

Having seen how two leaders of the SUA allowed their personal agendas to supplant the interests of the union's membership, it may be appropriate here to borrow from Erich Fromm. In the period of their obsessive rivalry for the leadership of the SUA between 1926-1929, Walsh had conformed to that depiction of the 'realist' whose view of reality is "distorted because of its lack of depth and perspective."107 Johnson, meanwhile, represented the psychotic "who interprets events in terms of his own feelings, without any reference to, or at least without proper acknowledgement of, what goes on in reality."108 That each had subordinated the interests of the union's members to their own, it seems clear, was a direct result of the economic conditions of the time.

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105T.Walsh, attachment to personal statement of expenses and outstanding liabilities, September 1929, MS2123 Box 10 Folder 92, NLA.
106The minutes of the SUA South Australian branch stopwork meeting held at Port Adelaide on 31 January 1928 refer to "the vast number of unemployed seamen at the pick-up", E183/3/1, ABL.
107Fromm, Man for Himself, p.90.
108Ibid., p.89.
membership to his own agenda is evident from the fact that, in a practical demonstration of Fromm's observation that "the true opposite of both 'realism' and insanity is productiveness", the SUA had been reduced to a state of impotence.

109 ibid, p.90.
CHAPTER FIVE.

COMMUNISM AND MANIPULATION: 1930-1936.

H.J. Brennan appears only fleetingly in the affairs of the SUA, but he reiterated the "enduring dilemma of unionism"¹ when, as general secretary on 28 August 1929, he told a meeting of the union’s committee of management that:

I am aware of the fact that it is not always possible to have peace in industry; there are periods when you can fight and periods when you cannot. I contend at the present time we are passing through a stage when we are not in a position to fight. All our funds have been exhausted and we are left with a legacy of some thousands of pounds worth of liabilities to meet before we are in a position to do much.²

Eighteen years earlier, Mr Justice Higgins had referred to the SUA as "this great Union."³ Even before the descent into the Great Depression, however, the union was in a parlous state. Its total assets amounted to a mere L200 and it had liabilities of L4750. Membership was 2,000 less than in the days when Tom Walsh received a salary of L10 10/- per week.⁴ In fact the salaries of the union’s officials, when they were paid at all, were reduced in 1929 to an egalitarian L8 per week which was then further cut to L5 10/-. Having been made an honorary position, the general presidency lost its potency while the paid posts of assistant branch secretary at Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne were abolished.⁵

There were 29 Australian coastal shipping companies operating 181 ships in 1929. There were six fewer companies and 27 fewer ships by 1932. In the same period, the total number of ratings of all categories employed in Australian registered intra- and

¹Hearn & Knowles, One Big Union, p.62.
²Proceedings CoM meeting Sydney 28 August 1929. E183/3/4, ABL.
³CA/R168.
⁴Membership was down to 3,000 "working members" by December 1933, with annual expenditure for 1934 anticipated to exceed income by L2,000. See minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 December 1933, E183/3/4, ABL.
⁵Minutes special meeting, Sydney 17 June 1929, E183/3/11, and minutes special meeting Adelaide, 9 July 1932, E183/3/2, ABL.
inter-state ships decreased from 4710 to 4072. But not all positions for seamen onboard Australian ships were filled by unionists. It was in that regard that the SUA took the Minister controlling the State Shipping Service of Western Australia to the Industrial Court at Fremantle on 7 June 1929. The union protested that the master of the intra-state mv Kangaroo had discriminated against the union by giving employment to a non-union crew when SUA members were available. But the union's case was dismissed by the Industrial Magistrate, who stated:

You have an equal right to be engaged on these ships with others who are not members of your union, but that is not discrimination against you. The master continued the employment of men who were in the ship and they had just as much right to be employed as members of your union. When you get preference that will be a different thing.7

And the union's very existence was precarious. Its working agreement with the interstate shipowners which dated from 1925 was such that, as Brennan pointed out, "the Agreement... calls for three months notice of termination on either side, it is only a matter of the Shipowners' Association writing to us a letter to that effect and we are finished."8

It might have been hoped that the situation would have improved when the union regained its registration under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act in late July 1930. But, in fact, an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, a defensive withdrawal into branch autonomy and sauvê qui peut individualism that was destructive of collectivism, continued to pervade the SUA.10 Thus, in the face of antagonistic confrontation by coastal company officials, the Adelaide branch of the union passed a resolution in January 1932 to the effect that:

6See Appendix 1.
7Transcript. Breach of Industrial Agreement No.4 of 1929. Industrial Court Fremantle No.178/29. MS2123 Box 11 Folder 107, NLA.
8Proceedings CoM meeting Sydney, 28 August 1929. E183/3/4, ABL.
9Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide, 29 July 1930, E183/3/2, ABL.
10Renegades from the SUA were employed in four South Australian intra-state ships in 1932, see minutes executive meeting Port Adelaide, 13 April 1932, E183/3/2, ABL. Allegations of men obtaining jobs by bribery were common, see for instance minutes special meeting Port Adelaide, 21 January 1932, E183/3/2. The SUA annual general meeting of 1933 in Sydney recommended a voluntary scheme of job rationing, but at subsequent special meetings on 3 May and 7 June 1933 in Sydney a majority of seamen voted against it. See minutes AGM, Sydney, 28-29 March 1933, E183/3/4, ABL.
Believing that if members and officials can not be disciplined, that the Union must cease to function and having previously expressed a want of confidence in the Federal Executive, this meeting here assembled cannot comply with the instructions received from the General Secretary. Further, we urge upon the Branches and members the immediate necessity of resisting the attack of the Adelaide SS Coy who now employ non-union labour, threaten members with the boycott if they obey the Union, and have repeatedly flouted the pick-up system adopted by this Branch.

While jobs were few, "about one every month" in Port Adelaide in 1933, SUA members who applied for them were subjected, it was claimed, to victimisation and intimidation by the agents of the shipping companies. Claims for overtime were consistently refused, as when the Adelaide Steamship Company notified their chief officers that in ships where it was customary for the bosun to oil the steering-gear daily at sea, in future when the job was done on a Sunday it should be treated as being necessary for the safety of the ship and no overtime payment should be made. And the Seamen's Union itself was treated with ill-concealed contempt by the shipping companies' clerks. Thus a claim submitted by the Newcastle branch secretary for overtime to be paid to seamen who had been called out to rig a gangway received the following reply from the branch manager of a shipping company:

Yours of the 22nd inst. We regret that you again force us to point out the obvious irrelevancy of your argument based on Navigation Act definitions. Furthermore, we have not the least desire to enter into a controversy on the relationship between a vessel laid up in Sydney harbour and a vessel in commission anchored in a roadstead...

"There is no doubt that the owners are adopting a box seat policy", the Newcastle branch secretary reported in September 1933, "and our present policy of attempting to adjust matters amicably is futile." And futility was the keynote when members of the Port Adelaide branch resolved to call upon the Federal Industrial Registrar "to enforce the

11 Minutes special meeting Port Adelaide, 21 Jan 1932. E183/3/2, ABL.
12 H. O'Neill to Johnson, 4 April 1933. E183/17/2, ABL.
13 Members complained that when applying for employment in any vessels of the Adelaide Steamship Company they were interviewed by either the company's Superintendent Engineer or its Marine Superintendent, "and any man who was loyal to the Union during the last dispute could not get a job." Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide, 28 January & 31 May 1932. E183/3/2, ABL.
14 Schofield to Johnson, 9 February 1933. E183/17/1, ABL.
15 Newcastle Branch Manager, Adelaide Steamship Company, to Schofield, 25 September 1933, E183/17/1, ABL.
16 Schofield to Johnson, 29 September 1933. E183/17/1, ABL.
Union's rights and instruct the Adelaide and Coast SS Coys to man their ships in accordance with the agreement." Helpless, lacking the means to hit back effectively at their tormentors, the South Australian seamen resolved to appeal to the Federal Attorney General, "to call into being the Crimes Act on certain officials of the Adelaide S.S. Coy." 17

Futility is evident, too, in the internecine struggles which continued to rack the supine body of the SUA. Brennan described how a censure motion against him was manipulated at a meeting of the Sydney branch in August 1929.

At 1.30pm after the majority of the men had gone back to their ships and only 83 members remained at the meeting out of a total of about 300 present at 11.30, a censure motion was launched against me and carried by 43 votes to 38 - a majority of 5, an hour and a half after the closing time of the meeting. I say this is not a true reflex of the views of the members of the Seamen's Union of Australasia. 18

And officials, impotent in the face of events beyond their control, allowed SUA meetings to degenerate into fruitless wrangling, so that a rank-and-file member had cause to complain that:

The last two meetings took two hours to discuss the adoption of minutes and to discuss the present motion of adoption has occupied at the very least one hour and a half. The minutes are correct and true. If we at all future meetings are to witness the fiasco that has taken place at the last two meetings including this one then the sooner we adopt other measures to prevent similar occurrences the better for the union as a whole. It is typical of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera show. It is just an attempt by certain individuals to wriggle out of the mess they created. 19

But even then, in the depths of the Depression, other measures were being advocated by new, more purposeful, and therefore more persuasive voices.

Articles critical of the union's leadership, published in The Workers' Weekly and in the Red Leader20, goaded member Jacob Johnson to condemn Communist influence within the union at the Sydney stopwork meeting of 27 January 1932. A response from

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17 Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide, 28 January 1932. E183/3/2. ABL.
18 Proceedings CoM meeting Sydney, 28 August 1929. E183/3/4, ABL.
19 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 September 1932. E183/3/1, ABL.
20 The Red Leader carried the banner, "Official Organ of the Minority Movement... Australian Section of the Red International of Labor Unions." See NLA collection.
member Joseph Keenan of the Militant Minority was supported by member Shelley, who accepted full responsibility for the articles. "Keen interest was taken by members present," the minute secretary noted, and when the meeting was adjourned at 1pm it was with the intention of resuming the debate at the next stopwork meeting. A few days later, Joseph Keenan condemned the ban imposed by the South Australian branch upon the Adelaide Steamship Company, and recommended that members expelled by the Adelaide branch for 'scabbing' should be readmitted. "The Militant Minority Movement in the Seamen's Union opposed expulsions on the basis that they only weakened the union", he said. Jacob Johnson retorted scornfully that "if this was the policy of the Militant Minority in the Seamen's Union, then the sooner the Militant Minority went out of existence the better for the working class generally." But the honorary general president had the last word:

Johnson and his like were the responsible movers of resolutions to suspend and expel members wholesale yet during all this time he had not even offered a mere suggestion as to what we should do with these scabs who are still in the ships. At least the Militant Minority is attempting to do something and the time is now proving that the policy adopted by the Militant Minority is the correct one.

And at the stopwork meeting at Port Adelaide, on 29 August 1933, a certain Comrade Casey from the Anti-Eviction Committee addressed the meeting on the matter of exposing the brutality of landlords who, assisted by the police, evicted members of the working class from their homes. He was heard sympathetically and afterwards accorded a wholehearted vote of thanks by the assembled seamen.

Jacob Johnson took over leadership once more as general secretary of the union early in 1933. In the ballot for office held at the end of 1932, he had been runner-up to William Raeburn, Tom Walsh's former associate. Johnson had chaired the stopwork meeting in Sydney, on 31 January 1933, when a letter from Raeburn explaining his absence due to ill-health, and requesting a review of his salary, was read. In accordance

21 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 January 1932. E183/3/4, ABL.
22 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 1 February 1932. E183/3/4, ABL.
23 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 August 1932. E183/3/4, ABL.
24 Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide 29 August 1933. E183/3/2, ABL.
with the resolution of the members assembled, the letter was thereupon consigned to the wastepaper basket and it was further resolved that the absent general secretary's position be filled during the period of his illness by Jacob Johnson. Raeburn subsequently resigned, which gave Johnson automatic succession to office.

There were acrimonious exchanges between branch secretaries when the committee of management met on 20 March 1933, for Johnson's sudden resumption of power had caused consternation. Clarke, the Melbourne secretary, welcomed Johnson's return, being of the opinion that "the Organisation in spite of what it may have been in the past was never worse than it is today." Leadership and direction had been missing and members had approached him saying that the organisation "is in a hell of a state." But Herbert, the Sydney secretary, O'Neill of Adelaide, and Schofield of Newcastle agreed that Clarke was "only concerned with making a job for Johnson." Johnson, meantime, impatient to gain immediate access to the federal office premises, was only with difficulty dissuaded from employing a locksmith to effect an entry. While O'Brien thought that "the administration of the Head Office is topsy-turvy", Schofield addressed himself more closely to the seamen's material interests, stating that:

The position is that while these fights are in progress, living and working conditions are being lost sight of. Which is the greater, the Union or the individual? All the Union has been doing for the last few years is fighting to see who shall hold the official jobs.

Raeburn, the deposed general secretary, admitted as much. In a time of massive unemployment individuals clung tenaciously to any job that offered. "It might be a five

25Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 January 1933. E183/3/4, ABL.
26The Red Leader, 29 March 1933.
27Minutes special meeting, Trades Hall Sydney, 20 March 1933, E183/3/4, ABL.
28ibid.
29ibid.
30ibid.
31The overall unemployment rate among Australian trade unionists in the first quarter of 1933 was 26.5%. In the state of New South Wales it was 30.2%. Commonwealth Year Book, No.27, 1934, p.739. Unemployment resulted in many nominations for union jobs. In the ballot of November 1933 there were 39 nominations for 7 official positions. See minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 November 1933, E183/3/4, ABL.
pounds ten shillings a week job, but the struggle to retain it is such that if a man is fortunate enough to get a job on board of a ship, he may be considered fortunate."\textsuperscript{32}

And then Jacob Johnson took the floor. Asked, in a derogatory manner, how many times he had been rejected by the membership of the union, Johnson launched into a characteristically egotistical harangue:

\begin{quote}
Unfortunately, three or four times. Unfortunately I say. People who are opposed to Johnson admit he is a most capable person... What right has a body of men who say they are the committee of management to meddle with my destiny... I assure you that I will not take it lying down if I am prevented from getting what I am entitled to... The shipowners don't want me. Coming back to the committee of management I don't allow any of them to meddle with my destiny... What other individual in the Seamen's Union has been persecuted the way I have. Through the employing class I have been dragged through every Law Court in Australia, and finished up with six months. I don't mind being crucified by the employing class, but I object to being crucified by those who admit my ability, but try to keep me out by subterfuge.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Though a majority of the committee of management was patently against him, Jacob Johnson was confirmed by a majority vote of the members as rightfully the general secretary of the SUA. A week later he presided at the annual general meeting of the union - where it was noted that the recent meeting of the committee of management was the first convened in three years. Among twenty-seven items adopted at that AGM, ostensibly for the purpose of establishing a policy to reorganise the union,\textsuperscript{34} was a resolution that:

\begin{quote}
The general secretary communicate with the NUS of Great Britain setting out a full report on the position existing between the two organisations and requesting that restitution be made for the damage done during the latter part of Mr Havelock Wilson's administration.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

But no amount of restitution from the British union, even in the unlikely event that it was forthcoming, would alter the existing reality. In 1934, shipowners were demonstrably and contemptuously able to crew their ships with 'free' labour, and as the Newcastle

\begin{footnotes}
\item[32]Minutes special meeting Sydney, 20 March 1933. E183/3/4 ABL.
\item[33]ibid.
\item[34]Unemployment resulted in members becoming unfinancial. Effective from 31 December 1933, the union's committee of management offered an amnesty to unfinancial members upon payment of L1 0 0d to clear one year in arrears. L1 10 0d to clear 2 years and progressively up to L3 0 0d to clear over four years in arrears. "But only when applicants have had their books continuously endorsed." See minutes CoM meeting Sydney, 15 November 1933, E183/3/4, ABL.
\item[35]Minutes annual general meeting SUA, Trades Hall Sydney, 28 March 1933. E183/3/4, ABL.
\end{footnotes}
secretary ruefully reported, "there does not appear to me to be any method by which we could remove the non-members from the ships."\textsuperscript{36}

Marsh & Ryan in their centenary history of the NUS detect a "taint of Bolshevism" underlying the British seamen's 'Homeboat' strike of 1925.\textsuperscript{37} While Havelock Wilson and his lieutenants had actively co-operated with the British shipowners' federation in defeating the strike, within the British union the sense of grievance that led to the strike was given voice and organisation, however ineffectually, by the Minority Movement, a product of the Red International of Labour Unions [RILU].\textsuperscript{38} Christian, in his analysis of power and privilege in Russia and the Soviet Union, asserts that the Comintern engaged in propaganda activities designed to encourage workers to participate in the British General Strike of May 1926.\textsuperscript{39} And Nelson, in his study of US merchant seamen and longshoremen, has found that the initiative for the formation of the Communist-led Marine Workers Industrial Union [MWIU] in New York, on 26 April 1930, did not come from the seamen themselves, but externally from the CPUSA in accordance with the ECCI's 'Third Period' line.\textsuperscript{40} Nelson has shown that the onset of the Great Depression in the United States did not result in a spontaneous initiative by the rank and file American seamen. The initiative came from outside.

In Australia, too, the initiative came from outside the ranks of the SUA. The opportunity presented by Australian merchant seamen had been brought into focus by a letter from the 'Anglo-American Section RILU' addressed to 'the Minority Movement of

\textsuperscript{36} Schofield to Johnson, 11 July 1934. E183/17/1, ABL.
\textsuperscript{37} Marsh & Ryan, \textit{The Seamen}, pp.120-122.
\textsuperscript{38} George Hardy, the Hamburg-based secretary of the Seamen's Section of the RILU, was present at a meeting of British seamen in London's East End at the beginning of the strike. In his memoirs he recalled that, "the Meeting elected me to the strike committee to become the only non-striker member. The executive committee of the Minority Movement had already decided to give the seamen every assistance and I gave this promise to the meeting. The battle was on..." Hardy, \textit{Those Stormy Years}, p.177.
\textsuperscript{39} Christian, \textit{Power and Privilege}, p.246.
\textsuperscript{40} Nelson, \textit{Workers on the Waterfront}, p.79.
Australia' on 26 April 1932. Contact between the Minority Movement (MM) and the workers in the factories and in the ships was very weak, the RILU complained. There was urgent need for the MM to concentrate on particular industries, such as mining, shipping and the railways. Specifically, the previous policy of concentrating MM attention upon unemployed seamen ashore had proved ineffectual and must be altered. It was time to transfer attention to the men in the ships by means of the formation of ships' committees. Moreover:

...the MM must relentlessly expose the manoeuvres of the various reactionary cliques of trade union officials who are struggling for control of the seamen's union, and proceed to organise unity among the seamen from below, for struggle against the offensive of the shipowners.

Unemployment, which among Australian trade unionists stood nationally at 28.1 per cent in October 1932, now provided the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) with an influx of recruits, many of whom were resentful towards the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and reformist trade union leaders whose handling of the crisis had proved to be inadequate. CPA membership increased tenfold from a national total of 250 members in December 1929 to some 2,500 by October 1932. But while it was one thing to build up Party membership from among the unemployed, the ECCI complained that the work of the CPA and its nuclei remained ineffectual among those unionists who were still in employment. In fact, the leadership provided by the MM was "absolutely unsatisfactory," with 'fractions' within the trade unions existing for the most part only on paper.

An ECCI directive entitled, Resolution of the Situation in Australia and the Immediate Tasks of the Party, pointed out that only 15 per cent of Party members took

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41 Anglo-American Section RILU to the Minority Movement of Australia, 26 April 1932, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 8 (76), ML.
42 ibid.
43 Commonwealth Year Book, No.27, 1934, p.739.
45 ECCI directive 22 October 1932, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 8 (76), ML.
46 ibid.
47 ECCI directive, 5 November 1932, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 8 (76), ML.
part in the work of the MM. This lack of meaningful participation was contrary to previous directions from the ECCI. It also contravened the decree of the Eleventh Plenum of the Communist International which had stated that the CPA must play a leading role in the formation and leadership of the MM. The ECCI recognised in the MM "one of the chief levers of the Party for liberating the workers from the influence of the reformists," and saw "the systematic development of the opposition movement from below in the reformist trade unions," as being of decisive importance in Australia with its high proportion of trade unionists and established tradition of collectivism.49 Ideally, the ECCI stated, the work of the MM should be carried out covertly by Party fractions among the rank-and-file of the trade unions and other organisations, with always an eye to recruiting active non-Party workers into the MM and the best of these into the Party itself. Meanwhile, the CPA and the MM must penetrate the trade unions where the policy of the bureaucrats was one of class collaboration, of negotiation carried on behind the scenes. That must be exposed. And the established policy of arbitration must be resisted. It was the task of the CPA to expose and oppose the attempts of the bureaucrats of the Labour Party and the trade unions to subordinate the trade unions to the Labour Party.50

And then, in accordance with Moscow's perception of a developing threat to Soviet security, the Comintern abruptly changed its policy yet again. The Twelfth Plenum of the ECCI declared, in November 1932, that 'left-sectarianism' should be overcome. Consequently, J.B. Miles, general secretary of the CPA, dutifully resurrected the class-enemy. A plenary session of the CPA, on 25 December 1932, was informed that the capitalist had replaced the 'social-fascist' as the primary antagonist.51 But, as Davidson has pointed out, to reverse the CPA's policy was one thing, it was quite a different matter

48 ibid.
49 ibid.
50 ibid.
to overcome the deep distrust, bordering on hatred, which the previous policy had engendered in both the left and right wings of the ALP.52

A year later, on 24 December 1933, at the Second National Congress of the Minority Movement in Sydney, the congress secretary spoke of new impositions upon seamen and waterside workers by the monopoly-capitalist shipowners, who:

...make claims for the complete smashing of the seamen's wages and conditions agreement; and who claim further sharp cuts in waterside workers' wages... All evidence points to a new and more extensive drive against the whole working class. It is to plan the defeat of this attack that this Congress has been convened.53

"What we must do", it was announced, was to inspire the workers with confidence in their ability to defeat reformists and capitalists by means of democratically elected united-front organisations on the job, regardless of craft, religious or party differences. Specifically, on the waterfront, the MM should intensify its efforts to recruit supporters, organise committees, disseminate propaganda, and engage in dissident activities onboard ships and within the branches of the Seamen's Union. The closest collaboration between the seamen and the wharf labourers was called for.54

Sloganeering apart, a more realistic note was sounded by Comrade Dodds, a seaman delegate to the congress, when he described the situation as it was at the end of 1933:

I do not think that in so far as work amongst the seamen is concerned there are many bright spots. The seamen's strike is an example of the weaknesses and many mistakes in the work of the Militant Minority group amongst the seamen. Comrades will remember that the seamen have been one of the most militant workers in Australia. Strike after strike, struggle after struggle, through struggles they have won their conditions and through struggle they are going to maintain all they have left. At least 50% of them are permanently unemployed. The importance of the seamen is also to be taken into consideration because of the coming war danger. It is necessary for us to carry on our work amongst them in a better manner than we have done in the past. Conditions in the ships today compared with three or four years ago are deplorable; in 1928 they received L19 now only L12 a month.

52Davidson, Communist Party of Australia, p.65.
53Minority Movement of Australia Proceedings of Second National Congress, Sydney, 24 December 1933, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16 (76). ML.
54ibid.
The Militant Minority consisted of somewhere about 90 members but after the strike had only about 12 including the members on ships...
The seamen are prepared to struggle and... the trade unions' officials are not prepared to give them any assistance. In order to overcome the differences we must get down among the seamen. The MM group can act as an artery in giving inspiration to the workers, so also can it act as a means for bringing together all the workers.55

Apart from Dodds, the leading figure of the MM among the seamen was identified at that time by the Political Bureau [PB] of the CPA only by his initial, 'K'. He operated from MM headquarters in Sydney, convenient to Party headquarters, from where "he gets directed on any question that he is in doubt about by just getting in contact with the secretariat."56 But the actual task was not clear-cut. It was admitted that doubt existed within the CPA as to the real role of the MM. And the problem was exacerbated by the fact that there was generally insufficient consultation between MM fraction leaders and the secretariat of the CPA's local District Committees [DC] upon the line to be followed.57 In fact, there were reports that in the coalfields the MM had usurped the work of the Party.58

A discussion within the PB identified the problem:

Workers... see as the central point of our propaganda, our fight against trade union officials, and look upon us as an organisation out to oppose bureaucracy and only take up questions of wages and conditions for the purpose of making ammunition against officials... We have to develop a definite campaign against this idea that the MM is an opposition, instead of developing [the] idea we are an opposition we should develop the idea that we are a militant trade union force. We are the alternative leadership to the present one. Our movement is a trade union centre.59

The CPA leadership was aware that the ideological outlook of the Party membership was limited.60 In discussion, the PB recognised that the membership, as an entity, possessed some capacity in the practical areas of party organisation and trade union work, but its understanding of Marxian economics was inadequate. And, given that the economic could not be separated from the political, the Party was essentially

55 ibid.
56 Minutes, PB meeting 10 November 1933, 'Commission's Report on District 2', MLMSS 502 Add-on 1936 Box 15 (76). ML.
57 Minutes PB meeting, 16 February 1934. MLMSS 502 Add-on 1936 Box 15 (76). ML.
58 ibid.
59 ibid.
60 Minutes PB meeting, 25 May 1935. MLMSS 502 Add-on 1936 Box 15 (76), ML.
vulnerable to "reformist error." But the CPA was under pressure from the Comintern to act. So it was that the PB asserted:

The big question we are faced with at the present time is to concentrate the attention of the party on wages and conditions... We will break the influence of the Labor Party... We will develop our work in the unions and win them from the influence of bourgeois ideology to proletarian ideology. Through this we will come to a correct political position where the trade unions will occupy their correct role in relation to the class struggle.

Justification could be found in the words of Lenin. He had insisted upon the need for revolutionary parties to base themselves on the economic needs of the workers, and in so doing he had emphasised the importance of strike action. Lenin, however, as has been remarked, was a planner of action. Fundamentally, he was a good general. And he had known, as any good general must, that "to accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy, but not to us, is criminal."

When, on 3 December 1935, Frank Hylander of the CPA chaired a special meeting of the SUA in the Sydney Town Hall, it was ten years to the day since the announcement of the collapse of the 'Homeboat Strike'. So it was upon a less than propitious anniversary that more than 1200 members resolved, with only 5 dissentients, that:

This special meeting of the Seamen's Union of Australasia declares that the Dethridge Award in the main constitutes a vicious attack on the seamen and we therefore express our resolute opposition to it. We instruct all our members to refuse to work under the terms of the Award and direct that they tender their legal 24 hours notice forthwith. We declare that we are ready to commence negotiations with the shipowners for a new agreement based on the restoration of the old conditions, a

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61 ibid.
62 ibid.
63 ibid.
64 Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p.388.
65 Lenin, *Left Wing Communism*, p.77.
66 The CPA's PB minutes of 1 July 1937 acknowledged Hylander as one of theirs. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 15 (76). ML. A SUA stopwork meeting in Sydney on 28 December 1938 heard Hylander state categorically that he was a member of the CPA. E183/3/6, ABL. Tom Walsh, in 1938, said that Hylander was Swedish-born, and "had not been to sea for [the] past five or six years." Walsh to Bradey, 12 December 1938, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 69, NLA.
67 See, C.O'Neill to Adela P Walsh, 3 December 1925, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 64, NLA.
shorter working week and providing for such improvements as are contained in the present award.⁶⁸

A proposed amendment that rather than take direct action, the union seek amelioration of the award’s penal provisions in the arbitration court, was resoundingly defeated. It was also resolved that a strike committee be immediately formed "for the purpose of collaborating with the officials with a view to conducting the present strike," and that the strike committee should comprise two delegates from each ship involved in the dispute and two rank-and-file unemployed members. Thereupon, "members Keenan and Malone were elected as the unemployed members."⁶⁹

Three days later, on 6 December 1935, Comrade Hylander was again in the chair when a special meeting of 1400 members of the SUA in Sydney overwhelmingly rejected a motion that the strike be called off while a plebiscite of the entire membership was taken in order to determine acceptance or rejection of the new award.⁷⁰ That same day, the Labor Daily carried a headlined report that "ACTU seeks time to settle ship dispute. To join men in court move. Temporary resumption is recommended. Lyons defers action."⁷¹ The SUA meeting, however, went on to decide unanimously that any move by the Commonwealth Government to carry out its threat to apply the regulations of the Transport Workers’ Act to the seamen would be countered by declaration of a general shipping strike. It was also resolved to empower the strike committee to conduct the strike to the best advantage of the seamen, with all federal and branch officials of the union being instructed to render it full assistance.⁷²

In the minutes of a succession of ever-larger meetings, orchestrated by the Communist fraction, one gains a sense of pent-up exasperation among the seamen. That

⁶⁸Minutes special meeting Sydney 3 December 1935, E183/3/5, ABL.
⁶⁹Ibid. Malone was identified as an active CPA supporter or member by Tom Walsh, see Walsh to Bradely, 12 December 1938, op cit.
⁷⁰Minutes special meeting Sydney, 6 December 1935, E183/3/5, ABL.
⁷¹Labor Daily, 6 December 1935.
⁷²Minutes special meeting Sydney, 6 December 1935, E183/3/5, ABL.
exasperation may have had its origins in the frustration felt at the news that the federal Government had granted a permit to P&O providing immunity from the coasting provisions of the Navigation Act and allowing that British shipping company to carry Australian passengers interstate.\footnote{Labor Daily, 3 December 1935.} Insult was added to injury when the agents for the Aberdeen and Commonwealth liner \textit{Esperance Bay}, formerly the pride of the CGL, announced that the ship which was due to depart for London was available to carry Australian passengers from Sydney to Melbourne.\footnote{Ibid.} And having gone to war with their traditional class enemy - the shipowners and the government in combination - the seamen now found themselves unsupported. On 9 December a meeting of the other maritime unions that were likely to become embroiled in the dispute, which had been summoned by the ACTU emergency committee, decided not to back the seamen's strike action. Instead the other unions urged the seamen to resume work and apply for a variation of their award, "with a view of removing the obnoxious clauses."\footnote{Ibid.} But the climax, when it came in a violent show-down on 23 December 1935, was not of the rank-and-file's making. The Sydney press reported that:

\begin{quote}
Wild scenes, culminating in a fierce assault on the General Secretary of the Seamen's Union (Mr Johnson) marked a meeting of the Sydney Branch of the Seamen's Union at the Town Hall yesterday morning. Mr Johnson was attempting to reply to statements made by the strike committee, when he was attacked by a number of men from the body of the hall, pushed off the platform, and thrown out of the hall.\footnote{SMH, 24 December 1935.}
\end{quote}

The assault upon Johnson was a consequence of the fraction's need to silence him. It was reported by the Conservative press that he was knocked to the floor, surrounded, and kicked and punched by a dozen men.\footnote{Ibid.} The \textit{Labor Daily} reduced the number to four,\footnote{Labor Daily, 9 December 1935.} but both newspapers agreed that Johnson suffered cuts and bruises, his glasses were broken and he was robbed of a quantity of cash. He had been drawing the seamen's attention to the marked absence of that support which at the outset Keenan had assured the seamen would be forthcoming, and had just remarked that "the chickens are coming
home to roost" when, amid shouts of "chuck him out" and "shut him up", he was rushed by a group from the floor of the meeting.79

An eye-witness, Tommy McKernan, described what happened in a letter to F.P.Walsh, general president of the New Zealand Seamen's Union.80 Recalling that a CPA member was in the chair, McKernan condemned those who attacked Johnson. "Thugs' is not name for them [sic]. Yes, we know them, just a dozen. You wonder why the majority are taking it, but can they do anything else? They are afraid to speak at a meeting owing to the basher gang. It is a racket."81 In fact when Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary, had jumped to his feet exclaiming that "nothing worse than this has occurred during the whole history of the Seamen's Union,",82 he had been threatened with shouts of "You'll be next".83 Then, too, the unsettling influence of past events lingered still among the seamen, as McKernan commented:

I know how dangerous is letter writing, but you remember Bell [NUS emissary] coming out here, so do not lose sight of the fact that his agents are still here, getting around in their stocking-feet. Old Walsh has been very busy around the waterfront... the Organisation is smashed.84

Four days after the assault on Johnson, on 27 December 1935, a special meeting of 2000 unemployed seamen in Sydney formally recalled him from his position on the grounds that he had neglected his duty, that they had no confidence in him and that he had wilfully disobeyed the wishes of the members.85 Joseph Keenan, of the MM, who had nominated for office against Johnson in the annual ballot, was elected acting general secretary pending the result of that ballot.86 Johnson was not present and it is hardly

79ibid.
80Bolinger says that about 1930 F.P.Walsh had severed all links with the CPNZ, abandoning Stalinism in favour of Trotskyism. See Bolinger, Against the Wind, p.167 & p.228. Meanwhile the SUA still had not repaid the L2000 loaned to it by the NZSU in 1922. See, F.PWalsh to Johnson, 23 October 1935, D170/6/4, WUA.
81McKernan to F.P.Walsh, 21 January 1936, D170/6/5, WUA.
82Labor Daily, 24 December 1935.
83ibid.
84McKernan to F.P.Walsh, op cit.
85Minutes special meeting Sydney, 27 December 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
86ibid.
surprising that he did not attend the next stopwork meeting in Sydney on the 31 December. He sent a letter instead. It was read to the 3000 members present and, with Frank Hylander in the chair, the meeting then resolved unanimously that, "seeing that letter submitted has come from a master scab such as Jacob Johnson that it be convened [sic] to the waste paper basket and we assert that he is no longer General Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australasia."  

This was the violent culmination of an increasingly overt campaign conducted by the MM within the union in accordance with CPA policy. It took little more than 12 months to topple Johnson. Preceding that event, Keenan, a former member of the union, had formally rejoined the SUA in October 1934. At the time, he claimed that he had spent the previous two years in England where, he said, he had been refused membership of the NUS because of his political activities, a statement that no doubt would have earned him the approval of most of those present. When Keenan rejoined the SUA his former membership was recognised and the mandatory probationary period of two years applicable to new entrants was accordingly waived, despite opposition from Johnson. Thus Keenan could and did seek office in the union, immediately. In December he was elected as rank-and-file SUA delegate to attend a meeting of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council on the matter of the need for wireless-telegraphy equipment to be installed in coastal ships as a safety measure. In February 1935, he was elected acting assistant Sydney branch secretary during the temporary absence of the branch secretary. And in April, he used his position as acting Sydney branch secretary to call a special meeting of the union, in the absence of the branch secretary, at which 500 members resolved on his motion that the union's executive be condemned for its "fascist anti-Soviet propaganda". Attempts by the executive to prevent election of relieving

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87 Johnson affidavit 9 July 1937. E183/18/2, ABL.  
88 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 December 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.  
89 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 October 1934. E183/3/5, ABL.  
90 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 21 December 1934. E183/3/5, ABL. See also The Red Leader, 12 December 1934.  
91 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 1 February 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
officials - such as Keenan - from the floor at special meetings were also condemned at that meeting. The officials of the Union, Keenan said in a classical allusion rare in the minutes of the SUA, saw their role as that of a "modern Diogenes."  

The CPA attack was also pressed home in the pages of the militant press, which caused Sydney branch secretary Chris Herbert to complain of articles in the *Melbourne Voice*, *Workers' Weekly*, and *Red Leader* that accused the executive of having dragged the membership into the arbitration court against its will. The union was then arguing its case preparatory to the court's determination of a new Seamen's Award. Later articles accused the executive of conspiring to sell-out the seamen in regard to their wages. But Herbert contended that when it became apparent that an increase in wages was likely to be contained in the forthcoming award, the accusation was changed to one of a sell-out on conditions. Johnson was adamant that the new award, when announced, would prove to be beneficial to the seamen, but that a 'certain element' was endeavouring to embarrass the executive in its task of presenting the union's case to the court. "These people," he stated, "are not desirous that the case shall be a success but they would prefer that it be a failure in order to prove the fallacy of the workers in Arbitration." And then, positioning himself out on the limb that in due course the MM would sever, he stated:

I am satisfied in my own mind that when the award comes into being we will see substantial gains all round. Our economic position is such that we will get more from the Arbitration Court than that suggested by our friends. I am sure 95% of the seamen will be well pleased with the results.

Jacob Johnson was no longer the apostle of job control. This former scourge of the shipowners now advocated caution, compromise and expedition in dealing with...
them.\textsuperscript{96} And this was despite the fact that in many of the coastal ships living conditions for seamen were little better than those uncovered by the 1906 Royal Commission.\textsuperscript{97} In September 1934, when yet another dispute had erupted in the stokehold of Howard Smith's notorious \textit{Canberra}, Johnson sought to prevent it spreading beyond that ship.\textsuperscript{98} Aware of the danger presented to them by the Party fraction within the union, he and his SPA supporters, branch secretaries Clarke of Melbourne and Casey of Brisbane, endeavoured to close the loophole that Johnson himself had so effectively used in the past, by moving at the annual general meeting held in Melbourne on 26 February 1935:

\begin{quote}
That in order to avoid minority control with possibilities involving the whole membership of the Union contrary to the wishes of the majority, the Committee of Management recommends that no resolutions carried after 12 noon of the Stop Work Meeting day shall become binding unless endorsed at the following stop work meeting.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

And:

\begin{quote}
That no business shall be conducted at a Special Meeting of the Union or of a Branch convened by the Executive or by requisition by members unless there be a quorum present when the motion is submitted to the vote.\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

But when a dispute arose which resulted in the wholesale sacking of SUA members onboard Huddart Parker's \textit{Murada} in Melbourne, Johnson was forced to act.\textsuperscript{101}

The dispute arose out of the company's refusal to pay penalty rates to seamen for a prolonged period that they had spent on stand-by, while maintaining steam-pressure, when the ship's departure had been deferred at a previous port. And it was symptomatic of the vindictive industrial atmosphere of the time that the \textit{Murada}'s master had dismissed the entire SUA crew in Melbourne, replacing it with a non-union crew. He logged the

\textsuperscript{96}In August 1935 the monthly publication of the Workers' Party of Australia referred to "the pale pink banner of the old-time militant 'Stick-em-up-Johnson.'" \textit{The Militant}, August 1935.

\textsuperscript{97}See Schofield to Johnson, 28 June 1935, regarding lack of fresh water in AUSN's \textit{Mackarra}. E183/17/1, ABL.

\textsuperscript{98}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 25 September 1934, E183/3/5, ABL. The \textit{Canberra} was known among seamen as the "Ash-Barge." Its stokehold contained 24 fires and was a particularly heavy job for firemen. \textit{Canberra} was the source of innumerable disputes until the ship was sold in 1947. See \textit{SJ}, December 1947.

\textsuperscript{99}Minutes AGM Melbourne 26 February 1935, E183/3/5, ABL.

\textsuperscript{100}ibid.

\textsuperscript{101}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 July 1935, E183/3/5, ABL.
SUA men, levied a fine upon each of them, and issued them all with bad discharges.\textsuperscript{102} It was a demonstration of the merchant seaman's vulnerability to 'double jeopardy.'\textsuperscript{103} Left on the wharf, they had been refused rail fares or subsistence allowance for the journey to their home-port of Sydney. Subsequently, company officials had discriminated against them when they applied for employment in the \textit{Zealandia}, another Huddart Parker ship.\textsuperscript{104} Johnson, at the Sydney branch stopwork meeting on 30 July 1935, having explained that a summons had been taken out by the union against Huddart Parker Ltd, left the meeting to attend court. Then, despite the branch secretary's protests, Keenan had the stopwork meeting converted into a special meeting, and played his trump card. He tabled correspondence between general secretary Johnson and the Lyons Federal Cabinet which indicated, he said, "that the General Secretary is prepared to compromise with the employing class by agreeing as it were for the provisions of the [British] Board of Trade manning scale for new vessels to be applied to the Australian Coast."\textsuperscript{105}

When Johnson returned to the meeting, the hearing of the \textit{Murada} dispute having been postponed, he found that in his absence his action in corresponding with the anti-labour Lyons federal government, which Keenan said could only worsen the Australian seamen's conditions, had been condemned as "an act of gross betrayal." He was summoned to a special meeting, to be held within fourteen days, to tender an explanation to the members. Thereupon, the chairman closed the meeting promptly at noon, precluding any further official discussion.\textsuperscript{106} Johnson had been hoist with his own petard.

\textsuperscript{102}\textit{SJ}, 26 August 1935.
\textsuperscript{103}In accordance with Division 9 (S.61-68) of the Navigation Act 1912, merchant seamen received a discharge certificate signed by the ship's master and countersigned by the superintendent of the Commonwealth Mercantile Marine Office [MMO] when they signed-off articles. Examination of his last discharge certificate by the superintendent of an MMO was mandatory before the seaman was permitted to join another ship. There were three grades of discharge, viz. 'Very Good', 'Good', and 'Decline to Report'. Award of a 'DR' could result in the seaman being refused selection for further employment in the industry.
\textsuperscript{105}Minutes special meeting Sydney 30 July 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
\textsuperscript{106}\textit{ibid.}
Now, as the seamen awaited the award of Chief Judge Dethridge of the Arbitration Court, the Communists and their sympathisers within the body of the union increased their pressure from below. Their temper is evident in a motion, narrowly ruled out of order at one meeting, "that Keenan be elected to assist the officials to extend the dispute and accompany them wherever the officials go." Despite the efforts of Johnson and the Sydney branch secretary Herbert to confine it to one ship, the union's dispute with Huddart Parker widened. As a consequence, the numbers attending meetings of the union in Sydney increased greatly. So did the militant tone of the resolutions that were passed. There were 102 members present at the meeting of 8 August. But there were 800 present at each of the meetings held on 12 August and on 14 August when it was resolved that "we now decide to immediately extend the present dispute to all vessels of the Australian Steamship Owners Federation and their immediate auxiliaries." On 19 August, 1500 members having heard the progress report of the strike committee, the militants moved a motion that the dispute be continued "until the demands by us are given full effect to by our enemies the shipowners." But with Clarke and Casey backing Johnson, it was conceded that further extension of the dispute would be postponed until the following day when a report from the executive officers of the union would be heard.

At that Sydney mass meeting on 20 August 1935, the report tendered by general secretary Johnson and honorary general president Clarke was adopted and the executive officers were instructed to negotiate for the best terms at the forthcoming compulsory conference. It was evident, however, that the federal leadership was on trial. Johnson, Clarke and Casey were forced to reply to a challenge from a left-wing ALP militant, member Daley, by assuring the meeting that on the termination of the compulsory

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107 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 8 August 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
108 Minutes special meetings Sydney, 12 & 14 August 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
109 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 19 August 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
conference to be held in Melbourne the following evening, "they would definitely express
their personal opinion and further be prepared to give a lead to the members."\textsuperscript{110}

When the union executive returned to Sydney on Friday 23 August 1935, it was
to recommend to over 1000 seamen assembled in the Sydney Town Hall basement that
the owners' terms be accepted and the ships be manned forthwith. Keenan, the
Communist faction, and their militant supporters were loud in their disagreement. Their
dissent, however, was overruled "after much discussion" at another mass meeting the
next day.\textsuperscript{111} The MM having lost that round, Johnson sought to justify his
correspondence with the Minister for External Affairs in the Lyons Federal Cabinet in
regard to manning levels. He read the whole of his correspondence to the Sydney
stopwork meeting on 27 August, explaining that Keenan had revealed the contents of
only one letter, and that had been out of context. Casey and Clarke supported the general
president in this endeavour to vindicate his actions, but on the motion of Keenan the
condemnatory resolution of 30 July was reaffirmed.\textsuperscript{112} And then the MM found another
matter with which further to undermine the credibility of the union's general secretary.

SUA members in the Union Steamship Company's \textit{Aorangi} had become involved
in a longshoremen's strike while berthed at Vancouver, British Columbia, in June 1935.
Jacob Johnson, writing in the \textit{Seamen's Journal} of 26 August 1935, described the
Vancouver Longshoremen's Union as a "bogus strike-breaking body, launched, fostered,
nursed and pampered by the shipping interest in Vancouver." He regretted that the SUA
members onboard the \textit{Aorangi} had seen fit to provide monetary support to the
longshoremen and then, in his inimitable style, focused his attack upon the Communists:

\begin{quote}
I have been taken to task by an alleged Official Organ of so-called Militants, known
as the \textit{Marine Worker}. In their issue of July 24, I am accused by one of its scribes
on one page of making a 'slimy attack' on the Vancouver Longshoremen's Union...
Bereft of anything constructive, this Organ exists mainly on a policy of self-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{110} Minutes special meeting Sydney, 20 August 1935. E183/3/35, ABL.
\textsuperscript{111} Minutes special meetings Sydney, 23 & 24 August 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
\textsuperscript{112} Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 24 September 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
glorification and vilification of its opponents. Misrepresentation is the motto of its scribes. With them, lying appears a virtue, truth a vice.113

A letter subsequently received by the SUA from the Vancouver Longshoremen's Union specifically accused two members of the *Aorangi* crew, Murray and Fleming, of "scabbing." A stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch, held on 24 September 1935, cleared both of the accusation by a vote of 91 to 70.114 But Murray who was a former general president of the union, and Tom Fleming who was the former secretary of the Sydney branch and a prominent Johnson supporter, had earlier been presented with gold watches by the shipping company at a ceremony in the Commonwealth Government's Merchant Marine Office. At that ceremony it was publicly stated that, "as a result of the negotiations conducted by Messrs Fleming and Murray, the efforts of the Communists to involve the crew of the *Aorangi* in the recent strike at Vancouver were defeated."115 Keenan attacked Johnson, Fleming and Murray at the stopwork meeting on 24 September with a motion that:

This meeting of the Sydney Branch of the Seamen's Union congratulates the longshoremen and water transport workers of British Columbia for the magnificent fight they are waging against the attacks of shipping capital. Further we dissociate ourselves from the lying slanderous attack of our General Secretary as published in our official organ 'The Journal' and at the same time soundly condemn him for the said attack. We commend the stand taken by the 79 members of the *mv Aorangi* who when in Vancouver were prepared to struggle side by side with the locked-out workers. We consider that Fleming misrepresented the position in the first report and today's report confirms that opinion.116

Keenan's motion was defeated, but that defeat may well have become a tactical victory. Clarke, having extracted a laudatory account of the presentation to Murray and Fleming from the conservatively middle-class and business-oriented *Sydney Morning Herald* was then tactless enough to publish it, with full acknowledgement of its origin, in *The Seamen's Journal*.117

113SJ, 26 August 1935.
114Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 24 September 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
115SMH, 13 September 1935.
116Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 24 September 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
117SJ, 25 September 1935.
The union's long-dormant periodical, *The Seamen's Journal*, had reappeared after a hiatus of ten years under Clarke's editorship in Melbourne on 25 June 1935 with the announcement that, "we regain our voice." This sudden reappearance was indicative of the union leadership's need to counter the divisive propaganda emanating from the CPA. Clarke wasted no time in declaring war, his first editorial stating that:

The Seamen's Union has been invaded by a small body of pseudo-militants, and under the 'Red Cloak' they have carried on a campaign of abuse and vilification of certain selected officials, and in many ways sabotaged the efforts of the Union's Representatives both in Court and in Conference with the ship-owners.

On the Monday preceding the union's monthly stopwork meetings, which were held on the last Tuesday of each month, Clarke claimed that 'they' held meetings at which tactics were worked out for the next day which were in conformity with CPA instructions. "In some of these so-called Militant Minority meetings, not 10 per cent of those present are seamen," he said. The shipowners, he observed, need look no further than the *Marine Worker* and *Workers' Voice* and such other publications of the CPA and MM in order to find material with which to attack the seamen.

Meanwhile, jobs on the coast were scarce and allocated by the owners as they saw fit. Accordingly, the Newcastle secretary reported that ever since a dispute with BHP in 1931-32:

Members of the Union who scabbed at that time, and the persons who were not members, and who scabbed, are still in the ships... the position has not changed. When a vacancy arises one of our men is picked-up, but as soon as one of the other persons offer for work our man is dismissed and the other signed on. I do not think there are more than sixteen of our men in the ships, who joined after the ban was lifted, and they are only there until the Company desires to make a job for one of the people, who, they say, came to their aid at the time of the dispute.

In a typical ship of the BHP fleet, the *Iron Warrior*, of the ten seamen employed on deck only six were *bona fide* members of the SUA while in the stokehold only one out of the

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119 ibid.
120 ibid.
121 Schofield to Johnson, 18 December 1934. E183/17/1, ABL.
complement of twelve was a financial member of the union. Such a situation maintained a high rate of unemployment among members of the seamen's union at a time when overall rates of unemployment among other trade unionists were decreasing steadily. Thus when three jobs were declared vacant in the stokehold of the Huddart Parker steamship Corio in Newcastle on 7 March 1935, thirty men competed for selection. That the situation was grim is clear from the cold statistics. There had been 209 ships of a total of 384,004 gross tons on the Australian registry in 1925. By 1935 the number of ships had decreased by 25 per cent, the total gross tonnage had decreased by 15.4 per cent, and there were 926 fewer jobs available on Australian articles for ratings of all departments. Across the Tasman, in New Zealand, the situation was worse and continued to deteriorate. There had been 200 ships on the New Zealand registry in 1925, but there were less than 100 in 1935 and these provided jobs for fewer than 1000 members of the union. The writing, for those who cared to read it, was on the wall. The times were unpropitious for strike action.

In anticipation of the new seamen's award that was to be handed down the very next day by Chief Judge Dethridge of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, the CPA sent out a circular to its district committees on Wednesday 6 November 1935. It advised that the new award contained a number of reverses for the seamen, that the union's 'reformist' leadership would accept these reverses, and that action should at once commence to mobilise the seamen for a struggle. The immediate task was to organise a mass meeting in Sydney which was to be made the focal point of the dispute. While Sydney was comparatively strong, the CPA indicated that it had no illusions that there

122 Schofield to Johnson, 2 September 1935. D170/6/4, WUA.
124 Schofield to Clarke, 7 March 1935. E183/17/1 folder 2, ABL.
125 See Appendix 1.
126 F.P.Walsh to Johnson, 23 October 1935. D170/6/4, WUA.
127 Circular, CC CPA to All Districts, Sydney 6 November 1935. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 5. ML.
existed little or no organisation among the seamen and waterside workers in the other ports. But, regardless, industrial action was to be initiated.

When the award was duly delivered, it was found that though it did contain some financial gains, these were confined to firemen and trimmers in coal-burning ships - an already diminishing sector of the union with the advent of motor and oil-burning ships. Otherwise, the award reduced overtime rates and the special rates paid to seamen acting as night-watchmen in port. It also abolished differential rates (the difference between waterside workers' and seamen's rates when the latter were required to perform waterside workers' duties in certain remote locations) and penalty payments for deferred sailing, which had been the source of the Murada dispute. And all this, the CC estimated, would amount to a loss of L2 per month for each member of the SUA. But the Dethridge award went farther. Under clause 66, "Medical Examination", it stipulated that:

If the employee is seeking or being sought for engagement with or by an employer, the employer may accept or take him subject to the employee submitting himself for medical examination... and may refuse to sign or have the articles of agreement signed on his behalf if the employee fails so to submit himself.

Thus the new award introduced compulsory medical examinations for seamen - "which will open the way for victimisation of all militants" But most significantly of all, it contained two penal clauses.

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128 Ibid. A CPA analysis in 1936 of its fraction membership within the SUA indicated 10 in Sydney, 1 or 2 in Newcastle, 1 in Port Adelaide. "In Melbourne the Party is very weak and has little influence", and "of Western Australia, we know very little." MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Maritime 1918-37 Box 28. ML.
129 Circular, CC CPA to All Districts, 20 November 1935, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 5. ML.
130 SUA publication. "Seamen's Union of Australasia. Award." D170/6/20, WUA.
131 Circular, CC CPA to All Districts, 27 November 1935, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 5. ML. The seamen claimed that compulsory medical examinations would eliminate older members of the union from the industry. See leaflet "Why We Fight! The Seamen State Their Case", D170/6/5, WUA. Havelock Wilson's discriminatory 'PC.5', which between 1922 and 1927 allowed him to defeat the rival Amalgamated Marine Workers' Union [AMWU], was developed from the system of registration used in recording the results of medical examinations of seamen conducted by 'Port Consultants.' See transcript evidence British seaman J.A.Johnstone, Deportation Board, 2 October 1925, A467/1 SF12/4 B32, Vol.4 pp.922A-922B. AA. Also, Dictionary of Labour Biography, p.205.
The first of these, clause 77, was entitled "Stopping or Hindering Work on Ship." Under its section (1), on pain of a fine of ten pounds (at a time when an AB's basic monthly rate of pay was £14.7.6d), it was forbidden for a seaman on articles to endeavour to enforce any demand in regard to any matter contained within the award by engaging in any activity that might be interpreted as tending to "do or omit to do, or incite or encourage any other employee to do or omit to do anything so as to tend to prevent or delay or hinder the departing or running or working or using of any ship." Section (2) stipulated that the union should not, for the purpose of enforcing any demand in regard to any matter contained within the award, "order or incite or encourage any of its members or permit any of its officers to do or omit to do anything in connection with the work to be done by any employee in the course of employment covered by this award so as to tend to prevent, delay or hinder the departing or running or working or using of any ship." Contravention of section 2 by the union rendered it liable to a penalty of £100.132

Clause 78, the second of the penal clauses, was entitled "Concerted Hindrance of Employment". Its section (1) forbade any seaman in employment from inciting any other seaman to either quit his ship or refuse to accept employment with a shipowner. Section (2) forbade any combination of seamen from enforcing their demands upon a shipowner by quitting their ship or refusing to accept employment. Section (3) forbade the union from ordering or inciting or permitting any of its officials to order or incite any of its members to commit a breach of either section (1) or (2). Contravention of either sections (1) or (2) by an individual seaman attracted a fine of ten pounds. Contravention of section (3) by the union entailed a maximum fine of one hundred pounds.133

It had been the intention of the SUA executive to recommend acceptance of the Dethridge Award, while at the same time submitting the question formally to a plebiscite.

13235CAR432.
13335CAR433. Also see copy of Seamen's Award. D170/6/20, WUA. Tom Walsh referred to "the new affair which Dethridge was pleased to call an award. I have read it and compared it with the agreement which I secured in 1925 and when I had finished I was on the verge of blasphemy." Walsh to 'Ted', 8 December 1935, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 66, ML.
to be conducted simultaneously with the union's routine annual ballot for officials.\textsuperscript{134} While the award would come fully into effect as from 1 December 1935, the union ballot results and therefore the membership's acceptance or rejection of the award would not be declared until February 1936. It was therefore as a matter of urgency that the CPA arranged to thwart the union leadership's plan. It orchestrated the seamen's rejection of the award at a large meeting held in the Sydney Town Hall and had that decision loudly reiterated at subsequent meetings \textit{en-masse} so as to overwhelm any voice of protest from the other, smaller, branches and by such authoritarian means extract their endorsement.

But the Commonwealth Government's reaction was equally swift. The \textit{Labor Daily} reported on 4 December 1935 that the Prime Minister had announced that following the decision of the seamen to hold up interstate shipping the Government had determined to apply the Transport Workers Act to the seamen on the same basis as it operated among the waterside workers. Mr Lyons had announced that unless the seamen resumed work within 48 hours, licences would be introduced. And not only would they be introduced, they would be made permanent. The newspaper quoted Prime Minister Lyons as stating that:

\begin{quote}
...if the Transport Workers Act is applied to seamen its application will be continued not merely for the present but permanently and seamen who fail to resume work will find themselves substantially excluded from future employment in the Australian shipping industry.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

There were brave if foolhardy words spoken at those Sydney meetings.\textsuperscript{136}

Having heard a report of the Strike Committee on 10 December 1935, 1800 seamen

\begin{footnotes}
\item[134]See \textit{Labor Daily}, 3 December 1935.
\item[135]\textit{Labor Daily}, 4 December 1935. Lyons went on to say "should the prompt re-manning of coastal steamers prove impracticable, the Government will not hesitate to take action to grant permits to overseas ships to engage in the coasting trade in respect of both passengers and cargo". See \textit{CPD}, Vol.148, p.2407.
\item[136]It is evident that not all who attended these mass meetings were seamen. The total membership of the SUA in 1934, according to Jacob Johnson, was 3,588. See Fitzpatrick & Cahill, \textit{Seamen's Union}, p.69. Tom Walsh told Prime Minister Lyons that "when the strike occurred the majority of the sailors and firemen were at sea and had no opportunity of voting one way or the other." See Walsh to Lyons, 17 August 1936, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 67, NLA. Johnson, in a sworn affidavit of 9 July 1937, said that many of those attending stopwork meetings of the SUA were in fact members of the WWF. See E183/12/2 ABL. A seaman, who was present, and who described "all the spectacular whisding at meetings", claimed that "there was plenty of wharfies and I know their names who was in the meetings clapping and cheering." See A.Jones to 'Pat', 15 April 1936, D170/6/5 WUA.
\end{footnotes}
resolved that no member should take out a "Dog's Licence" and emphatically declared that there could be no settlement of the dispute while the Government pursued its intention to apply the regulations of the Transport Act to the seamen. But that very day Statutory Rules 1935. No.125. Regulations under the Transport Workers Act 1928-1929. Transport Workers (Seamen) Regulations were proclaimed by the Governor General and were gazetted for the ports of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Newcastle and Adelaide. Another meeting in Sydney under the chairmanship of Comrade Hylander, this time of 2700 members, on 17 December reaffirmed its "full confidence and trust in the strike committee," and empowered it to carry out all negotiations with the employers and others with a view to a successful settlement of the strike. But the Attorney General, R.G.Menzies, had already delivered a lecture to a deputation from the central strike-committee informing it that the union's action in precipitating a strike had ensured that licences for seamen had come to stay.

Defiance was evident on 31 December when a meeting of 3000 'members', again under Hylander's chairmanship in Sydney, decided against defending a summons to appear before the NSW Industrial Commission to show cause why the Sydney branch of the union should not be deregistered. Instead, the seamen unanimously reiterated their full confidence in the strike-committee and also in the union's general secretary, Joseph Keenan. And then, on 6 January 1936 a special meeting of 3000 in Sydney resolved to escalate the strike into a general shipping strike involving both interstate and intrastate vessels, under both federal and state awards. But, by then, it was apparent that the seamen were feeling the effects of prolonged unemployment, since "many announcements were made by the Committee relative to the policy of Food Relief."

137 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 10 December 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
138 Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No.71 of 10 December, No.72 of 11 December & No.74 of 13 December 1935.
139 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 17 December 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
140 Circular CC CPA to All Districts, Sydney 19 December 1935. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
141 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 December 1935. E183/3/5, ABL.
142 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 6 January 1936. E183/3/5, ABL. The 'Seamen's Strike Bulletin No.3, of 10 January 1936, reported that when approached for a donation, "Mr Frank McDowell of the
And now it became apparent that the seamen were standing alone. On 13 January 1936, the seamen's strike bulletin sounded a note of alarm:

It is imperative at this stage that we should mention the ACTU. We have been out now for 7 weeks, and while we recognise the undoubted influence of this organisation at the same time we cannot but criticise them for their present attitude towards our struggle. We suggest to the ACTU and their sections, if they be sincere in their desire to assist us that they show to us without further delay some concrete evidence of their intentions.

That same day another mass meeting chaired by Hylander in Sydney, with 3500 present, listened to an address from miners' delegates. These delegates all admitted that the decisions of the rank and file in the coalfields were generally against supporting the seamen's strike although individual mines had decided not to supply coal to particular 'scab' ships manned by non-unionists. Hylander chaired another meeting in Sydney four days later, again with 3500 present, when in contrast to the fiery tones of earlier addresses, Joseph Keenan now told the seamen of the necessity that he attend the forthcoming conference of the ACTU on 20 January to place before it the case of the seamen. Then there were more announcements of food relief arrangements.

On 30 January 1936, under the chairmanship of Hylander of the CPA, 4000 unemployed men assembled in the Sydney Town Hall basement, and held what was probably the SUA's largest-ever meeting. It lasted no more than one hour and twenty minutes. Reports by Keenan and the Sydney branch secretary relevant to the ACTU's conference in Melbourne and also on the strike-committee's last two meetings with the shipowners were received "with little discussion." And there was a note of resignation in the resolution:

That this special meeting of 4000 seamen reject the humiliating terms dictated to us by the shipowners and decided to continue the struggle until such times as our logical demands are met with. Further, we condemn the high-handed action of Mr

well-known Sydney firm of that name... replied that he would rather give any food left over from the cafeteria to the pigs." D170/6/5 WUA.

143 See Labor Daily, 9 January 1936.
144 Seamen's Strike Bulletin, No.4, 13 January 1936, D170/6/5, WUA.
145 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 13 January 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
146 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 17 January 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
147 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 30 January 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
Menzies in his refusal to discuss the question of the licensing system and we call upon the ACTU to convene a conference between the Seamen's representatives, the ACTU and the Federal Prime Minister Mr Lyons to explore the possibilities of removing the licences from the seamen and further we call upon the ACTU to give effect to their resolution to convene at the earliest possible moment the conference of federal trade union executives directly and indirectly involved.148

And then the meeting endorsed the belated decision of the strike committee to inaugurate a system of mass picketing on the Sydney waterfront. But, apparently, only during office hours! Upon the closure of the meeting at 3.50pm it was announced that all those present should repair to the waterfront and stay there until 5pm.149

The strike collapsed on Wednesday, 19 February 1936. At another special meeting of some 3000 unemployed members, chaired by Hylander, a recommendation was submitted in the form of a resolution by Joseph Keenan, that:

...we still recognise the correctness of the struggle but at the same time realise that no industrial support is forthcoming to assist us to win and as our union is endangered by preference licenses we decide that the only possible line is for us to offer for employment under the terms of the award. This to commence from Monday the 24th. We at the same time recognise the part played by our central strike committee and the General Secretary of our Union and again place on record our fullest confidence in them.150

But the Labor Daily reported that the meeting broke up in disorder. Under a headline "Keenan is hooted by Seamen," the paper told how Keenan had come close to suffering the same fate as Johnson. "Strong complaints against the policy pursued in the dispute were voiced before the meeting assembled", the paper reported, and:

...when the chairman Mr Hylander called upon Mr Keenan to report to the meeting on conferences that had taken place in Melbourne, there was an outburst of hooting... An ugly situation developed when the platform was rushed and only the intervention of a number of others saved Mr Keenan from being assaulted. 'I expected this, because I have the courage to tell you the truth', he said amidst renewed uproar.151

148 ibid.
149 ibid.
150 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 19 February 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
151 Labor Daily, 20 February 1936.
It was only after much discussion the next day, Thursday, that the recommendation to call-off the strike was finally agreed in Sydney by a six to four majority. On Friday, 21 February 1936, the other branches reluctantly decided to follow the Sydney decision. In Brisbane, the press reported, the seamen contended that "they had been badly let down" by the strike leadership in Sydney. In Adelaide the decision to follow Sydney's lead was only taken after a three hour meeting which, it was reported, frequently deteriorated into an "angry uproar."

Now, after the large mass meetings held at the height of the strike, the numbers attending fell away. There were 1000 seamen present on 25 February 1936 at the stopwork meeting in Sydney when Keenan addressed the situation. Gone was the fiery radical rhetoric. Instead, he placed his hope in the decision of the High Court which was expected to rule shortly in the matter of the constitutionality of the licensing regulations. The Labor Party had assured him, he said, that "when the Federal Parliament met an adjournment of the House would be made by the Federal Labour members with a view to ventilating the position of the seamen under the TWA." He appealed for branch unanimity, but in the meantime an attempt to convene the union's committee of management had proved unsuccessful. Clarke in Melbourne and Casey in Queensland absolutely refused to recognise Keenan as general secretary. Schofield, meanwhile, had resigned as Newcastle secretary. As for further action - Keenan commented that to approach the ACTU for assistance would only elicit the response "put your house in order first." And then, in terms hardly guaranteed to reassure the unemployed men standing before him, he stated:

Some individualists [sic] would make believe that I brought about the strike. That statement is deliberate because its very viciousness is desired by the individual to implement on the members 'I TOLD YOU SO.' It is up to the members that we defeat that type of I TOLD YOU SO. It is they who can be held responsible for any

152 Minutes resumed special meeting Sydney, 20 February 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
153 SMH, 22 February 1936.
154 Ibid.
155 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 25 February 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
setbacks and not me. You men came out on strike because of the conditions that were forced on you in the new Award.\textsuperscript{156}

There were 500 men at the special meeting, chaired by Hylander, held in Sydney on 3 March 1936 when Keenan confessed his inability to bring the committee of management together. The South Australian secretary could not attend because his branch lacked sufficient funds to pay his fare. Melbourne and Brisbane refused to come. Only the newly appointed Newcastle secretary could be expected to attend. When asked from the floor what action he now intended to take, Keenan could reply only that, "he had nothing to suggest other than to leave the matter in the hands of the members."\textsuperscript{157}

Some of those members, in the Brisbane branch, heard a report from a seaman newly returned from Sydney. He told them that members in Sydney were destroying their union membership books and were refusing to pay contributions "until the dictatorship of disaster prevailing in Sydney was removed."\textsuperscript{158} Clarke, the Melbourne secretary, published a leaflet attacking the CPA and Keenan. "This campaign concludes in the tragic condition in the Union today", he said. "'Dog-collars' for seamen; and almost every member of the Union on the beach. All that you members have got out of the strike is a new General Secretary. All we hear from him now is a demand for 'recognition.'" Keenan was accused of "crippling the Union and massacring the members in order to serve his opportunist ambitions."\textsuperscript{159} And in a letter to the President of the New Zealand Seamen's Union, Clarke bemoaned the grave situation. The union had sustained a blow from which it would take a long time to recover, he reported, with most of the ships now manned by non-union labour.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{156}ibid.
\textsuperscript{157}Minutes special meeting Sydney, 3 March 1936. E183/3/5, ABL.
\textsuperscript{158}Minutes special meeting Brisbane, 28 February 1936. E183/3/8, ABL.
\textsuperscript{159}Leaflet. Clarke to "Members of the SUA", 4 March 1936. D170/6/5, WUA.
\textsuperscript{160}Clarke to F.P.Walsh 6 April 1936. D170/6/5, WUA.
Inevitably, as memories dimmed and participants faded away, the realities of the seamen's strike of 1935/36 were distorted in terms of partisan interest. In his recollections, some 20 years later, one former member of the central strike-committee said that at the end of the strike every ship on the coast other than the Canberra and Katoomba was sailing on schedule manned by non-union labour, the shipowners aided by the Government having recruited 7,000 strike-breakers, many of them former Navy men. But this simplistic account ignores the fact that many non-union seamen were employed in the coastal ships even before the strike began. A federal government report of 1939 records that 19 ships were idle within a few days of the strike being declared on 28 November 1935. Shipowners immediately began enrolling volunteers and got the first ship away on 9 December. By mid-January, according to official figures, 109 ships had been held-up by strike action but of these 79 had been immediately recommissioned with crews being supplied from a pool of 1426 'volunteer' seamen. In all 2316 seagoing jobs from 112 ships were vacated by the strikers. And of these 1885 were filled by volunteers onboard 96 ships. The shipowners, in fact, recruited a total of 3000 volunteers, but not all of these were qualified to do the work. Before the strike ended, however, the government introduced a scheme of 'preference' licensing which placed great strain upon the strikers' solidarity and resulted in much bitter division among the seamen themselves. Under the regulations, first preference would be granted only to a seaman who held a licence before 1 March 1936 and who was then either employed or had had two months employment as a licensed seaman. Thus it became crucial for the members of the SUA, if they were to compete on level terms with the influx of 'volunteers,' to obtain licenses in their home-ports before the deadline and get back into employment.

161 E.V. Elliott address reported in SJ, June-July 1955.
162 See Appendix 7 for the wide distribution of seamen among many small Australian ships in 1935 in the inter- and intra-state and foreign-going trades. Union organisation was thus rendered peculiarly difficult. And not all vessels on the Australian registry provided employment for Australian national seamen. Some of Burns Philp’s vessels and the ships operated by the British Phosphate Commission employed indigenous crews. See report of SUA attempts to replace the indigenous crew with union members in Burns Philp’s Mangola. SJ October 1946.
164 Ibid.
In Sydney, on 22 February 1936, it was reported that, "scores of union seamen applied for licences yesterday and afterwards thronged the shipping offices in search of employment."\(^{165}\) In Newcastle, too, there was a rush to secure licences. There, "the Customs House was besieged to such an extent that police reinforcements had to be summoned to form the men into queues."\(^{166}\) A seaman, 'on the beach' in Sydney, described the scene in a letter to F.P. Walsh, general president of the New Zealand union. "When they declared the strike off when a lunatic knew we were gone a million there was a queue outside the shipping office as long as Cuba same day fair dinkum and plenty of the stick-em-up brigade in the lead."\(^{167}\) He went on to say that, "I suppose you know all about the wreck of this union over here and you can feel certain that the majority of scabs in ships are there to stay." And the non-union seamen had been rewarded with the 'plum' jobs leaving only the 'hard case' jobs for the SUA men. Thus, "the Canberra, the hardest job on the coast has a union crowd. The Arkaba an Adelaide boat a coal burner also picked a union crew a fortnight ago. It had to be seen to be believed. Discharges flying at the second [engineer], he near got crushed to death. That ain't exaggerating."\(^{168}\) And then, there was the underlying sense of betrayal, and with it too the knowledge that bad as things were in the Australian coastal ships there were always those among the numerous deep-sea British seamen\(^{169}\) who were anxious to escape from worse.

Someone from over NZ told me there is homeblokes [sic] off boats getting in the union is that right? Plenty of them left lousy homeboats in Sydney and went scabbing and still at it. The Murada AUSN boat picked up a full crew yesterday, all scabs. You have to fill in a form as long as this letter for 6/6 a week dole here. I've had none.\(^{170}\)

As for the former activists, he observed bitterly that, "it is nothing to see some of these great militants, or supposed to be, hanging around after 10 oclock at night waiting for a job. They tell you to get in anyway." The Communist minority influence in the SUA,

\(^{165}\)SMH, 22 February 1936.
\(^{166}\)\textit{ibid}.
\(^{167}\)A Jones to 'Dear Pat', 15 April 1936. D170/6/5, WUA.
\(^{168}\)\textit{ibid}.
\(^{169}\)In 1936 the NUS claimed a membership of 43,487. See Marsh & Ryan, \textit{op cit}, Appendix-1 p.306.
\(^{170}\)A Jones to 'Dear Pat', 15 April 1936. \textit{op cit}.
formerly so persuasive, was now condemned by this unemployed rank-and-file seaman in terms of, "Keenan or his gang got no vote of mine. I can assure you. I would sooner tear up my book than fall to that." 171

J.B. Miles, general secretary of the CPA, at a CC meeting of the Party's leadership on 10 April 1936, announced that "we controlled the seamen's strike. So far as essential control [was] concerned we were in control, but it was not a complete control because of Clarke and Casey." 172 The next day, Joseph Keenan appeared before the CC, when a post mortem upon the strike was conducted. As general secretary of the SUA he provided his version of what had happened. 173 From that account it would appear that he had been badly let-down by the SUA branches. The first problem had been with the formation of the strike-committees. Keenan reported that in Adelaide and Melbourne there had been "some sort of strike committee" 174 but none had been formed in Fremantle. Newcastle and Brisbane had formed strike-committees, but the one in Brisbane had come under the domination of Casey. An early opportunity had been missed in Melbourne. Comrade Dodds in the Macedon had been told to leave his ship when it arrived there, in order that he might organise the Melbourne seamen. Instead, he signed-off in Sydney, and only later went to Melbourne.

It was obvious from the outset, said Keenan, that Byrne, SUA secretary in Western Australia, did not want his branch to become involved. Byrne had pointed out that the seamen in the intra-state vessels of State Ships of Western Australia were not covered by the provisions of the Commonwealth Navigation Act, and claimed that if these seamen left their ships they would be replaced by 'coloured seamen'. He had sent Keenan a telegram asking for exemption from the strike. In fact the WA situation was

171 ibid.
172 Minutes CC meeting, 10 April 1936. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4/76 CY Reel 3500 frame 0070. ML.
173 Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, Report Seamen's Strike - J.Keenan - MLMSS 5021, Add-on 1936 Box 4/76 CY Reel 3500 frame 0029-0049. ML.
174 ibid.
symptomatic of the main problem—lack of support by those who failed to see how the strike could benefit their particular interests. Seamen in the intra-state vessels, as distinct from the inter-state ships, were covered by state awards and not by the federal award that was in dispute.\textsuperscript{175} Since the provisions of the Commonwealth Navigation Act did not apply to intra-state vessels, these seamen were not required to obtain or display a discharge certificate at the Merchant Marine Office. Furthermore, they were specifically exempt from the Seamen’s Regulations of the TWA\textsuperscript{176} and therefore were not required to obtain licenses when that act was invoked by the federal government. It was only pressure from Melbourne that caused him to call out the 600 seamen employed in intra-state ships, Keenan said, and then they remained solid for only a week before they began to drift back to their jobs.\textsuperscript{177}

When efforts were made to broaden the strike by enlisting the support of the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council, Keenan claimed that the Council initially passed resolutions pledging both moral and financial support, but subsequently made no effort to give effect to those resolutions despite repeated approaches from the SUA.\textsuperscript{178} In the same vein, the marine cooks decided to support the SUA at one meeting and reversed their decision at another. The marine stewards, too, were approached, Keenan stated, but their union secretary, Moate, “who is closely linked with the steamship owners,” packed a meeting with his coterie and killed any support that might have been forthcoming.\textsuperscript{179}

Initially, the waterside workers were practically unanimous in their support for the

\textsuperscript{175}See Labor Daily, 23 December 1935.
\textsuperscript{176}Statutory Rules 1935 No.125 Transport Workers (Seamen) Regulations, Part 1, Para 3(3). And refer Navigation Act 1912, Part 1, section 2. See also Appendix 7, Table 1.
\textsuperscript{177}Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, op cit. It was subsequently claimed that the wisdom of calling out the intra-state seamen had been questioned, but it had been reasoned that support from other unions could not be expected if a section of the seamen were seen to remain outside the strike. See CPA report, The Work in the Seamen’s Union since the Conclusion of the Strike and the Present Situation, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Maritime 1918-37 Box 28(76). ML.
\textsuperscript{178}Markey says somewhat enigmatically that “the Labor Council organised financial support... but was extremely disappointed with the results.” Markey, In Case of Oppression, p.216.
\textsuperscript{179}Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, op cit.
seamen, but a meeting packed in similar fashion by their leaders produced a resolution distancing the 'wharfies' from the strike.\(^{180}\)

Keenan told the CC that the ALP had instructed its spokesmen in Sydney not to share a platform with him. In fact, the Labor mayor of Glebe had threatened to have the lights extinguished in a local hall where Keenan was scheduled to address a meeting. Meanwhile, the waterfront Pyrmont branch of the ALP refused to co-operate with the seamen unless their central strike-committee was disbanded. The *Labor Daily* allowed Johnson column space to express his views freely, while restricting the space allowed to the strike leaders. And with Clarke and Casey publicly attacking the CPA and the central strike-committee, Johnson made statements calculated to alienate potential public support. He sowed doubt in the public's mind as to the justification for the strike, which Keenan said, somewhat naively, "had the effect of making the public think that this was a Communist strike."\(^{181}\)

And then there was the CC meeting which had deluded itself into a general expression of confidence that the coal-miners, who were recognised as the most militant of unionists, would come out in support of the strike. The intra-state seamen, who had remained at work, had been levied to provide food relief for the inter-state men on strike.\(^{182}\) But, "as a gesture," Keenan said, they had called out the intra-state seamen. Then the coal-miners decided not to support the seamen. It had been a serious error, Keenan observed, that after the miners' refusal to participate, the intra-state seamen were kept out on strike. If they had been ordered to return to work they would have done so *en masse* in what would have been seen as a demonstration of solidarity. As it was, all

\(^{180}\)ibid. See also the non-committal account in Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 101.

\(^{181}\)Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, *op cit.* Former NSW Labour premier Lang retained strong support among FIA members employed in marine engineering workshops on the waterfront. Also federal ALP MHRs Beasley and Rosevear, whose electorates encompassed Sydney's working-class waterfront suburbs, owed allegiance to 'Lang Labor' which was bitterly anti-communist. See Merritt's PhD thesis, *History of the Federated Ironworkers Association*, p. 206.

\(^{182}\)CPA "Report on Seamen's Union of Australia", MLMSS 5021 Add-on Maritime 1918-37 Box 28(76). ML.
semblance of solidarity was lost. Three hundred went back to their ships without any instructions whatsoever and now could well be lost to the SUA, since it only required a total of 25 of these men to apply to the Industrial Registrar to obtain registration as a new organisation. The CC Secretariat had issued instruction that their ships should be boarded and contact maintained with these men, Keenan said. However, as a consequence of Johnson's activities as employee's representative on the New South Wales State Conciliation Committee, SUA officials, with the significant exception of Herbert, were denied permits to board intra-state ships at their berths. Johnson's presence on the conciliation committee actually provided him with an ability to "cripple the union," Keenan reported, since he could use his influence on the committee to debar union officials from entering the Sydney wharves. Previously minor grievances could be settled onboard by visiting union officials, but now seamen had to walk from their ship to the union office in order to report their grievances or pay their subscriptions. In fact, they no longer came near the union offices.183

Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary, Keenan remarked, "came under our influence during the strike struggle and since. He is not the strongest of types but we can utilise him while we have the opportunity."184 However, Clarke, Casey and Johnson who were "viciously attacking the CPA" were also trying to "win Herbert away from our influence," as was the ALP. Within the union Johnson, Fleming, Murray and Walsh, who were all former officials, were united in their opposition to the CPA, despite the fact that "these people have been at each others' throats for years."185 They were telling the unemployed seamen that they would never get back into the ships unless they took steps to remove the Communists from the union.186 But, in fact, both Clarke and Casey were operating with the support of very small majorities in their branches. A recent meeting in Brisbane had gone Casey's way on a vote of 12 for and 8 against. In Melbourne, Clarke

183Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, op cit.
184ibid.
185ibid.
186ibid.
recently obtained a resolution on a vote of 92 for and 54 against. To Keenan, it was "hardly credible that we cannot muster more than eight votes in the port of Brisbane or reduce Clarke's majority."187

During the strike, Keenan complained, there were insufficient men available to picket the waterfront effectively. He recalled that on one occasion:

...when we had called a meeting at which over 3,000 were present, we called on the members to come down to the waterfront and line up against the ships... only about 300 to 400 men turned up at the waterfront.188

'Flying squads' used in picketing specific targets had been initially effective, but then the strikers' source of information within the shipowners' bureaux had been discovered, and silenced. Raiding ships alongside the wharves, at night, with the intention of beating-up any non-union seamen discovered onboard had proved unsuccessful, owing to the difficulty of identifying in the melee who was a 'scab' and who a unionist. Keenan said that he doubted there were as many as 1700 or 1800 'volunteers' in the ships, as was claimed. The shipowners had stated that they would employ SUA men - if a vacancy occurs. The task before them now, he said, was to ensure that such vacancies were created. Somehow, they had to get the 'volunteers' out of the ships.189

In the face of daily attacks from the press during the strike, the strikers had failed to communicate effectively with each other or with the public. It had taken several weeks before a decision was made to issue a thrice-weekly strike bulletin. Melbourne had complained of lack of information from Sydney and there was insufficient contact between Party districts and sections. Propaganda had also been ineffective. While the Roman Catholic radio station 2SM had denied him use of its facilities, Keenan claimed that he had been the only seaman prepared to go 'on air' and make use of the broadcast

187 ibid.
188 ibid.
189 ibid.
facility provided by radio station 2KY in Sydney. "There was a tendency on the part of the Party members," he remarked, "to make me the strike." 190

In his concluding remarks to the CC, the general secretary of the SUA identified the peculiar problem presented to those endeavouring to organise the peripatetic seamen. There was a need, he said, for a rendezvous, such as an international seamen's club, where seamen could meet and be reached. Havelock Wilson had mentioned that same need to Tom Walsh, years earlier. 191 "We must remember that the seamen are only under our influence so long as they are under our eyes," Joseph Keenan observed. 192 He recommended that shipboard committees should be set up among the seamen in the ships and said that a decision had to be made whether to resurrect the Marine Worker or to make The Seamen's Journal serve the Party's purpose. If it was to be the latter, then it was of course essential that Clarke be ejected from its editorship. 193

Ending on a positive note, Keenan told the CC that formerly the opposition to the Party had come from the men in the ships "who said that the communists were just out to create chaos and disaster." 194 The Dethridge award had changed that completely. The seamen recognised that the Party was not to blame for the new award, but had in fact done everything to oppose it. The support that now emanated from the ships was exactly what was needed. For too long the Party had based its support on the unemployed. "In former years it was our line to keep the party members on shore to go to the meetings and howl at the officials." 195 New, more effective tactics were being adopted, Keenan boasted. The strike had shown up several bad elements that had crept in as a consequence of mass-recruiting, "but we have weeded them out." And, as a direct consequence of the strike, "some good types have come to light and are now in the ranks of the party." 196

190 ibid.
191 Wilson to Walsh, 5 February 1929, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 65. NLA.
192 Minutes CC meeting 1st session 11 April 1936, op cit.
193 ibid.
194 ibid.
195 ibid.
196 ibid.
And then, in a demonstration of where his allegiance ultimately lay, Keenan said: "I do not know of any actual loss. I do not know of too many errors - possibly some will be brought out in discussion." But, in the end:

The Party strengthened itself considerably, as a result of this struggle... Here we have recruited more than 100 individual Party members out of this struggle. We have 14 Party Members in the ships. Our prestige has gone up despite all the attacks that have been levelled at us during the currency of the dispute and since. The Party prestige is higher than ever.

It was a matter of some gratification to the general secretary of the SUA that the Party, if not the seamen, had done well out of the strike. In sentiment it was a long way from Tom Walsh’s latter-day pragmatism, given expression as, "the rank and file of the seamen are not politicians; they want their jobs, their wages and peace of mind."

When Comrade Ernie Thornton from Melbourne addressed the CC meeting, he castigated both Keenan’s official and unofficial activities. Keenan, he said, was evidently unaware that there were at least six members of the SPGB supporting Clarke in Melbourne and actively assisting in the manipulation of SUA meetings there. As for Comrade Keenan’s personal behaviour, Thornton considered it such as to jeopardise the Party’s position within the SUA. Thornton referred to confirmed reports of Keenan’s dissipation while ostensibly attending ACTU meetings in Melbourne. He had been reported as carousing in a Greek “sly-grog shop”. He was seen in an Italian club in Carlton buying drinks for prostitutes. Thornton knew for a fact that “non-Party people were very concerned about the position”. There were “seamen on the beach starving and Keenan as seamen’s secretary could find plenty of time to buy wine for women.”

Keenan had “a whole number of weaknesses,” while his cynical, flippant attitude to serious questions in a strike struggle and his general manner in meetings did not improve.

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197 ibid.
198 ibid.
199 Typescript, “Communism and the Marine Transport Workers”, MS2123 Box 4 Folder 40, NLA.
200 Thornton, Victorian branch secretary of the FIA, became federal secretary in May 1936. See Merritt, History of the FIA, p.209.
201 Minutes CC meeting 1st session 10 April 1936, op cit, frame 0057.
202 ibid.
the prestige of the Party. "I don't think it is the job of a leading communist in a trade union to be all the time giving ammunition to the opposition to use against the Party," said Thornton. And he was especially critical of the motion put forward by the central strike-committee at the end of the strike in which the committee declared confidence in itself and in the general secretary. For such a resolution to be moved by Keenan meant that he was declaring confidence in himself - an unprecedented thing, Thornton commented, which only provided the opposition with more ammunition. And, though the Party had attracted some good seamen, there was still nobody on their side with the capabilities of a Clarke in "presenting a case and manoeuvring."204

Comrade Wiggin said that the problem was that "we did not wake up to the position until the ships were half-manned." The strikers, instead of being congregated on the waterfront, had been allowed to disperse to the suburbs in search of sustenance and it was practically impossible to get them to return to oppose the flood of 'volunteers'. There was never more than 5% of the rank-and-file engaged in any form of strike activity, he said. "There was nothing to cause any inspiration or any activity."206

Comrade Cram reviewed the situation in Newcastle NSW, for the CC. There had been problems in controlling a strong anarchistic element within the Newcastle strike-committee, he stated, but eventually "we cured some of these people of their stupid ideas." More importantly, though, the strike had resulted in the defeat of Schofield, who Cram identified as an ally of Johnson's. Upon the decision having been taken to end the strike, Schofield had moved a motion of confidence in himself. He received only two votes, resigned on the spot, and walked out of the room. Reuben Jones, his replacement as runner-up, was a Party member, but "Jones is weak and we must use more care in

203 ibid.
204 ibid.
205 ibid, frame 0065.
206 ibid.
207 ibid, frame 0076.
selecting people to run on our ticket."208 Newcastle was now fairly secure, Cram concluded optimistically, since it was now under the control of a fraction of over 12 members.209

When Comrade Donald spoke, he warned of "the terrible weaknesses which exist along the whole of the Australian waterfront, so far as our organisation and activity is concerned."210 The ACTU leadership had successfully prevented the widening of the strike, primarily as a result of the support that it obtained from the other maritime unions. Donald said that the main lesson to be learned from the strike was that action was very urgently required both nationally and in each district to overcome the present weakness and establish the Party's position on the waterfront as securely as it was established amongst the miners, metal workers, and tramway-men.211

In Melbourne, Comrade Donald admitted, "for a considerable period in No.4 we did not know that such things as seamen existed, for a considerable period no activity whatsoever was carried on amongst the seamen at all."212 And when activity was developed amongst seamen, it was developed amongst men whose home-ports were other than Melbourne. Consequently, when the strike began, the seamen with whom the No.4 District had established contact were not to be found in Melbourne. The peculiar difficulty of organising seamen was again in evidence. It was not a question of developing the struggle among the Melbourne fraction. "The first problem was to find a fraction."213 It was a matter of once more making initial contacts and of identifying those seamen who were prepared to work with the Party. Meanwhile, Clarke had a seasoned group of unemployed seamen gathered around him, men who had not been to sea for at least ten years, but continued to attend SUA meetings and support Clarke's line.

208 ibid.
209 ibid.
210 ibid, frame 0080.
211 ibid.
212 ibid.
213 ibid.
Apparently, Comrade Donald observed, "they get some economic value out of supporting Clarke." 214

During the progress of the strike, the Party in Melbourne had been able to recruit some seamen. They were, said Comrade Donald, "to a large extent still pretty raw", but they composed a fraction of some 12 to 15. 215 With this fraction it would have been possible to have removed Clarke from the Melbourne secretaryship, but it was decided that in the circumstances Clarke was less of a danger to the Party as a lone official than he would have been mounting a persuasive attack from the floor at union meetings. But, as events turned out, that decision proved to be yet another mistake because Clarke's position was strengthened when the strike ended in defeat. In fact he "was able to play upon the discontent, upon a certain mood of defeatism which has attacked Melbourne seamen, in order to strengthen his own position and direct their attacks from Clarke towards Keenan and the Central Strike Committee." 216

In retrospect, it was apparent to Comrade Donald that the greatest mistake made - and he said that it emanated from Sydney - was to imagine that the shipowners would be unable to obtain qualified non-union labour in sufficient quantity to man the ships. Melbourne had gone along with that reasoning and, as a consequence, there was no picketing in place when the 'volunteers' appeared. Then there was the failure to make timely and selective use of physical violence, the effectiveness of which Comrade Donald explained, from his own experience:

We have found in Victoria in the dole strikes that in areas where we were able to get hold of the first scabs and put them in hospital that there were no more scabs... When we allow a certain section of scabs to go on to the job, the task is harder to keep them away." 217

214 ibid.
215 ibid.
216 ibid.
217 ibid. frame 0084.
Another major weakness, that had been reiterated by other speakers, was the lack of Party propaganda and communication. With the rank-and-file seamen so obviously in need of effective leadership, the Party had so far failed to seize the opportunity presented, which caused the Victorian Comrade to comment that, "if we give these fellows a real line on what to do we will be able to develop our struggle against Clarke and Casey to a much higher level."218

Comrade Docker was no more concerned with ethical considerations than had been Comrade Donald. Docker thought it a mistake that Keenan had admitted he was a Communist when publicly challenged by the Attorney General, R.G.Menzies. Comparing the situation to that of Harry Bridges in the USA, Docker suggested that membership of the Party was best kept secret when funds had to be raised from sources such as ALP members and religious groups which might otherwise be alienated by revelation of the truth.219 Docker admitted that the CC had incorrectly assumed that the coalminers would support the seamen. In endeavouring to extend the dispute, he said, "we came to a decision to endeavour to bring about a struggle of the mine workers in sympathy with the seamen and went straight to them with the decision. We had a defeat, and a very decisive defeat."220

In Brisbane, Comrade Burns reported, there were about 200 members in the SUA branch of whom half were employed in river craft or dredges. These, he considered as not really seamen, and lacking in trade union consciousness. It had been found impossible to keep the fraction together in Brisbane during the strike, it was "saturated with defeatism."221 Most of the men there were opposed to Casey, he said, but they would neither attend meetings nor pay their union dues. "The real honest militants," he commented, "are very anarchistically inclined and very left. It is difficult to get them

218 ibid.
219 ibid, frame 0090.
220 ibid.
221 ibid, frame 0092.
along to a meeting."222 The general feeling in Brisbane, according to Burns, was that if a 'leading Party seaman' was sent there for a few weeks Casey would be compelled by the membership to attend the CoM meeting, "or they would demand his resignation."223

And then the leaders of the CPA expressed their views. Comrade Sharkey said that the strike could only have been won by extending it beyond the ships. The CC had known that the seamen were beaten, but thought that by involving the miners sufficient pressure would be brought to bear to get a "reasonable agreement" for the seamen. But the miners refused to become involved.224 This meant that a retreat had to be organised, but the seamen were hostile to the idea and insufficient explanation was given them. The result, he said, was "the unhealthy spectacle" of Keenan agitating for a return to work - the same thing that Johnson, Casey and Clarke were advocating - while the militants were opposed to such a surrender.225 Obviously, the Party had need to study more effective mass leadership tactics and publicity. Sharkey agreed that there had been no effective picketing, commenting that "it is not sufficient to make insulting remarks about scabs as they go by to have really effective effects."226

Comrade Dixon spoke of the difficulties encountered as a consequence of failing to take the workers into the confidence of the Party, by omitting to explain tactics to them. As a result of the organisation that the Party developed during the strike, he said, the seamen were drawn into playing an active part in the struggle, but "when the time came to send them back to work, they were not prepared to return to work."227 Immediately following the decision of the miners to remain aloof from the strike, Dixon related that:

We convinced Keenan that it was necessary to return to work and that Keenan should go to Melbourne and get terms satisfactory to the seamen to return to work. He did not get good results. Clarke, Casey, Johnson and Co. were certain that Keenan was going to recommend a return to work. They started to talk about this and the seamen

222 ibid.
223 ibid.
224 ibid, frame 0100.
225 ibid, frame 0102.
226 ibid.
227 ibid, frame 0108.
were convinced and because of this we were in the position that we could not possibly direct Keenan to go there and tell the workers to return to work. The proposals would have been rejected and the influence of the fraction would have been destroyed. It presented a great difficulty to be overcome. We destroyed their manoeuvre by Keenan going there and saying we will not return to work.  

The end result of all this was, Dixon admitted, that the SUA was left in disarray.

As to the situation generally, I think everyone will agree that it is very serious. Here we have one of the finest and most courageous bodies of the Australian working class rendered useless for a period of years.

All was not lost however, the leadership in the SUA was at least militant, in contrast to that of the waterside workers whose policy was "to breed and preach defeatism." Everything now depended upon building the party and maintaining an agitation among the seamen.

Comrade Brown reiterated the thoughts of Comrade Dixon. In particular he agreed with Dixon that the situation on the waterfront was chronically bad. There was no semblance of party organisation in the WWF or in the Ship Painters and Dockers. It was essential that the Party "take full stock of the maritime industry and the unions on which we can base our future activity and consolidate our forces." The strike had revealed the lack of a proper organisation, there had been no effective communication link between the fraction in the strike committee and the "higher organs of the Party." And Brown agreed that it was essential that the editorship of the union bulletin, The Seamen's Journal, be wrested from Clarke. It was essential, he said, that the Journal should be published regularly in order to create the same aggressively militant psychological effect among the workers as had been momentarily achieved with the Marine Worker. But Keenan should not be the new editor, Brown concluded. "We all know that comrade Keenan has weaknesses, and it is no good closing our eyes to such weaknesses. Keenan is frivolous. I think an editorial board of Keenan would be very bad." Keenan was
absent from the meeting at that point. "I regret that Comrade K is not here to listen this morning," Brown commented, and went on to repeat what he had already told Keenan, which was that Comrade Keenan would never be an efficient trade union leader, "unless we can convince him that the PB knows better than Keenan. He would deny this but he has to become conscious of that and it is up to him to help us."

When Keenan resumed his report, he advised the CC that Jones, the Party nominee in Newcastle, would have to receive some serious consideration. Jones was making no attempt to carry out his duties as branch secretary and Franklin had actually stolen the job from him and was "working vigorously in the union." A report had been received from Brisbane, Keenan continued, that it was possible to oust Casey, whose support was weak, consisting as it did of only a small group of "beer sparrers." But, on the other hand, the Party and its supporters was also weak, being able to secure only 8 out of 20 votes. In recent years, the contest inside the union had been between the Communists and members of the SPGB. Now, Keenan warned, the ALP was active. Daley was becoming prominent in the affairs of the union. He was a former ALP activist who, for some personal grievance, had dropped out, but had recently rejoined the Millers Point branch of the ALP. Herbert, too, was being influenced by the ALP. Comrade Thornton joined in warning of an increasing ALP influence. He was quite definite that during the strike, "the great bulk of the reformists on the Melbourne Trades Hall Council wanted to see the seamen beaten and tried to get them beaten, because of the fact that they looked at it from the point of view that it would be a defeat for the communists." Thornton recounted how, on the night of the return to work, there was no doubt that "they were gleeful that the seamen had been beaten." But, regardless of local

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234 *ibid.*, frame 0145.
235 *Minutes CC meeting 4th session, 11 April 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4/76 CY Reel 3500, frame 0168, ML.
236 *ibid.*
237 *ibid.*, frame 0220.
238 *ibid.*, frame 0213.
239 *ibid.*
provocation, the Party's attitude towards the ALP, as dictated by policy, could no longer be adversarial. In a definitive statement to the CC on 24 July 1936, Dixon stated that:

Not only are we prepared to enter into a united front with the Labor Party, we are prepared to affiliate with the Labor Party and become part of its organisation. Such an affiliation would be conditional upon the right to retain control of our internal organisation, that is to say we seek affiliation to the Labor Party on the same basis as the trade unions. This idea of affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labor Party should be widely explained to the workers.240

In contrast to the Party's self-confident view of its capability in the area of trade union work on the eve of the strike, Comrade M.P. Ryan told a meeting of the CC in the aftermath of the strike that whenever any attempt was made by the Party to work in the area of trade unionism, "it falls down about our ears."241 And the reason was, he stated, that most of the District Committee members were not practical trade-unionists. "There are only a couple of us who have had practical trade union experience."242 He reiterated Dixon's comments of the previous day, stating that there was need for a reinvigoration and a broadening of the Party's membership. Recruiting methods had been too conspiratorial in the past, it was essential now "to bring forward the leaders of the Party."243

Succinctly, Comrade Sharkey summed up the findings of the CC and its decisions in the wake of the seamen's strike. Comrade Dixon would consult the transcript of the discussion and write an article for 'Review' class material.244 The matter of Keenan was to be referred to the CC Secretariat.245 In regard to management of the seamen themselves, the general secretary of the CPA had commented that:

240 ibid, frame 0406
241 Minutes CC meeting 25 July 1936, op cit, frame 0477.
242 ibid.
243 Minutes CC meeting 24 July 1936, op cit, frame 0408. Dixon said that the total Party membership of 2,700, "is not only stagnant but it is declining."
244 An article appeared which was introduced as follows: "This is the first of a series of articles analysing the recent Seamen's Strike by Joe Keenan, the newly-elected general secretary of the Seamen's Union. Being throughout the leader of the strike, his analysis is of the utmost importance, and will be followed by all with keen interest." Keenan, J. "The Seamen's Strike", The Trade Union Leader, April 1936, pp.203-204.
245 See Keenan's 'statement of self-criticism', Keenan to Sharkey, chairman CC of CPA, 7 September 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
There is something of an exception here. The seamen are really somewhat different to the other workers. They are a very difficult crowd to hold together. They are most unruly and the Party membership within the organisation are [sic] still very backward and we have a very hard task.246

Therefore, an investigation of the Party's work among the seamen would be carried out by the PB.247 Subsequently, a post-strike report entitled *The Work in the Seamen's Union since the Conclusion of the Strike and the Present Situation* reveals that considerable attention was then devoted to "the problem of this union."248 The CC and two District Committees worked on it. In fact the leadership of the CPA was heavily involved with Sharkey and McWilliams regularly consulting with the fraction and Miles and Dixon also assisting.249 It was found that in the aftermath of the strike:

>The situation was as bad and as difficult to handle as any that the party has ever been faced with. The ships to a very large extent were filled with strike breakers and few jobs were going. Large sections of the Union were demoralised. Inside the Union there was chaos. Clarke, Casey (Victoria and Queensland Secretaries) Johnson and Walsh were openly splitting, sabotaging, hampering the work of the Union, preventing its recovery in order in alliance with the shipowners, to keep it weak and above all to discredit the Communists. These traitors, it may be said, whilst we are aware of their rotten politics and treacherous role, are at the same time old experienced campaigners, with many years of experience within the Seamen's Union, knowing the organisation inside out. A very difficult opposition indeed to combat in the prevailing condition of defeat, pessimism and demoralisation. 250

Tactically, Keenan had failed to organise effective mass action during the strike, the CPA report concluded. There had been no picketing of the shipowners' 'scab' employment bureaux. And there should have been "attention to scabs when ashore."251 Johnson had been able to use his position on the state conciliation committee to ensure that union officials in Sydney were unable to gain access to the ships in port and the lack of mass action had left the striking seamen with a sense of inactivity and the suspicion that their interests were not being attended to. And then there was Keenan's personal

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246Minutes CC meeting 1st session, 10 April 1936, op cit, frame 0070.
247ibid, frame 0146.
248MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Maritime 1918-37 Box 28 (76) ML.
249ibid.
250ibid.
251ibid.
shortcomings. His "excessive drinking, etc.," had caused disruptions among the Sydney fraction and had resulted in the development of a certain hostility between the Sydney and Newcastle fractions which, while it perhaps did not particularly influence the mass of the membership, "tended to dampen the fighting enthusiasm of the militants." But, most seriously of all, Keenan had demonstrated an inability to communicate both with the membership of the union and with the Party leadership.

In summary, according to the CPA, the reason for the failure of the strike was that "the reformist leadership of the trade unions stifled the strike and prevented it from widening." The trade union movement isolated the seamen, and the ACTU, while promising support, effectively sabotaged the strike. Thus the labour press played up the CP leadership as much as did the capitalist press. In fact the Labour Daily was even more hostile than the capitalist press giving prominence to articles by Johnson, Walsh, Clarke and Casey. And while the CPA admitted that "our own errors were also many", it saw its most serious error as being that "we depended too much on Keenan."

Thirty-four years old Elliot Valens Elliott, "of 86 Wareemba Street, Five Dock, New South Wales, seaman" whose home-port was Sydney and whose "usual classification when employed as a seaman was that of a greaser" and who was destined to play an enduring role in the affairs of the SUA, was responsible for publication on 25 February 1936 of the final edition of the Seamen's Strike Bulletin. There it was announced, in defiant if somewhat wistful tones, that:

The seamen, after a magnificent struggle, marked by an unheard of display of solidarity, have been forced to retreat. They do so with their ranks unbroken, much to the chagrin of those people who sought to see the Union smashed and the seamen

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252 ibid. Also, see statement J.C. Hutchinson to No.4 District CPA, 12 December 1935, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
253 MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime 1918-37 Box 28(76), ML.
254 ibid.
255 ibid.
256 54 C.L.R. High Court of Australia. Elliott, plaintiff v. The Commonwealth of Australia and Another, defendants, Sydney, 16 December 1935. Motion for an injunction that the TWA 1928-29 and regulations thereunder conflicted with sec.99 of the Constitution.
257 ibid.
driven back on their 'bellies,' a forecast delivered by Johnson in the early stages of the struggle.\textsuperscript{258}

Strike-pay was said to be seven shillings per week for single men and ten shillings for married men,\textsuperscript{259} but given the financial plight of the union it is unlikely that many actually received such a benefit. Appeals for monetary support from the trade union movement produced little response.\textsuperscript{260} As a consequence of his militant activities Elliott, who had a wife and young family to support, had lost his job in the modern passenger liner Westralia.\textsuperscript{261} He had nominated together with three others for the position of assistant secretary of the Sydney branch, but had been unsuccessful in the ballot.\textsuperscript{262} Later, he would recall that "I walked the Hungry Mile month after month and could not get a job."\textsuperscript{263} In the twelve months that followed the strike he counted himself lucky to get six weeks work in the stokehold of Burns Philp's 'hard case' Mangola. Many seamen were to remain unemployed for the next two years.\textsuperscript{264} Daily, seamen sought casual employment on the wharves. Some tramped the bush in search of sustenance, while yet others were glad to obtain government relief work as labourers road-making with pick and shovel.\textsuperscript{265}

Jacob Johnson, still claiming that he was rightfully the general secretary of the union, and now under police protection, was scathing on the subject of the seamen's perennial credulity. "Eighteen months ago," he said, "this gang of racketeers promised you a land of 'milk and honey' if you only followed their lead, and here are the results of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{258}Seamen's Strike Bulletin, No.19, 25 February 1936, D170/6/5, WUA.
  \item \textsuperscript{259}SJ, June-July 1955.
  \item \textsuperscript{260}The final issue of the Seamen's Strike Bulletin reported: "Poor Financial Response... there was a very poor response to our appeals. Many unions failed dismally to assist us, and the total amount collected during the whole period of the strike was a disgrace to the movement. The notable exception to this position was the miners, who, all told, subscribed approximately L700." Seamen's Strike Bulletin, No.19, op cit.
  \item \textsuperscript{261}CIB Reports 7 July 1941 & 17 June 1949. A6119/1 Vol.1 Item 135, and Vol.2 Supp. Item 136, AA.
  \item \textsuperscript{262}Elliott obtained only 11\% of the vote, see Seamen's Strike Bulletin, No.13, 6 February 1936, D170/6/5 WUA.
  \item \textsuperscript{263}Elliott's notes for an address to a CoM-Representatives meeting in 1960, D170/1/8 WUA.
  \item \textsuperscript{264}SJ, June-July 1955.
  \item \textsuperscript{265}See biographical sketch of E.V. Elliott in Smith's Weekly, 10 May 1941.
\end{itemize}
their policy." 266 Many seamen, he said, were to be found "nursing the city kerb stones hoping the Union may rehabilitate itself." 267 And who was to blame for their plight? "The Communist bluff, skite and bombast of alleged leadership has been exposed," he proclaimed. "It has been stripped threadbare. Not one of these self-styled leaders has been able to conceive of a single plan whereby the Union might extract itself from its present deplorable plight." 268 Perhaps, as was demonstrated by that 'deplorable plight' the seamen, in conformity with Conrad's stereotype, had been all too "easy to inspire." Certainly, in the fight of 1935/36 with "our enemies the shipowners", it is apparent that those who remained loyal to the SUA and sought guidance from its federal leadership were used, for its own ends, by that leadership. In themselves, the seamen had provided the material means by which the CPA sought to realise some part of its political agenda.

266 Leaflet, J. Johnson "To All Members of SUA", April 1937. D170/6/6, WUA.
267 ibid.
268 ibid.
CHAPTER SIX.

LABOURISM AND RESURGENCE 1936-1940.

Tom Walsh rejoined the SUA at a stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch on 28 April 1936 whereupon, in protest, the Newcastle branch secretary tendered his resignation.¹ Two days later, in the conservative *Sydney Morning Herald*, Walsh said that:

>The last seamen's strike was one of the most tragic affairs in the history of organised labour in Australia. So many promises of success have been made to these men. They are still being fooled.²

In another newspaper, he claimed that the seamen were being subjected to Communist propaganda which was "subtly and deliberately thought out to further the interests of a party whose philosophy and policy are complete negations of everything which trades unionists stand for."³

After the strike, an industrial organisation emerged in competition with the SUA. The Licensed Seamen's Association [LSA] was formed from the 'volunteers' who now outnumbered the SUA men in the interstate ships.⁴ Not only did the 'volunteer' seamen have their own industrial organisation, but they received preference in selection for employment at centres (bureaux) established by the shipowners from which members of the SUA were specifically excluded. This was justified on the grounds that there was

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¹A report issued by the CC of the CPA commented that Walsh's application for readmittance was opposed by the fraction, but the question came on early in the meeting when there were only 150 members present compared to some 500 later in the morning.

Following the admittance of Walsh, Jones, Newcastle secretary and who was on the militant ticket, resigned. His excuse was the admittance of Walsh. However, this was subterfuge in as much as he had his resignation typed out. Jones was not capable of doing the Newcastle job and in actual fact his resignation will be of advantage, as a more capable secretary [Reg Franklin] is offering, nevertheless, it would seem from his procedure, that he sought to embarrass the fraction.

Secretariat CC CPA to "All Districts", 29 April 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.

²*SMH*, 30 April 1936.

³*Sun*, 30 April 1936.

⁴A CSOA deputation told the Attorney General in September 1939 that of the seamen employed in coastal ships in 1937 some 51% were non-unionists. See *Seamen's Journal*, November 1939.
need to protect the non-unionists from intimidation. The legality of the bureaux was challenged by the CPA on behalf of the seamen on the basis that their operation contravened that part of the Navigation Act designed to prevent 'crimping.' In fact the challenge was upheld in Sydney Central Police Court on 22 April 1936, when the manager of the Sydney bureau was fined for contravention of the Act. However, that same day the federal Government amended the Seamen's Regulations of the TWA by adding regulation 11A which specifically legitimated the shipowners' operation of their bureaux.

A formal objection was lodged by nineteen trade unions and the ACTU when the LSA applied for registration as an organisation of employees under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1934. But it was upon a technicality that the Industrial Registrar refused the LSA's application on 24 November 1936. In finding that the LSA was unable to prove that it had, at that time, sufficient members to warrant its registration as an industrial organisation, the Registrar refuted the unions' assertion that the LSA was "an employers' association." The objection, he stated, rather than being supported by evidence, "appears to be founded on inferences drawn from circumstances." It only remained for the LSA to recruit sufficient non-union seamen to overcome that 'technicality.'

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5 See report of J.N. Lawson, Minister for Trade & Customs, 'Conditions on the Waterfront at the Principal Ports of the Commonwealth, 1939.' Cited in Seamen's Journal, December 1939. According to Keenan, the Union Steamship Company issued instructions to its ships' officers that "all engagements of ships' crews and replacements must be made through the bureaux, a place open only to 'volunteers' and that only as a last resort must union seamen be engaged." Keenan to F.P. Walsh, 18 November 1936. D170/6/5 WUA.

6 Typescript "The Work in the Seamen's Union," MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Maritime, Box 28. ML.

7 Navigation Act 1912-1935, Division 4, 'Supplying Seamen'.

8 September 1939. See also historical article, S/21 September 1972.

9 In the matter of an application by the Licensed Seamen's Association for registration as an organisation of employees, and of objections thereto. The Industrial Registrar ruled that "Accepting the evidence of the applicant's secretary, there would appear to be approximately 2,400 licensed seamen employed on the Australian coast [excluding intrastate seamen]. Of these, 900 are in all probability members of one of the objectors - the Seamen's Union of Australasia. If registered, the applicant would purport to represent the remaining 1,500. It is unable to prove the possession of a number of members sufficient to entitle it to claim to be so representative." D170/6/5, WUA.
Certainly, non-union seamen were readily available. In the port of Newcastle, SUA seamen had ejected non-unionists from the Adelaide Steamship Company's *Allara* by "methods best not discussed."  

However, when they refused to sail because one last 'volunteer' remained concealed onboard, the local manager of the shipping company dismissed them all and got the ship away manned by a non-union crew brought in from Sydney.  

With so many men unemployed, the shipowners were not easily thwarted. When another Adelaide Steamship vessel, the *Arkaba*, berthed in Sydney and some firemen gave their notice to quit to the ship's master in accordance with the Navigation Act, but contrary to the advice of their union officials, Keenan observed that:

> I am not satisfied with the actions of the Union seamen giving their notice to terminate in this port, there is too big a risk of scabs getting the jobs and we can thank our stars that it was a Saturday when this ship arrived otherwise there might have been a different tale, this port with its bureau system can always get scabs and the sooner Union seamen in ships realise that the better.  

The CPA leadership recognised the danger presented by the LSA and the shipowners' employment *bureaux* as the "most serious stumbling block against re-engagement of our men." And with SUA members unable to get back into the ships "the reaction and resultant apathy of the men who are still out of work has given Johnson, Clarke and Casey an opportunity of putting the whole of the blame on the Communist Party."  

And then there remained the question of the 500 or so intrastate seamen, the 'breakaways', who had returned to work and whose readmission to the SUA the CPA saw as essential since they were now the "financial backbone of the Sydney branch and also because of the danger that they may go to help form a scab union, or breakaway organisation."  

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10 Circular, Franklin to All Branches, 9 December 1936. E183/17/1 ABL.  
11 *ibid.*  
12 Keenan to Franklin 15 December 1936, E183/17/1 ABL.  
14 *ibid.*  
15 *ibid.*
In Newcastle, with the timely departure of Reuben Jones, Franklin, as runner-up in the previous ballot, took office as the new branch secretary. This gave the CPA occasion to review the ideological stance of the current officials. 'Reg' Franklin, an expatriate Welshman, who had been active in canvassing support among the coalminers of the Northern District during the strike, was described as "sympathetic."16 'Chris' Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary was "neutral for the most part, but has also sought the assistance of the Party fraction to get certain vital resolutions carried." He was seen to be "at times definitely vacillating and therefore not to be depended on."17 Herbert had followed Johnson's lead at the outset of the strike, loyally supporting the then general secretary's line that the Dethridge Award were advantageous to the seamen, but had changed tack when the Sydney members voted to reject the award.18 However, Herbert increasingly was coming under the influence of the ALP.19 Byrne, the WA secretary in Fremantle, had been pro-Johnson and now was "vacillating and not to be depended on."20 And, of course, both Casey in Brisbane and Clarke in Melbourne were "definitely reactionary."21 'Harry' O'Neill in Adelaide was considered to be "doing good work" since he had openly opposed Johnson.22 But of the union's executive only Keenan, the general secretary, was a member of the CPA.

During the strike, Keenan as seamen's leader had been publicly challenged by Attorney General R.G. Menzies as to his membership of the Party. His avowal of communism then had actually resulted in a loss of prestige for the CPA. Consequently, the CC advised that "care has to be exercised by comrades... and whilst we by no means say that never should Communist union officials acknowledge their Party, at the least time, place and circumstances should be thoroughly considered and the right moment

16 ibid.
17 ibid.
18 ibid.
19 Keenan to CC CPA meeting 4th session 11 April 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4 CY Reel 3500 frame 0220-0221. ML.
20 Typescript "The Work in the Seamen's Union," MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime Box 28. ML.
21 ibid.
22 ibid.
chosen." Subsequently, Keenan had isolated himself from the seamen he purported to lead. His idiosyncratic behaviour had been, in the view of the CC, such that he had "lost the confidence of many of the members of the union and of all the fraction." A motion of 'no confidence' in Keenan as general secretary was passed at the Sydney branch stopwork meeting on 26 May 1936 when, by a vote of 83 to 63, it was resolved that a requisition should be issued for his recall from office on the grounds of "incompetency [sic] and general dissatisfaction". A special meeting held in Sydney on 1 June 1936 for the purpose of recalling Keenan (at which Tom Walsh was howled down by the fraction), ended inconclusively because it was time to vacate the hall but not before it heard a motion put that:

Seeing that the General Secretary's report is merely a repetition of his former make belief [sic] to kid the seamen that he can accomplish something for them where it is now a well-known fact that his presence in office as General Secretary is a hindrance to members finding re-employment in the industry this meeting demands that he resign his position as General Secretary forthwith.

When another special meeting was convened in Sydney in order to pursue the matter of no confidence in the general secretary, Dodds and Hylander of the Communist fraction, supported by E.V. Elliott, defended Keenan. On that occasion, Jacob Johnson and Fleming were given a hearing but Walsh was again howled down. In the end, Daley, as chairman, ended proceedings by declaring that a quorum was not present. Another attempt by the Johnson/Walsh anti-Communist group to have Keenan removed from office at a special meeting on 9 June 1936 also failed for lack of a quorum. On each occasion, in fact, the Communist fraction had ensured that a quorum was not present by persuading its supporters as they arrived at the meetings to remain outside.

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23 ibid.
24 ibid.
25 ibid.
26 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 26 May 1936. E183/3/5 ABL.
27 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 1 June 1936. E183/3/5 ABL.
28 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 4 June 1936. E183/3/5 ABL.
29 ibid.
30 CPA CC notice to All Districts, 10 June 1936, also see "Maritime National Fraction Report", 10 June 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML
Keenan was obviously inept. So, why did the Party not immediately replace him? The answer lay in the 'runner-up' rule. Johnson had publicly stated that he intended to apply the runner-up rule when Keenan was removed from office. To remove Keenan would simply have meant to install Johnson, whom the CPA recognised as "the shipowners' agent and the worst disrupter for years... and a bitter enemy of Communists." Resumption of the leadership of the SUA by Johnson had to be prevented at all costs, "irrespective of trade union 'legalism'."

Meanwhile, in the ships, the owners held to their perennial "creed of parsimony." Refusing to pay overtime earned by seamen was one way to cut costs. Another way was to manipulate the coasting provisions of the Navigation Act. Accordingly, BHP employed 'cheap' foreign rather than 'expensive' Australian ships to carry its iron-ore cargoes around the coast, when a resurgent market had ensured that its own industrial fleet was fully employed. Questions put to the Minister for Commerce in the federal Parliament by the leader of the opposition, J.Curtin, revealed that during the months of August and September 1936 eight single voyage permits were issued by the Commonwealth to unlicensed vessels (i.e. vessels of other than Australian registry) to carry the company's ironstone from its loading port of Whyalla adjacent to its South Australian mine to its two steelworks located at Newcastle and at Port Kembla in NSW.

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33 ibid. In a sworn statement Jacob Johnson claimed that "during the year 1936 after the strike had been declared off I attended every monthly stopwork meeting of the Sydney Branch and was invariably subjected to hostility and threats of violence by a certain element if I attempted to speak." He claimed that the meetings of the Sydney branch between February 1936 and June 1937 were characterised by the lack of the required quorum of 50 members and that even when a quorum was obtained "those present were invariably unfinancial or not even seamen." He stated that bona fide seamen refused to attend stopwork meetings of the Sydney branch after the strike because they were "never in a position to express their views affecting their interests unless they coincided with a certain element." Johnson affidavit, 9 July 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
34 Sager, Seafaring Labour, p.167.
35 See list of vessels and dates with details of overtime payments refused contained in SUA correspondence file, E183/17/1 Folder 2. ABL.
36 Keenan to Franklin, 15 October 1936, E183/17/1 ABL.
37 CPD Vol.151, p.958
And when the *Iron Baron*, a new addition to the BHP fleet, on its delivery voyage from the United Kingdom, was due to arrive at Newcastle NSW on 29 October 1936, fears were expressed that the Commonwealth's Licensing Board in that port intended to grant First Preference Licenses to the British seamen onboard rather than replace them with unemployed members of the SUA.38

Without effective leadership, the SUA as an organisation lacked the unanimity of purpose that was essential if collective action was to be taken to combat injustices such as these. Symptomatic of that lack of unanimity, material support was withheld from the union's leadership, thus rendering it increasingly ineffective. Keenan informed the Newcastle branch secretary in September 1936 that:

A check up on the returns shows how little is coming into Sydney, the officials have not had one full week's salary since the return to work, all are owed large sums, a fact that we do not give overmuch publicity to as we fear that this might have repercussions among the fainthearts who are ever alert to seize on anything they can use to show the union is 'finished'.39

When summoned to Melbourne on union business, the general secretary had to borrow his rail fare. Only a donation from the New Zealand miners allowed him to liquidate part of that debt and pay the outstanding telephone bill. And no financial assistance could be obtained from the Sydney branch. Herbert, the Sydney secretary, attending court on behalf of the union, had insufficient funds to engage counsel and was even then "trying to borrow from Sullivan Bros on [the] basis that they are engaged as counsel."40 A month or so later, Keenan reported that the telephone in the Sydney office had been disconnected because of an unpaid account of L20. With the union under threat of court proceedings by the Postmaster General's Department, Keenan and Herbert attempted, unsuccessfully, to raise a loan from the WWF who "point out that a large number of our members are in work therefore they should meet their liabilities, logical reasoning too."41

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38Keenan to J.Curtin, Leader of the Opposition, Parliament House Canberra, 26 October 1936. E183/17/1 ABL.
39Keenan to Franklin, 10 September 1936. E183/17/1 Folder 2, ABL.
40Ibid.
41Keenan to Franklin, 22 October 1936. E183/17/1 Folder 2, ABL.
Meanwhile, Keenan was being boycotted by the union's Queensland and Victorian branch secretaries (Casey and Clarke). No weekly returns had been received from Clarke since June 1935, and the last returns from Casey had been received in November 1935.42 Neither branch secretary would communicate directly with Keenan so that the general secretary was reduced to conducting his correspondence indirectly via the Sydney and Adelaide branch secretaries. Such intransigence on the part of Casey and Clarke served to further deplete the union's finances while making it difficult to determine who among the Brisbane and Melbourne members were financial.

Sydney, with the largest membership, had always been the most influential branch of the union. But now Keenan wrote to the Newcastle branch secretary, "Newcastle is financially functioning today as did Sydney prior to the strike... We suggest that you immediately on receipt of this letter make out a cheque for L20 made payable to the Accountant Telephone Branch GPO Sydney... the whole financial position needs reviewing."43 Under the spell of Keenan's oratory, mass meetings in Sydney prior to and during the strike had demonstrated an uninhibited, if short-lived, support for strike action. But, in the long-term, the rank and file seamen looked primarily to the union's leadership for delivery of improved conditions. And now an untenable position had been reached in which "the General Secretary is to be regarded as some one apart from the organisation and to be left to fend as best he can for himself, and branch's [sic] are now to be relieved of their obligations in this direction regarding their funds as being for branch consumption only although collected from the general membership."44 But, in the aftermath of the failed strike, Newcastle had gained an obviously dedicated fighter in defence of the seamen's material interests in branch secretary Reg Franklin. Newcastle branch, while providing Franklin with their wholehearted support, had developed a sense of autonomy that prompted Keenan to observe ruefully, "...there would appear to be a feeling among some of your members to regard the income of the Newcastle branch as

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42 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 October 1936, E183/3/5 ABL.
43 Keenan to Franklin 22 October 1936. E183/17/1 Folder 2, ABL.
44 Keenan to Franklin, 27 October 1936. E183/17/1 Folder 2, ABL.
being the concern of that branch alone, while of course there are others who attend your meetings expressing opinions such as 'send them nothing' etc.\(^{45}\) Obviously there was a lesson to be learned here by any prospective federal leader of the SUA.

The forthcoming SUA ballot for office came under scrutiny at a meeting of the PB of the CPA on 7 November 1936. The ballot was a notoriously expensive operation and Dixon foresaw difficulties in carrying it out.\(^ {46}\) In fact, he thought the ballot probably "impossible owing to [the] legal position and [the] financial state of [the] organisation."\(^ {47}\) But in the event the CPA decided that no Communist nominees would be opposed to the incumbent branch secretaries in Fremantle, Adelaide, and Newcastle (respectively Byrne, H.O'Neill and Franklin). In Brisbane, Elliott, "should he decide to run" would contest against Casey. Dodds would be withdrawn. In Sydney, West would contest against Herbert for the secretary's job while Hylander would contest against McLaughlin for the position of assistant branch secretary. And, finally, it was noted tersely, "Keenan to withdraw in favour of Daley. Proposals endorsed."\(^ {48}\)

When the SUA's federal returning officer [FRO], Irvine, announced the official list of nominees for office at the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch on 24 November 1936, it was found that Keenan and McLaughlin together with Johnson and Tom Walsh had nominated for the post of general secretary.\(^ {49}\) Tom Fleming, Johnson's long-time associate, had nominated against Herbert for the Sydney secretarship. Hylander was in the running for the assistant secretary's job in Sydney. Peter McKeman, another Johnson associate, was competing against Franklin for the Newcastle job. G.T.Clive, of the Party fraction, had nominated against Clarke in Melbourne, and

\(^{45}\)ibid.  
\(^{46}\)Minutes PB meeting 7 November 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15. ML.  
\(^{47}\)Minutes PB meeting 14 November 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15. ML.  
\(^{48}\)ibid.  
\(^{49}\)Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 24 November 1936. E183/3/5 ABL.
E.V. Elliott was contesting against Casey for the Queensland secretaryship. Harry O'Neill had competition in Adelaide, but Byrne in Fremantle was unopposed.50

Behind the scenes, the CPA leadership evaluated the nominees against the incumbents. In Melbourne, the chances were considered to be about even. In Brisbane, Casey would probably be defeated. In Sydney, Herbert would be extremely hard to defeat. As regards the validity of the contestants for the general secretaryship, which under the rules of the union was the business of the FRO,51 the Party made no immediate comment.52 But only one week after his election as FRO, Irvine was evidently 'persuaded' to resign. At the stopwork meeting held in Sydney on 29 December 1936, W.J. Daley was elected to replace him.53 At the time Daley was elected FRO for the ballot that would decide who would be general secretary of the SUA in 1937, the CPA at the behest of the Comintern was once more proffering its unwelcome embrace to the ALP,54 and Daley was an active member of the ALP.55

The result of the ballot for general secretary was to be declared by the FRO at a special meeting of the union held in Sydney on 8 February 1937. In the event, no announcement was made as a quorum could not be obtained. Two days later another special meeting was held. Again, for lack of a quorum, no business could be transacted. Actually, in a three-cornered contest, Jacob Johnson had won the ballot with 608 votes (40.7 per cent of the ballot) against McLaughlin's 571 (38.3 per cent). Keenan had come last with only 314 votes (21 per cent).56 But this information was not officially notified to

50 ibid.
51 See ruling of chairman E.V. Elliott in, ibid.
52 "Report on Seamen's Union Australia", MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime Box 28. ML.
53 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 29 December 1936. E183/3/5 ABL. A CPA report noted that at the time of the ballot only 300 members were financial, and that "the election of a returning officer resulted in a win for Johnson, an individual named Irvine winning who proceeded to remove the names of Franklin, Keenan, Hylander, Elliott and others from the ballot, at the same time accepting Johnson's nomination. However, no confidence was carried in this 'returning officer' and W. Daley was elected in his stead." See "Report on Seamen's Union Australia", MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime Box 28. ML.
54 See CPA policy statement by R. Dixon, CC meeting, 24 July 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4 CY Reel 3500, frame 0406. ML.
55 See CPA Circular No. 182, 29 September 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
56 Herbert to "The Secretaries of all Branches", 13 February 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
the membership by the FRO, as was required by the rules of the union. It was, instead, conveyed unofficially to the branch secretaries in a handwritten postscript at the bottom of a circular letter sent out by Herbert, the Sydney secretary. Daley, the FRO, remained silent. When "a certain distance is necessary", Michel Mollat du Jourdan has observed, "the sea provides one."57 As a seaman, Daley had signed-on a ship's articles and, opportunely, quit the land.58

The CC subsequently claimed that, of the six branches of the SUA, the Party fraction was successful in getting the members of the Sydney, Newcastle and South Australian branches to support Daley's stand in refusing to recognise Johnson.59 Johnson claimed that the Victorian, West Australian and Queensland branches had definitely indicated their intention to support him. Herbert, in his capacity as 'presiding officer' of the union, said that only Byrne in Fremantle had officially announced that his branch recognised Johnson. In order clearly to establish where the balance lay, he would write to the branch secretaries requesting that they should immediately advise him of the wishes of their members as expressed in either stopwork or special meetings. "As far as Queensland branch is concerned", Herbert announced, "I am directing my communication to Mr E.V.Elliott the duly elected Secretary of that branch."60

The Queensland branch of the SUA had long been the fief of its secretary 'Bill' Casey and "his small group of 'beer sparrers'".61 Casey, former fireman, formerly of the IWW, lyricist of Bump Me Into Parliament, advocate of the OBU, disciple of the SPGB, and member of the SPA supported Jacob Johnson. The ballot, in which Elliott had nominated against Casey for the position of Queensland secretary was held on 9 January

58 Herbert to "The Secretaries of all Branches", 13 February 1937, op cit.
59 Typescript, "The Work in the Seamen's Union," MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime Box 28. ML.
60 Herbert to "All officers and Committee of Management," 1 March 1937, E183/18/2 ABL.
61 Keenan to CC of CPA, 11 April 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4/76 CY Reel 3500, frame 0169. ML.
1937. By 26 January the returns showed that Elliott was in a winning position. Nevertheless, Elliott could have been in no doubt that in moving to displace Casey he would provoke a faction fight. A former shipmate in the *Westralia* warned him, stating that "I attended the monthly stopwork meeting in Brisbane, and judging from the attitude apparent there, your reception will not be too cordial, that perhaps you already know. But they have no intention of letting you take over." Elliott had been a prominent member of the seamen's strike committee. Not only that, he had instigated an action in the High Court of Australia against the Commonwealth Government and its Attorney-General. Then, as an individual seaman, he had sought and had been denied by a majority ruling of the High Court an injunction restraining the federal government from applying the regulations of the Transport Workers' Act 1928-29 to seamen. The Court had ruled that although the regulations applied only to specified ports of the commonwealth, they were not discriminatory and so did not contravene section 99 of the Constitution. If, as Cahill asserts, the shipowners' federation had formed a 'black-list' of activists after the strike, then no doubt E.V. Elliott, greaser, appeared upon it. For Elliot Valens Elliott, the only alternative to the Brisbane job was the dole.

In Brisbane, the stopwork meeting on the last Tuesday of February 1937 had been "rather heated for a while." A few days later, however, Elliott wrote to the secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council relating that, having been elected to the position of secretary of the Queensland branch of the SUA, he had been obstructed by a small section of the membership in the performance of his duties "until today, the 1st March." But, he said, "I do now advise you that I personally am responsible for all

62 Ballot paper. E183/18/2 ABL.
63 Macartney to Gilshenan, 1 March 1937, D170/6/6 WUA.
64 Cooper to Elliott, 28 January 1937, D170/6/6 WUA.
65 High Court of Australia 1935-36, Elliott v. The Commonwealth of Australia and Another, 54 C.L.R. D170/6/5 WUA.
67 He nominated for office as assistant branch secretary at Sydney in the ballot at the end of 1935 but came third polling only 11% of the total vote. See, *Seamen's Strike Bulletin*, 6 February 1936. D170/6/5 WUA.
68 Elliott to Herbert, 23 February 1937. E183/18/2 ABL.
Seamen's Union receipts and expenditure in the Port of Brisbane. Neither I nor my Union will recognise any debts contracted as from today the 1st March 1937, by any person or persons purporting to be Officers of the Seamen's Union of Australasia, Queensland Branch. 69

Fighting a rearguard action, Jacob Johnson rallied his supporters in Brisbane. He told them on 17 March 1937 that he had made an application to the Arbitration Court in Melbourne to compel Herbert in Sydney, Franklin in Newcastle and Harry O'Neill in Adelaide "to comply with the rules of the Union." 70 He expected that each of them would shortly be issued with a summons. He urged the Brisbane seamen to make a stand. They should go to court, Johnson said, in order to prevent Elliott from "masquerading as Queensland branch Secretary". 71

When Elliott had arrived to take up his official position in Brisbane on 6 February 1937, a special meeting of the branch was summoned by the faction opposed to him in order "to consider the question of branch autonomy". 72 But Elliott's victory was now a foregone conclusion. A resolution passed unanimously by 62 members at a special meeting held in Brisbane on 21 March 1937 declared that:

We adhere to the policy always adopted by the Branch members and recognise those contestants, irrespective of Branch membership, who gain a majority of the Ballot. We consider that the election of E.V. Elliott is the result of the rank and file expression of the Seamen's Union of Australasia, and together with the other Branches, recognise the result of the Ballot as binding. We demand that all property of the SUA Queensland branch be handed over to E.V. Elliott and that any other person immediately vacate the Offices of the Union, if not certain action will be taken." [emphasis added]. 73

At that meeting, too, nominations were received and a branch executive elected. 74 This occasioned a polite letter from the Industrial Registrar in Brisbane thanking Elliott for his

69 Elliott to Secretary Trades and Labor Council, Brisbane, 1 March 1937. D170/6/6 WUA.
70 Johnson to Macartney, 17 March 1937. D170/6/6 WUA.
71 ibid.
72 Macartney to Gilshenan, 1 March 1937, D170/6/6 WUA.
73 Minutes special meeting Brisbane, 21 March 1937. E183/3/8 ABL.
74 ibid.
letter of 22 March 1937 which had announced that Elliott was Queensland branch secretary of the SUA. Having received a letter from Macartney which stated that he was the Queensland branch secretary and which announced the names of his executive, "which differ from yours", the Registrar wrote that "it would be a great convenience to the Court if the dispute could be settled and the Court could be certain as to who really are the officers of the union."  

For an industrial organisation whose members were occupationally itinerant and invariably dispersed, the SUA lacked a consistent means to disseminate information. Elliott complained that the Queensland members were continually asking him for information as to what was occurring in Sydney, "and I cannot give them anything official." What was the position in regard to Jacob Johnson? he asked Herbert. Rumours were being spread among the rank and file seamen that he found difficult to refute without official correspondence to support his statements. And it was by word of mouth that members at the stopwork meeting in Sydney on 27 April 1937 heard that a meeting convened ten days earlier by the opposition to Elliott in Brisbane, "Macartney, Casey and Co," had been attended by only 40 members. At the meeting, Macartney had resigned and Taylor had been elected in his stead as 'secretary of the Queensland branch'. In fact the summons to attend the special meeting at the Trades Hall in Brisbane at 10am on Saturday 17 April stated that:

> You are urgently requested to be present. Business: To deal with Mr Macartney's resignation from the position of Secretary, in consequence of two assaults upon him and threats of further bashings unless he resigns. Signed R. Taylor, Secretary, C. Brackenbridge, President, E. Mackay, Vice President.

The Sydney branch members also heard that the SUA agent in Townsville had announced that in future he would support E.V. Elliott as secretary, stating that "he had previously

75 Industrial Registrar to Elliott, 23 March 1937. D170/6/6 WUA.
76 Elliott to Herbert 21 April 1937, E183/18/2 ABL.
77 ibid.
78 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 April 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
79 ibid.
80 Notice "to delegates and members", Brisbane 10 April 1937. D170/6/6 WUA.
been misled as to the true state of affairs in Brisbane.\textsuperscript{81} The intimation of a resort to 'certain action' contained in the resolution passed at the special meeting on 21 March in Brisbane had been no idle threat.

The faction fight in Brisbane ended on 27 April 1937. At the Brisbane stopwork meeting of that date it was resolved by a vote of 62 to 6 that, "this Branch immediately fall into line with the other Branches and recognise E.V.Elliott as Queensland Branch Secretary."\textsuperscript{82} But, throughout those branches, in the aftermath of the failed strike, distrust and disunity were endemic. This was evident when men offered for employment in the Union Steamship Company's \textit{Waitopu} in Sydney. An examination of their membership books revealed that many had been in employment for up 9 months after the strike without paying their dues to any branch of the union.\textsuperscript{83} Other applicants for seagoing jobs were found to have been employed in shoreside industries and had not bothered to have their union books suitably endorsed.\textsuperscript{84} It was regrettable said Herbert that "a psychology had been created against members meeting their obligations to the Union." Some unscrupulous, if enterprising, seamen were ignoring the union and entering directly into employment bargains with the shipowners. They were "trying to make themselves secure by hiding behind their licences."\textsuperscript{85}

With the collapse of a responsible system of financial accounting within the SUA, the firm of Robertson, Rudder & Watt resigned as the union's auditors.\textsuperscript{86} Those SUA financial records and subscription coupons which the auditors had in their possession were deposited with a firm of solicitors. Subsequently the solicitors made it known that the union's property would be handed over only to a person authorised by a majority of the members of the CoM.\textsuperscript{87} At the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch on

\textsuperscript{81}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 April 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
\textsuperscript{82}Minutes stopwork meeting Brisbane, 27 April 1937. E183/3/8 ABL.
\textsuperscript{83}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 March 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
\textsuperscript{84}ibid.
\textsuperscript{85}ibid.
\textsuperscript{86}Johnston to Macartney, 17 March 1937. D170/6/6 WUA.
\textsuperscript{87}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 March 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
30 March 1937, Chris Herbert in his capacity as 'presiding officer' informed the seamen that Franklin in Newcastle and O'Neill in Adelaide had provided him with written authorisation to take control of the union's property. Byrne in Fremantle had advised him that the West Australian branch had provided its written authority to Jacob Johnson. The Victorian secretary, W.J. Clarke, had not bothered to reply. But the balance of power had altered, for Herbert had received written authority from Elliott in Brisbane.88

Now the Communist fraction and the ALP faction within the SUA moved in unison. A motion by McLoughlin and Keenan was carried endorsing any action deemed necessary by Herbert to secure the union's property.89 Daley then moved and Malone of the fraction seconded a motion, carried with but two dissentients, that:

This stop-work meeting of the Sydney Branch does not recognise J. Johnson as a member of this Branch or any other Branch of the Seamen's Union of Australasia for the following reasons: 1. Non-compliance with Branch Decisions. 2. Not engaged in the Industry. 3. Disruptive tactics. 4. Betrayal of members' interests.90

An earlier special meeting in Newcastle had been even more explicit, carrying a motion that decried Johnson as a traitor and disrupter and stating that "since he does not go to sea and is therefore not deprived of his living we recommend to all branches that steps be taken to expel him from the Seamen's Union and thus put an end to his disruption."91

Johnson's view was that his nomination for election to the position of general secretary of the SUA had been in accordance with the rules of the union. Moreover, a total of 608 members of the union, 37 more than voted for his nearest rival, had formally expressed their wish that he take office.92 Alone in a bare room at 82 King Street Sydney (as close to the SUA office at 12 King Street as he dared approach), expending his own funds, Johnson issued a leaflet attacking "the disruptive clique" within the Sydney and

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Cited by Johnson in his affidavit of 9 July 1937, E183/18/2 ABL.
92 Ballot result as advised by Herbert to "The Secretaries of all Branches", 13 February 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
Newcastle branches. It was this element, "masquerading as militants", he claimed, that had "so callously played with your destinies for self-aggrandisement [sic] prior to and during the last strike." In Sydney and Newcastle, Johnson, claimed, meetings of the union had deteriorated into a "circus" where "emissaries of the Communist Party" silenced any speaker who dared to oppose their viewpoint by means of orchestrated pandemonium, howling, and sustained interjections. And if these methods proved insufficient then the speaker would be silenced by means of physical assault. The fraction within the SUA, was "merely a rabble, incapable of leadership and the formulation of policies beneficial to our future welfare."

It was left to Franklin, who was never a member of the CPA, to respond in practical rather than ideological terms. Johnson's slogan, he said, was: "If I can't run the Union, no one else will." Conditions aboard the ships, he went on, were intolerable. To achieve some relief required that the union membership act in unanimity. But recent history had shown that with Johnson in or out of office there was no unanimity and consequently an ineffective organisation.

For a number of years the main struggle inside the Union has been one of whether Johnson was General Secretary or not. In this struggle he has been ably assisted by his immediate henchmen. It was the same when Raeburn was in office, similarly with Walsh. It became a question of Johnson right or wrong, and whoever was in office had to get out one way or another. Fellow members is it not time that we put an end to that state of affairs?

The committee of management should meet, Franklin said, and address itself to matters relevant to the improvement of conditions for the men in the ships, such as the abolition of the shipowners' bureaux, affiliation to the Labor Party, cancellation of the Transport Workers' Act and application to the Arbitration Court for interpretation and variation of the Seamen's Award of 1935, as "foisted upon us by Johnson and Co." But the crucial

94 Johnson to "Members of the SUA", April 1937, D170/6/6 WUA.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Franklin to "The Membership of the SUA", D170/6/6 WUA.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
and immediate task was to recognise that, "the Organisation comes first at all times, and those who would seek to make our position weaker by disruption, must be put in their proper places on the outside, where they can do the least harm." 100

"Union Deadlock. Court Suggests General Meeting. Seamen's Secretary", so ran the headlines in the Sydney press on 14 May 1937. 101 Upon Johnson's application, the federal Arbitration Court had summoned Herbert, Franklin and O'Neill to show cause why they had not recognised Johnson as general secretary by sending to him the weekly returns of their branches. 102 But when the matter was heard before Chief Judge Dethridge in the Commonwealth Arbitration court on 6 May 1937 he declared that the secretaries of the Sydney, Newcastle and Adelaide branches were not bound to recognise Johnson as general secretary because the result of the ballot had never been officially declared by the FRO, Daley, as was required by the rules of the union. 103 An order directing the FRO to declare the results and so legitimate Johnson's position could be made, Dethridge CJ observed, but it was not sought because Daley was at sea. Until the declaration was made the election remained incomplete. And there was no provision in the union's rules, the judge concluded, by means of which the FRO's function could be exercised by some other person and so "cure the mischief caused by his neglect of duty. There was nothing to justify Daley's refusal to announce the result." 104 In refusing to interfere in the internal affairs of the SUA and by suggesting that a general meeting of the union should finally settle the matter, Chief Judge Dethridge tolled the bell for Jacob Johnson. 105

The CC was well pleased with the manner in which events were developing. The forthcoming meeting of the SUA, it considered, would "...likely secure the expulsion of

100 ibid.
101 SMH, 14 May 1937.
102 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 April 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
103 Judgment Dethridge CJ, Arbitration Court Melbourne, 6 May 1937. E183/18/2 ABL.
104 ibid.
105 Dethridge CJ was quoted as saying, "...what I am concerned with is to see that the management of the union is not made a farce." SMH, 3 June 1937.
Johnson from the Union, thus putting an end to his disruption and strike-breaking once and for all. An election for a new General Secretary will be held and a candidate whom the fraction have in mind (not comrade Keenan) will probably be elected." 106 By this means the CPA would achieve an unprecedented degree of control over the seamen:

With a General Secretary and branch officials, Herbert, Franklin, O'Neill and Elliott all hostile to Johnson and Walsh, Clarke will be isolated and dealt with. With such a possibility in view, the fraction was justified in doing all possible to keep Johnson Out, even if there were some breaches of rules and Trade Union legalism. All the more so as the position of the Union will rapidly improve under good leadership. 107

When, at 10.30am, on 25 May 1937, a special meeting of the SUA assembled at Millers Point in Sydney, Hylander of the Communist fraction was in the chair and the branch secretaries, H.O'Neill, R.Franklin, E.V.Elliott, and C.Herbert were present as members of the CoM. W.J.Clarke, the Victorian secretary, was also present, but as the meeting was held in Sydney he was isolated from his supporters. Herbert opened proceedings with a precis of events since the last annual election and read Chief Judge Dethridge's judgment to the meeting. 108 The scene having been set, the fraction proceeded to the business on hand. It was resolved with but two dissentents, upon a motion by J.Keenan:

That this special meeting instructs member W.J.Daley to refrain from making any declaration in respect of the position of General Secretary. This meeting is of the opinion that the decision arrived at by W.J.Daley in connection with Johnson is a correct one and we endorse the same. 109

Then, the chairman, Hylander, accepted the motion of his fellow fraction member Malone, and had his ruling upheld by a large majority despite a challenge from Herbert, "that J.Johnson be expelled from the Union." 110 In the debate that followed Malone spoke in favour of his motion as did Franklin and Daley, the latter having conveniently returned from sea. On the motion being put, the chairman declared it carried with only

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106 Typescript, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Maritime 1918-37 Box 28. ML.
107 Ibid.
108 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 25 May 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
109 Ibid.
110 Herbert afterwards told the press that in his view the meeting had not been called to expel Johnson and it did not follow the procedure laid down in the rules for expulsions and suspensions. SMH, 27 May 1937.
two dissentients. Hylander, in his official capacity, then asked Jacob Johnson to leave the Hall. At that stage W.J. Daley resigned his position as FRO, and upon Keenan’s motion it was resolved, with Clarke the sole dissentient, that the meeting elect a FRO and that nominations be received from 1 to 15 June in all branches for the position of general secretary and that all the branch secretaries as members of the CoM give full assistance in the conduct of the ballot. The meeting then elected Frank Hylander of the CPA as the new FRO. Daley, of the ALP, was now free to stand for the post of general secretary of the SUA at the forthcoming election, the conduct of which was in the hands of the CPA.

That election was the subject of discussion by the PB of the CPA on 1 June 1937. The fraction within the union had actually reported itself divided between selection of Daley or McLean. According to the information held by the PB, Daley was the much better known of the two. He appeared to have more ability than McLean, and “will respond to the Party lead.” He was recognised as a leader in the struggle against Johnson, the fact that he had failed to declare the result of the ballot for the general secretary’s position being considered a sound reason for supporting his candidature. Consequently, the PB of the CPA noted in its minutes: “Decided to notify the fraction that the PB choice is Daley.”

Daley was chairman of the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch of the union on the last Tuesday in June 1937. With 105 members present, he opened proceedings and immediately requested that Jacob Johnson leave the meeting as he was not a member of

111 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 25 May 1937. E183/3/5 ABL. Of Hylander, Tom Walsh observed that: “The militants and communists who seldom leave the cities... are always available to attend meetings where they are also allowed to take part in and, in a great many instances, dominate the position.” Typescript, “The Seamen’s Union of Australasia”, 9 March 1937, MS2123 Box 7 Folder 67, NLA.
112 Minutes PB meeting, 1 June 1937, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15(76). ML.
113 Ibid. Daley earned the wrath of Chief Judge Dethridge of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, who was quoted in the press as stating that the SUA’s rules “had been contumaciously flouted by Mr W.J.Daley, formerly returning officer,” and that “Daley should not be allowed to get away with it.” Sun, 3 June 1937.
the union. "Johnson withdrew," the minutes record sedately. Johnson's version was that Daley, who was of burly stature, was elected chairman when the meeting opened at 10.10am. and, seven minutes later, "the chairman... came off the platform and put his hands on me threatening to forcibly eject me from the hall." The meeting then continued, with a letter from Clarke being received and, in accordance with a unanimous resolution, consigned to the wastepaper basket. A letter from Jacob Johnson was dealt with in like fashion, as was one from Byrne in West Australia, upon which it was resolved that the CoM be instructed to "seriously review the position of the WA Agency." The meeting closed, having unanimously commended the actions of the branch secretaries in Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle and South Australia (Herbert, Elliott, Franklin, and H.O'Neill) "in giving effect to the wishes of the Members", and having condemned the action of the Victorian and West Australian secretaries (Clarke and Byrne).

Daley was duly elected general secretary of the SUA on Thursday 8 July 1937. Frank Hylander, of the CPA, as the FRO for the ballot, announced that in a three-cornered contest Daley had polled 47.1 per cent of the vote. The two other candidates, Riddle and Baker, though both relatively unknown, had still managed to obtain 37.2 per cent and 15.7 per cent of the vote respectively. Of the total membership of the SUA, however, only six hundred and thirty-seven seamen or some 25 per cent had participated in the ballot. Even fewer had voted on the second question on the ballot paper. A mere five hundred and ninety-three had bothered to vote for affiliation of the union to the ALP. Announcing the result, the Workers Weekly castigated the policies of the former Johnson regime:

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114 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 June 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
115 Keenan referred to Daley as "the big bloke". Keenan to "Danny" 6 December 1938, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML. Also see photograph in Workers Weekly, 9 July 1937.
116 Johnson's statutory declaration of 9 July 1937, E183/18/2 ABL.
117 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 June 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
118 ibid.
119 Workers Weekly, 9 July 1937.
These policies were marked by a sectarian isolation from the labor movement of this country, a wrong and antagonistic attitude towards kindred unions on the waterfront; instead of healing breaches, the Johnson group, by their tactics and statements, widened them. The Johnson leadership also was antagonistic towards the Labor Councils and the ACTU. It is perfectly true that the reformism of some of these bodies needed criticising and fighting against, but the Johnson group, influenced by the vicious sectarianism of the tiny 'Socialist Party of Great Britain,' to which Clarke and Johnson nominally subscribe, merely withdrew the Seamen into isolation, thus making it easier for the splitters to prevent other unionists aiding them in time of strikes. The Johnson group also adopted a similar attitude to the ALP again isolating the Seamen.  

The editor of the *Workers Weekly* welcomed the decision to affiliate with the ALP claiming that in contrast to the isolation, disruption and factionalism of Johnson and Walsh and their respective cliques, it showed that the seamen had done with isolationism. The admirable policy outlined by the new general secretary indicated that the seamen now stood for unity within the labour movement and within the union and for the election of a Labor government which would assist in ending the licensing system and the other injustices which had been inflicted upon them.  

The Communist *Workers Weekly* appears to be "the mouthpiece of the Seamen's Union," Johnson observed caustically. The seamen, he said, "are being used by this party and its white anting [sic] element in the Seamen's Union as pawns in their game of chess for political power." Having been approached by many members of the union "who are desirous of building-up a Union on a commonsense policy," he had made an application for de-registration of the SUA in order that its membership might by re-organised "on a proper basis." Pending the hearing of his application, Johnson recommended that the seamen carefully consider their situation and their options and if after mature consideration they were in agreement with him that "the would-be Master Mariners of the Communist party in the Seamen's Union, by their corruptness, treachery and incapabilities have navigated you on the rocks", then they were invited to make

120 *ibid.*  
121 *ibid.*  
122 Leaflet, Johnson to "Fellow Seamen", D170/6/6 WUA.  
123 *ibid.*
application on the attached form to join his new "Seafarers' Union of Australasia."  

Financial members of the Seamen's Union of Australasia might freely transfer into and become members of the Seafarers' Union of Australasia subject to production of their SUA membership book and upon payment of ten shillings quarterly contribution.

The members of the SUA got to hear of Johnson's application for deregistration of their union at the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch on 27 July 1937. In fact, Johnson had lodged his application with the federal Arbitration Court on 9 July, the day after Daley's election. At the stopwork meeting it was resolved unanimously upon a motion by the Communists Keenan and Hylander, that the meeting commended the vigilance of Daley and Herbert in discovering the "dastardly plot of Johnson" and went on:

"We call upon the Labor Movement to exert every effort to defeat Johnson in his nefarious purposes... This meeting is of the considered opinion that Johnson is but the advance guard of Fascism within the Labor Movement and we urge the whole Labor Movement to treat him accordingly."

Those who spoke in favour of the resolution included, predictably, Johnson's old antagonist, Walsh. Less predictably, they also included Fleming. There were no speakers against the motion and it was carried "unanimously and enthusiastically."

By mid-1937 Johnson's supporters had been reduced to vice-president Fleming in Sydney and branch secretaries Clarke in Melbourne and Byrne in Fremantle. Now Fleming had defected. On that same day, at the stopwork meeting held in Melbourne, Clarke advised the members assembled that it was apparent that the CoM placed no confidence in him and likewise he had no confidence in them. That being the case, he said that he could no longer carry on as Victorian branch secretary, and resigned.

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124 Seafarers' Union of Australasia, Membership Application Form. D170/6/6 WUA.
125 ibid.
126 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 July 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
127 ibid.
128 A former seaman, who sailed with Fleming in September 1943, described him as "a talker rather than a doer... always looking after Tom Fleming", N.Cunningham to Author, 11 June 1997.
129 For the CPA's opinion of Clarke's ability as an antagonist, see minutes CC meeting 10 April 1936 for E.Thornton's opinion. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4 CY Reel 3500 frame 0057. ML.
130 Daley to Herbert, 2 August 1937. E183/18/2 ABL.
Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary, told a special meeting of SUA members in Sydney on 20 August 1937 that there were approximately 400 non-unionists sailing out of the port of Sydney in Australian registered ships. Nevertheless, he claimed that overt hostility between unionists and non-unionists was a thing of the past. He saw both sides fraternising. Every effort should be made to assimilate the 'outsiders', he said, since an organisation that functioned "as one big united body" was in the best interests of seafarers in general. However, at the following stopwork meeting on 31 August 1937 which, ironically, was chaired by Tom Walsh, it was learned that in addition to Johnson's application for de-registration of the SUA and his canvassing of his Seafarers' Union of Australia, an application had been lodged by the shipowners' volunteers' association, now styled the Australian Seamen's Federation [ASF], for registration by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court.

When the executive officers of the SUA lodged a protest with the federal Arbitration Court against the ASF's application for registration, it was on the basis that registration of a competing union "would perpetuate a state of enmity and rivalry amongst men whose best interests lie in unity and that such enmity and rivalry would mitigate against the settlement of industrial disputes and the proper working of the industry."

But when another special meeting of the SUA assembled in Sydney in mid-September 1937 it was told by general secretary Daley that he had in his possession a list of names of members of the ASF. Many of the names on that list, he stated, were in fact members of the SUA. And at the subsequent stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch at the end of September 1937 Daley read out the list of names which had been filed by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in support of the ASF's application for registration, and, as the minutes note, "many names of members of our Union appeared on the

131 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 20 August 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
132 ibid.
133 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 August 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
134 Franklin to Commonwealth Industrial Registrar, Melbourne, 14 September 1937. E183/18/2 ABL.
135 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 14 September 1937. E183/3/5 ABL.
list.” But now the material circumstances of the union were beginning to show some signs of improvement. In October 1937, the Sydney branch secretary was able to announce that though there were still some "slackers and dues dodgers", contributions from members had increased 100 per cent in comparison with the situation of a year previously. And there was tacit recognition from 'outside' as when the Industrial Registrar of NSW invited general secretary Daley to replace Jacob Johnson as the union's representative on the State Conciliation Committee, thus ensuring unhindered access to the Sydney and Newcastle wharves for the union's officials. And when the seamen registered their support for the Trades and Labor Councils' call for a boycott of Japanese goods, the Labour Movement would have been no less gratified than was the CPA.

Towards the end of 1937, as the time for the SUA's annual ballot for office approached once more, the PB of the CPA selected its nominees for office for the forthcoming year. It was agreed that Daley, the ALP member, should be supported in his nomination for re-election as general secretary. Herbert had the approval of the PB as Sydney branch secretary. Franklin was approved, as were Elliott in Brisbane and H.O'Neill in Adelaide. Clive was to be supported in his bid for office as Melbourne branch secretary as would McLean for the WA secretaryship, or, failing him, Malone. Hylander was to nominate for the post of Federal Returning Officer. But Keenan's name did not appear upon the CPA's list of nominees.

136 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 September 1937, E183/3/5 ABL.
137 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 26 October 1937, E183/3/5 ABL.
138 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney 30 November 1937, E183/3/5 ABL.
139 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 26 October 1937, E183/3/5 ABL.
140 Minutes PB meeting 19 October 1937. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15, ML.
141 The minutes of the PB meeting of 2 November 1937 note tersely: "Keenan. Comrade Miles to interview him." MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15, ML.
In the event, the union's executive remained unchanged in 1938. But of that executive, only Elliott was, or would shortly become, a member of the CPA.\textsuperscript{142} Keenan, in his day, had been the only Communist on the SUA executive. In 1938 there was no change quantitatively, but there was a definite qualitative improvement. Elliott was beginning to make his mark both inside and outside the SUA. He impressed an audience at the University of Queensland with "as forceful and impressive an address as the Radical Club has heard this year," when he spoke on the subject of the Transport Workers' Act and the "tyrannous" conditions that it imposed.\textsuperscript{143} At the CoM meeting on 21 March, he successfully moved a series of motions, the last of which instructed the union's general secretary "to communicate with the secretary of the ACTU and inform him that as soon as finances will permit us to pay our affiliation fees we intend doing so, and also that we will continue to be affiliated to the above named body."\textsuperscript{144}

Considerable satisfaction could now be taken in "the remarkable recovery the Union had made... both as regards its industrial re-organisation and also its future financial stabilisation in almost every Branch and Agency throughout the Federation."\textsuperscript{145} And at the AGM of 29 March 1938 the union's progress towards financial recovery was celebrated by increasing the wages of the officials. Branch officials now received a uniform L7 per week while the general secretary's remuneration was increased to L8 per week. In another move, as much symbolic of a resurgent confidence as it was a means to raise revenue, the fee for new entrants to the union was set at L4.15.6d.\textsuperscript{146} And again,

\textsuperscript{142}See Fitzpatrick & Cahill, \textit{op cit}, p.109. With such titles as \textit{The Workers' Struggle Against Capitalist Depression and the Way Out: The Australian Railways Union Educational and Organising Scheme}, Lloyd Ross figures largely in a collection of CPA study material in Elliott's papers. D170/7/6 WUA. Elliott was recorded as a member of both the CPA's Maritime Branch and Brisbane District Committee in 1940. A6119/2 Item 139 Vol.4, AA.
\textsuperscript{143}Semper Floreat: The University of Queensland Students' Newspaper, 9 June 1938.
\textsuperscript{144}Minutes CoM meeting Sydney, 21 March 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.
\textsuperscript{145}ibid.
\textsuperscript{146}Minutes AGM Sydney, 29 March 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.
symptomatic of the union's gathering strength, it was resolved that the Seamen's Journal should be resurrected and put into circulation in July 1938.\(^{147}\)

Marx believed that capitalism was intrinsically immoral.\(^{148}\) Lenin insisted that, "We can (and must) begin to build socialism, not with abstract human material, or with human material specially prepared by us, but with the human material bequeathed to us by capitalism."\(^ {149}\) In penetrating trade unions and labour parties, no stratagem was to be discarded on merely ethical grounds.\(^{150}\) It was that larger policy of 'boring from within' that Chris Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary had advocated, however inadvertently, when he told 150 members at the stopwork meeting in Sydney on 25 January 1938 that their way forward was not one of confrontation with the shipowners. It was in fact to "get in by any means whatsoever and work the scabs out."\(^{151}\) It was obvious that the disastrous tactics of 1935/36 should not be repeated.

Despite the fact that the ASF was granted registration on 14 April 1938,\(^{152}\) a sense of cautious optimism was now apparent within the SUA. Circumstances were beginning to favour the union, or could be made to do so. Amendments made to the TWA by the federal Government ensuring cancellation of any First Preference Licence held by a seaman who had not been in sea-going employment between 1 January 1938 and the licence renewal date of 31 August 1938, were actually beneficial to those who had remained loyal to the SUA, as Herbert pointed out. He assured seamen at a stopwork meeting on 31 May 1938 that bona fide members would have no difficulty in renewing their licences. During the previous twelve months, he commented:

\(^{147}\)Ibid. The PB of the CPA meeting in July 1937 had decided to effect the early re-appearance of the Seamen's Journal as an organ of propaganda. Minutes PB meeting 13 July 1937, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15. ML.

\(^{148}\)The Communists do not preach morality at all." Marx, "The German Ideology", cited in McLennan, Karl Marx Selected Writings, p.183.

\(^{149}\)Lenin, Left-wing Communism, p.50.

\(^{150}\)Ibid. p.55.

\(^{151}\)Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 25 January 1938. E183/3/5 ABL.

\(^{152}\)"Which body is composed of Seamen who scabbed during our Strike in 1935-36... the employers have got what they were out to get and that is Company Unionism." Daley to F.P.Walsh, 12 May 1938, D170/6/7 WUA.
...many of the Scabs had drifted out of the Industry, and the new regulations meant the wiping off of them altogether, also many of our own Members were at present working in other Industries or working two books, the new system would eliminate many opportunists and a certain class who were making a seasonal convenience of the Union.  

There was, he said, a surplus of First Preference Licences in circulation (as a consequence of a deliberate policy by the federal government during the 1935/36 strike), and the amendment to the regulations would ensure elimination of that surplus.  

Daley, as general secretary, had meanwhile been talking with the shipowners. He was now able to pass on to members the shipowners' assurance that only SUA men would be employed in the absence of competent 'volunteers' and, furthermore, that the practice of procuring seamen by means of the shipowners' bureaux, would cease.  

But the practice was still in force in October 1938 when a deputation comprising representatives of the ACTU, the WWF and Daley and Herbert of the SUA was introduced by E.J.Holloway, the Labor member for Melbourne Ports, to the Attorney General, R.G.Menzies.  

The deputation sought the repeal of the TWA, "to enable us to get back to a proper system of bargaining between employers and the employees." During the audience with the Attorney-General, Herbert informed Menzies that the interstate trade required 1500 qualified seamen in the Port of Sydney. After the strike, however, the Government's licensing committee in that port had issued 2,900 First Preference licences. While the amendment to the TWA regulations which had come into force on 31 August had resulted in the cancellation of 750 of these licences there were still "all nationalities, such as Southern Europeans and everyone else", competing for jobs with members of the

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153 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 May 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.  
154 ibid.  
155 ibid.  
156 Transcript of proceedings, "deputation to the Right Honorable R.G.Menzies, Attorney-General, 17 October 1938." D170/7/38 WUA.
SUA who had given a lifetime of service to the shipowners. Herbert said that at least 92 per cent of the SUA membership had returned to the industry, but a problem remained in regard to the former 'breakaways'. There were 800 of these who, because their activities had benefited the shipowners during the strike, were eligible to be selected for employment at the shipowners' bureaux in Sydney and Melbourne - locations from which ordinary members of the SUA were excluded. Having now returned to the SUA fold, they were also eligible to be selected with the other unionists at the ship's side, so that they "had a little both ways." That they had such an advantage over other unionists resulted in division within the ranks. The shipowners should not continue to discriminate against the SUA members, continued Herbert in placatory tones, "if they did make a mistake in 1935 and 1936, merely a lifetime of service in that respect should be accepted at least on a par with the services that the volunteers gave in 1935/36." When Herbert stressed that there were good seamen on the coast who had given a lifetime of service to the shipowners, Menzies replied gravely, "I follow that point." Things had changed, Herbert assured the Minister. Under their new leadership, the seamen were now aware of the real situation. They were "sitting up and taking notice... there were a couple of stormy petrels that we had," he said, "but they have now gone."

A month later, on 29 November 1938, Tom Walsh was expelled from the SUA for the last time. The general secretary had refused to accept Walsh's subscriptions on the basis that Walsh was not seeking employment in the industry (Walsh was 66 years of age). At the stopwork meeting in Sydney, member Malone of the Communist fraction took exception to Walsh's presence as he was not a financial member. Daley, in turn, condemned Walsh as an agent provocateur. He was "a hireling of the shipowners," whose function was to create confusion and chaos and prevent any improvement in the standard of living of Australian seamen in general. Daley reminded members of Walsh's

157 ibid.
158 ibid.
159 ibid.
160 ibid.
161 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 29 November 1938. E138/3/6 ABL.
statement during the recent annual general meeting of the union that he would vote for Curtin's Labor Party "with a view of bringing Fascism to Australia ever so much quicker." Malone, supported by Hylander called upon the members to end "an evil that had been in evidence in our Union for approximately 15 years or more." They should "rid the Union of the last of the greatest and most expensive renegades that this or any other Union had ever been saddled with." Then, with Fleming presiding, the Communist fraction disposed of Tom Walsh. The meeting resolved, upon Malone's motion, seconded by Ron Hurd, that Walsh should no longer be recognised as a member of the union. Tom Walsh then withdrew.

Despite Chris Herbert's conciliatory approach, the antagonistic attitude of the shipowners and intransigent behaviour of their representatives towards the seamen had changed little. In seeking employment in a ship, union members were required to line-up for selection at that ship's side, wherever it was berthed. But when the SUA requested the establishment of a central information board from which seamen could ascertain what jobs were available, where and when, rather than being dependent upon information or misinformation from gatekeepers at the various company wharves, the shipowners were not prepared to make any such concession. A case in point was the announcement by the Adelaide Steamship Company's agent that the *Uloola* would arrive in Newcastle at 7pm on 8 December 1938 and would require "firemen, trimmers and ABs". The ship berthed at 8.25pm and when the master and chief officer came ashore at 9.40pm it was to state that only one trimmer and one AB were actually required. In vying for the job available, thirteen ABs lined up on the wharf for selection. One was duly selected and then rejected because his previous discharges showed that he had been in another ship of the Adelaide Steamship Company where an industrial dispute had occurred. In a show of

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162 ibid.
163 ibid.
164 Ron Hurd's recent address, on his experiences while serving with the International Brigade in Spain, had been enthusiastically received by the Sydney branch. See minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 22 February 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.
165 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 26 July 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.
166 Franklin to Daley, 10 December 1938. E183/17/1 folder 3, ABL.
solidarity, the remainder of the unemployed seamen present refused to offer again for the job and walked away. The argument that ensued was adjourned to the Mercantile Marine Office where company representatives at one point threatened Franklin with legal proceedings, alleging that, in contravention of the Navigation Act and the Seamen's Award, he had prevented their exercise of the right of free selection. Eventually, at midnight, two hours after the vessel's scheduled departure time, the AB was signed on the ship's articles. An angry Reg Franklin subsequently informed the union's general secretary that, "It is quite obvious that direct action is now necessary on all jobs as we have got to prove and show these people that the Seamen's Union is now once again a force to be reckoned with in the Industrial fields" [sic].

But the leadership of the SUA had been content to leave it to Tudehope of the Cooks' Union and Captain Lawrence of the Merchant Service Guild [MSG] to speak on behalf of a deputation from the combined maritime unions which, seeking amendment of the Seamen's Compensation Act, called upon the Minister for Commerce and Health on 1 February 1938. It was pointed out to the Minister that, despite repeated appeals beginning in 1918, the Act, number 13 of 1911, had not been amended since it first became law. Then, when amendments to the Act were eventually passed by Parliament, the SUA federal leadership had no compunction in appending its signature to a fulsome letter of appreciation from the combined maritime unions addressed to the Hon. J.A.Beasely, MHR, member for West Sydney [Australian Labour Party - non-Communist], which stated that 'we regard this as another example of what can be achieved with proper understanding and co-operation between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement.' Such fine sentiments, however, could have been of little consolation to a destitute Mrs Ethel Burnside of the working-class Newcastle suburb of Merewether.

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167 ibid.
168 Notes of deputation, 1 February 1938, D170/6/7 WUA.
169 Letter cited in minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 December 1938. E183/3/6 ABL.
NSW. Her husband had been lost in the wreck of the coastal collier *Minmi* and, 17 months later, her claim for compensation still awaited a hearing.\(^{170}\)

Protesting that SUA members were denied a fair share of available employment and accusing the shipowners of blatant discrimination, Joseph Keenan told a special meeting in Sydney on 3 February 1939 (which he had himself convened), that "the attitude generally of the members of the CSOA was one of pure vindictiveness." It was imperative that the membership "retaliate in some form or another",\(^{171}\) General secretary Daley, however, sought to placate the meeting, providing the assembled seamen with an account of the "extremely excellent" case that he and Herbert had presented when they met the Attorney General, R.G. Menzies.\(^{172}\) "A sympathetic consideration" of the workings of the TWA had been promised by Menzies, he assured them. Unfortunately, due to the *Dalfram* dispute at Port Kembla, the matter was temporarily in abeyance, nevertheless, "the necessity for an urgent enquiry into the workings of the Act has caused the Attorney-General's Department to probe fully into the matter when it is anticipated that a full report will be made by the Secretary to that department with a recommendation to repeal the Act or otherwise."\(^{173}\) Everything humanly possible was being done, Daley announced to the meeting:

> We are confident that good results will materialise as a result of the efforts made. We anticipate that a conference with certain members of the Cabinet and parties concerned will take place within a week or two. Referring to what he had already stated, he and the Branch Executive deem it advisable to stay any action which may complicate matters.\(^{174}\)

In the end the resolution of the meeting amounted to no more than that the executive officers of the SUA should, "in any further conference with Mr Menzies," urge the repeal of the TWA.\(^{175}\)

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\(^{170}\) Mrs Burnside to Daley, 6 October 1938. E183/17/1 folder 3, ABL.

\(^{171}\) Minutes special meeting Sydney, 3 February 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.

\(^{172}\) *ibid.*

\(^{173}\) *ibid.*

\(^{174}\) *ibid.*

\(^{175}\) *ibid.*
Daley and Herbert repeated their performance before 200 members assembled at the stopwork meeting in Sydney on 28 February 1939. They provided "very lengthy reports regarding interviews by the Executive Officers of the Union and the Federal Attorney General Mr Menzies on the application by the Union for the repeal of the TWA also for the establishment of Central Pick-up Places in the ports of Sydney and Newcastle."\(^{176}\) But a month later it was apparent that the trust placed by Daley and Herbert in Menzies' sincerity had been misplaced. Daley had now to admit that with the resignation of R.G. Menzies as Attorney-General, he and Herbert had obtained an interview with the new Attorney-General, W.M. Hughes. When, ingenuously, they asked if his predecessor had left any minutes on the union's previous submission or if any recommendations had been made to Cabinet "on these very important matters", Hughes replied succinctly that "there was nothing at hand at present."\(^{177}\) And now the SUA rank and file would go only so far with its labourist general secretary. When he proposed that all further discussion on the repeal of the TWA should be deferred, they declined to support him. He was also reminded of the decision of the union's AGM of 1939 that publication of the *Seamen's Journal* should be resumed.\(^{178}\)

The union's *Journal* had last appeared some three and a half years previously.\(^{179}\) In the absence of a union bulletin, the membership was dependent for news of the union's wider activities upon reports provided at the stopwork meeting held monthly in Sydney, the minutes of which would be read at branch stopwork meetings the following month. But in Brisbane, E.V. Elliott had instituted a local publication, in a basic typescript and roneoed format. *The Seamen's Voice*, Volume 1 Number 1 of September 1937, had stated unequivocally that "production of this union sheet is a preliminary step towards the republication of the *Seamen's Journal*".\(^{180}\) It was to be published monthly.

\(^{176}\) Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 February 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.
\(^{177}\) Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 March 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.
\(^{178}\) *ibid*
\(^{179}\) SJ, 25 September 1935.
\(^{180}\) *Seamen's Voice*, September 1937.
Contributions from members were specifically requested, and there was to be no doubt as to what were its objectives, as an organ of the union:

*The Seamen's Voice* will take up the struggle for 100% financial membership; for closer unity in the industry and on the waterfront; for the repeal of the 'Dog Collar' Act and the licences; for the 40-hour week, improved working conditions and a substantial rise in the basic wage; against war and fascism; and for the return of a Federal Labour Government. It is your paper: read it, constructively criticise it, and pass it on to your mate.181

When, in May 1939, Daley and Herbert were reading their long reports to assemblies of a hundred or so seamen in the port of Sydney, Elliott's publication had blossomed both in scope and presentation into volume 2 number 5. Beneath a banner, *The Seamen's Voice: Official Organ of the Seamen's Union (Queensland Branch): Distributed in all Australian Ports*, it broadcast its message far and wide in an attractive, illustrated, and easily assimilable tabloid format.

Elliott was becoming more outspoken in his criticism of general secretary Daley.182 In response to an instruction from Sydney that he cease publishing *The Seamen's Voice* in view of the imminent appearance of *The Seamen's Journal*, Elliott noted defiantly on 24 May 1939, that a further issue of his publication would be available on the 29th. "Comrade", he asked an associate, "what has the G.S. been instructed to do during his occupancy of office? What has he promised to do? What has he done?"183 The *Journal* had been delayed so often that "mention of it now arouses ribald remarks". No statement of the union's financial position had been issued since Daley assumed office. "The rules are never observed, except when it is a question of tactics. It has been resolved several times that they be altered. Nothing has been done." The union's latest application to the federal Arbitration Court he described as "farcical", since "the whole Committee of Management decorated the Court for a week without uttering a word." He had wished to record an official protest but had been dissuaded. It was, Elliott concluded, undoubtedly

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181 Ibid.
182 Joseph Keenan told a friend that "when Brisbane carried a resolution condemning Daley for not getting out the *Journal* he [Daley] rang up Elliott and told him to watch his step or else he would put him back on the end of a shovel." Keenan to "Danny" 6 December 1938, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
183 Typescript, Brisbane 24 May 1939. D170/6/8 WUA.
due to the executive's failure to engage in a consistent policy of attack that the 'scab' bureaux continued to operate to the detriment of the membership of the SUA.\footnote{ibid.}

The Communist fraction within the SUA applied pressure to general secretary Daley and Sydney branch secretary Chris Herbert at the stopwork meeting in Sydney on 27 June 1939. The members assembled unanimously resolving upon a motion by Hylander seconded by Malone that the executive CoM should formulate a guiding policy for the union which should then be articulated in the \textit{Seamen's Journal} so that members might know what the union's overall policy was when they next assembled in stopwork meetings.\footnote{Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 June 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.} General secretary Daley responded by assuring the meeting that the \textit{Seamen's Journal} would re-appear in August.\footnote{ibid.} But it did not. The stopwork meeting in Sydney on 29 August 1939 heard Daley explain that publication of the \textit{Journal} had been delayed "due to the many details necessary for its publication being finalised."\footnote{Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 29 August 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.} It was due to appear on 11 September, and it would "contain a wealth of information to members."

When the \textit{Journal} did appear it was to announce "United We Stand - Divided We Fall." The theme was ostensibly aggressive. The union's policy was declared to be one of "again bringing about complete organisation and unity within our ranks, and a determination to fight and win until there is only one Seamen's Union in the shipping industry."\footnote{SJ, September 1939.} As an industrial organisation of wage earners, the seamen must "at all times be prepared to fight in defence of your rights."\footnote{ibid.} But the branch secretary's reports, with but one exception, were defensive. In Sydney, the employment situation remained bleak with only isolated jobs becoming available to members. Newcastle
complained of unscrupulous individuals sneaking past the BHP gates to gain early access to the steelworks' wharves in hopes of snatching any job that offered at a ship's side before the arrival of those other members of the union who observed BHP regulations which prohibited entry to the steelworks earlier than 15 minutes before the 'pick-up' was due to commence. The Adelaide branch secretary noted that the owners persisted in their policy of giving preference to 'volunteers' in selecting men for employment, though the number of non-unionists available had dwindled since "only original volunteers or member of the Seamen's Union can obtain a first preference licence." But in contrast to the other reports, the Queensland branch secretary detailed his aggressive, persistent, and successful activities. He had achieved a long-overdue improvement in the woeful conditions endured by SUA members employed in Brisbane River dredges. Then, too, the Queensland branch's financial statement for the half-year showed a credit balance of L85 16 3d in the bank.

The beginning of that other war - the Second World War - rated only a passing mention on the last page of the Journal of September 1939. A brief report advised that a Shipping Control Board had been established by Prime Minister Menzies as a result of the declaration of war upon Germany on 3 September 1939. Menzies was quoted as stating that "it was impossible to form any conception at present of the extent to which vessels now engaged in these essential services might have to be diverted to meet naval requirements."

The introduction of the Australian National Security (General) Regulations, Statutory Rules 1939 - No.87 immediately upon the outbreak of war provided the federal Minister for Commerce with Draconian power, not least in the matter of who should and who should not be employed henceforth in Australian merchant ships. But the past

191 ibid.
192 ibid.
193 ibid.
still preoccupied the minds of protagonists within the shipping industry. When a
deputation from the Maritime Transport Council [MTC], which included general secretary
Daley and Sydney branch secretary Herbert, called upon the Attorney General on 20
September 1939 in yet another attempt to persuade the Government to close the
shipowners' employment bureaux, a spectre from the seamen's past was raised:

Mr Daley: I want to refer one matter to you - it is the use of a word. The
shipowners' contention is that the person in charge of a Bureau is a superintendent -
he is not a superintendent at all; he is a clerk.
Attorney General [W.M Hughes]: That is important. You say he is an employee of
the shipowners?
Mr Daley: Yes.  

And the shore-bound shipowners were still capable of demonstrating a startling degree of
ignorance in regard to the realities of the maritime workplace. When Hughes told a CSOA
deputation of Daley's complaint that jobs in ships whose stokehold conditions were
notoriously exhausting were reserved for SUA firemen and trimmers, the shipowners'
Mr Farrell dismissed the complaint, exclaiming: "Is there any difference between
ships?" 

But unemployed seamen could no longer line-up for selection at a ship's side.
Stringent new war-time regulations restricting entry to the wharves meant that seamen in
Sydney were now selected for employment at the centrally located Commonwealth
Mercantile Marine Office. As J.A.Beasley MHR pointed out, these regulations had
"materially altered the whole circumstances." And it was also as a consequence of
these altered circumstances that, cautiously, Daley was able to advise the SUA
membership that arising out of discussions with the Attorney General he had been
unofficially informed that "it is quite likely" that when the report of an official
investigation into the operation of the TWA was tabled in Parliament when it shortly re-
assembled, action would be taken upon "certain recommendations." 

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195 Cited in SJ November 1939.
196 SJ November 1939.
197 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 31 October 1939. E183/3/6 ABL.
198 SJ November 1939.
199 Ibid.
It had become obvious that the 'Seamen's Regulations' of the TWA (which licensed seamen only in 'prescribed ports') operated in a manner that was detrimental to the Government's war effort. Suddenly, in the port of Sydney there were more jobs to be filled than there were seamen available to fill them. There was a particular shortage of ABs. Ships were sailing from Sydney short-handed, while seamen found shoreside employment as riggers in Cockatoo and Garden Island dockyards where, as a matter of national urgency, merchant ships were being converted for use by the Navy. But Elliott reported that due to commandeering of interstate vessels in Sydney many seamen had been forced to return to their home-port of Brisbane where they were now unemployed.

It was expedient, then, that the TWA should be suspended. Having visited all the ports in the Commonwealth in which the legislation operated, Government investigators submitted a recommendation to the federal Government that the Act should be suspended or repealed upon condition that a form of registration of seamen and waterside workers was introduced. The imperatives of war swept away the root causes of years of bitter conflict. The psychological effects that were the legacy of those bitter years, however, were less easily dispersed. A month after the beginning of the Second World War, a resolution was passed by the Sydney branch of the SUA calling for a mending of relations with the Seamen's Union of New Zealand in order to "rectify matters and again bring both bodies together whereby they can again wage common cause against our enemy, the shipowner [emphasis added], on both sides of the Tasman."
In Newcastle, there were still more men offering for work than there were vacancies, nevertheless a notable victory was won by the seamen in their 'private war'. Franklin, the Newcastle branch secretary, reported that the SUA men in the *ss Bundaleer* had delivered an ultimatum to the Adelaide Steamship Company that unless the ship's chief steward and cook were dismissed for incompetence the seamen would refuse to sail. When all the unemployed seamen in Newcastle supported the ultimatum, the shipowner gave in to the seamen's demand! It was exactly twenty-eight years since the refusal of SUA firemen to sail with the *Koombana*'s chief steward had resulted in the union's surrender of November 1911. Now, flushed with victory, Franklin exulted in the union's new-found collective strength announcing that "united we stand, and can and will proceed to improve our conditions."205

In Brisbane, job opportunities were reported to be "fairly infrequent". But the branch secretary, E.V. Elliott, again took the opportunity to make effective use of the *Seamen's Journal* in bringing his local successes to the attention of the union membership at large. "The year 1939 closes with several achievements to the credit of the Union in Brisbane," he related.206 All vessels trading out of Brisbane were now manned by unionists who were selected at one central pick-up and this was the result of a process of "elimination" of 'volunteers' by methods unmentionable or by recruiting them into the SUA. In the dredges, after 12 months work by the indefatigable Elliott, a variation of the Award had been achieved in the Queensland Industrial Court which provided an increase in sustenance allowance that not only was enjoyed by those sailors and firemen whose former lack of 'trade union consciousness' had been so apparent,207 but was also applicable to masters, mates, and engineers. Adopting an impersonal mode of address as disconcerting as it was memorable and that would soon become his distinctive 'trademark', the Brisbane branch secretary reported; "Elliott was selected to advocate by the

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205 *ibid.*
206 *ibid.*
207 Minutes CC meeting 1st session 10 April 1936 MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4/76 CY Reel 3500 frame 0092, ML.
other unions and the court granted the variation which had been unsuccessfully sought for fifteen years."\(^{208}\)

Davidson in his *Short History* of the CPA says that the Australian Party had received no warning of the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany of August 1939.\(^{209}\) Initially, news of the signing of the Pact was gleaned by the CPA leadership from press reports released from Berlin.\(^{210}\) With opposition to the Pact developing among "the masses",\(^{211}\) it was felt necessary to advise State Committees on 25 August that while no clear explanation for the policy of the Soviet Government was yet available it was nevertheless clear that "the responsibility of the present situation rests with the British Government and must be sheeted home."\(^{212}\) Three days later, the CC having hurriedly formulated its policy, instructions were transmitted to State Committees for their immediate attention. Menzies had pledged Australia to support Great Britain, it must be made clear the CPA instructed that:

> ...his government is in the minority and cannot speak for the Australian people... Under cover of the grave anxiety in the minds of the people, the Government has introduced a series of emergency measures which attack the very foundation of democracy. The greatest possible protest movement must be organised against this. We must show that the purpose of the legislation is to establish a dictatorship in Australia.\(^{213}\)

And as a consequence the CC stated that "we must oppose any co-operation with the Government and particularly any tendency for participation by the Labor party in the Government."\(^{214}\) "Reactionary" Labor leaders such as Curtin and Forgan-Smith who "are repeating the treachery of 1914 and [have] fallen completely into line with the British and Australian bourgeoisie in the conduct of the imperialist war," must be rejected.\(^{215}\)

The policy of these people in regard to the war, the CC announced, "must be strenuously

\(^{208}\) *SJ* November 1939.
\(^{209}\) Davidson, *Short History*, p.78.
\(^{210}\) Minutes Central Executive CPA 24 August 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 16 (76), ML.
\(^{211}\) Ibid.
\(^{212}\) Circular No.161 CC CPA to "All State Committees", 25 August 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
\(^{213}\) Circular No.163 CC CPA to "All State Committees", 28 August 1939, *ibid*.
\(^{214}\) Ibid.
\(^{215}\) Circular No.211 CC CPA to "All State Committees", 8 November 1939. *ibid*. 
fought by the labor movement." Weapons captured earlier from the 'enemy' should be deployed against them:

At the same time, this does not mean that we indulge in any form of indiscriminate denunciation of Labor leaders or that we cease our attempts to win leading elements in the Labor Party for working class unity and action. There must be the most careful differentiation between the reactionary labor leaders and those who can be won for a progressive policy.216

On 21 September 1939, the general secretary of the CPA, J.B. Miles, reported to the Party's Central Executive that discussions with comrades Sharkey and Hylander had determined that in the forthcoming SUA annual ballot for office "we cannot support any proposal to nominate anyone against Daley."217

With antipathy rife between officials and between officials and members, the situation within the SUA was apocalyptic. There were "conflicts and rumours of conflicts."218 Even if Daley agreed to stand-down, the CPA leadership reasoned, factional struggles would be certain to develop around candidates, "especially should Elliott nominate."219 Factional struggles had characterised the SUA before and for some time after the election of Daley to the general secretaryship. The failure of the 1935/36 strike and "the incompetence and degeneration of Keenan" had brought the SUA down to a very low level, a situation of which Walsh and Johnson had taken full advantage.220 While Daley now posed a problem, his record was not entirely one of failure, as the CPA leadership conceded.

Daley was critical of Keenan during the strike when he was not so closely associated with our members as he became later. After the election of Keenan and while still not closely associated Daley took a stand against factionalists in recognition of the elected secretary. Later as returning officer Daley got rid of Johnson as a candidate. On becoming secretary Daley got rid of Walsh. As General Secretary he helped to defeat the disrupters and establish Elliott as secretary in Brisbane. He also rid the union of Clarke in Melbourne, consequently greatly weakening the influence of this bitter enemy of our Party.221

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216 ibid.
217 Minutes CE CPA meeting 21 September 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16. ML.
218 Circular No.182 CPA CC 29 September 1939. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
219 Minutes CE CPA meeting 21 September 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16. ML.
220 Circular No.182 CPA CC 29 September 1939. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
221 ibid.
It was a not inconsiderable list of achievements. And the CPA leadership had to admit that the union's resurgence had begun with the appointment of Daley as general secretary. In fact, the financial position was described as "...never better than it is today."222 But, so far as the CPA leadership was concerned, Daley was merely a stopgap.

We have no doubt that a man able to avoid some of Daley's errors could have done still better. However, he was beyond question the only possibility to improve the situation and we are convinced that to support anyone against him today would result in new factions and a set back to the union. We know, despite political weaknesses due to lack of training and consequent errors, that Daley is loyal to his class, the union and to us.223

Daley lacked the drive needed to get things done, but there was no real evidence to support accusations that he was losing support among the membership. The CC secretariat saw such accusations as emanating from "a few doubtful people associated with Keenan and from a few in our own ranks [emphasis added] who base themselves mainly on Daley's faults."224 As for allegations that Daley's fumbling discredited the CPA, the CC secretariat reminded Party members that Daley was a member of the ALP. "Only a few people who fail to make allowances expect him to know always what we would do in the particular case".225 The SUA's Sydney branch was seen by the CPA leadership to be "certainly dangerous from our standpoint". If the CPA supported another nominee to stand for office against Daley there would at once be a faction fight. Sydney officials would be certain to raise "the CP bogey" and there would be opposition from Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth branches. Further, if a militant were to challenge Daley by nominating for office as general secretary, then there would be real danger that a third nominee from 'outside' might slip in. At all costs that had to be prevented.

Therefore, we recommend full support for Daley and work for Daley by everyone to ensure a substantial majority. We will endeavour to influence Daley at all times, so as to minimise frictions and aid the progress of the union.226

222 *ibid.*
223 *ibid.*
224 *ibid.* Also see Keenan's expression of self-justification and criticism of Daley in, Keenan to "Danny" [Malone?], 6 December 1938, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
225 Circular No.182 CC CPA, 29 September 1939, *op cit.*
226 *ibid.*
And with a view to counteracting "bad influences on Daley and increase ours from day to day" it was further recommended by the CPA leadership that Comrade Barney Smith should nominate for the Sydney branch secretaryship. In the meantime, the CC Secretariat exhorted the Party to provide "every support to Newcastle and Brisbane offices."227

A month closer to the date of the SUA ballot, on 31 October 1939, as a result of discussions that the CPA senior leaders Miles and Sharkey had with Dodds and Hylander of the Sydney SUA fraction it was realised that, "there has been no real preparation to undermine H [Herbert]."228 A few days later in a covert circular marked "run no risk of this document going astray, make no copies, destroy as soon as not required, ensure acknowledgement of receipt",229 it was announced by the CPA leadership that all state centres and Newcastle had fully endorsed its proposals in regard to the SUA. However, the CC stated, "subsequent information and consultations participated in by the persons mainly concerned in Sydney and Newcastle cause us to propose modification."230 The suggested nominee for Sydney branch secretary, Comrade Smith,231 was "not keen on the idea", since no real preparation had been made for the ousting of the incumbent, Herbert.

This means, in our opinion, that the change should be postponed till we can direct the fire in the required direction and stop the general sniping and tactically wrong sniping at Daley by K [Keenan] and his allies who include some persons carrying Party cards. We have also been reminded that K some time before any attention was given by our people to nominations, told Herbert that the fraction had decided to run Smith against him. This caused a show-down, the former being exposed to H as a liar. To now nominate Smith is to give a weapon to K and H.232

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227 ibid.
228 Minutes CE of CPA, "Seamen", 31 October 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16 (76), ML.
229 Circular No.206 CPA CC "to all state committees", 4 November 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
230 ibid.
231 Barney' Smith had been a member of the seamen's Central Strike Committee of 1935/36 and had assisted in the publication of the unemployed workers' movement newspaper Progress. See SJ January 1945.
232 Circular No.206 CPA CC "to all state committees", 4 November 1939, op cit.
In another move in their ‘game of chess’, the leaders of the CPA decided that Comrade Smith should nominate for the Melbourne branch secretaryship, where the incumbent was considered to be weak.233

With the SUA ballot now imminent, CPA policy was to refrain from challenging any official of the SUA other than the Melbourne secretary. The CPA must "work to ensure the decisive return of Daley, Franklin, Elliott and Barney Smith. Efforts are being made to get in touch with the latter."234 But ten days later further complications had arisen "owing to the difficulty of keeping in touch with people in ships."235 It was unclear now whether Smith would nominate for office. Brisbane had reported that a certain William Bird had already nominated for the Melbourne branch secretaryship but since the nomination had not yet been officially received, "it may still be possible to adjust this matter, so that we can propose support for one nominee in Melbourne."236 Obviously the seafaring environment was still such that seamen remained 'hard to manage'. Out of the fog of uncertainty, however, something positive had emerged. In Brisbane, in addition to considerable industrial acumen Elliott had been demonstrating a wider political awareness.237 Now, J.B. Miles, general secretary of the CPA, was able to report that "the reaction of Comrade Elliott to our proposals in connection with nominations had developed well."238

When the results of the ballot for office held at the end of 1939 were announced, it was found that in a four cornered contest, Daley had been re-elected as general secretary with 55.8 per cent of the formal vote. Keenan, with a mere 13.1 per cent, had come bottom of the poll. In Sydney, Chris Herbert was re-elected unopposed as branch

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233 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Minutes CE of CPA 14 November 1939, "Seamen", MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16, ML.
236 Ibid.
237 After taking office in Brisbane in February 1936, Elliott was elected foundation secretary of the Maritime Council of Queensland, a united front organisation of maritime unions. See "First Annual Report of Maritime Council of Queensland", D170/6/9 WUA. See also Dixon's statement of a united front policy, 24 July 1936, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 4 CY Reel 3500, ML.
238 Minutes CE of CPA 14 November 1939, "Seamen", MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16, ML.
secretary as was Reg Franklin in Newcastle and Harry O'Neill in Adelaide. On the other side of the continent, John Byrne easily retained his position as West Australian branch secretary. In Melbourne the relatively unknown Bill Bird, with 20.5 per cent of the formal vote, had defeated two other contestants and was runner-up to the re-elected branch secretary John O'Neill. In Brisbane, Elliott resoundingly defeated his only rival when he obtained 75.2 per cent of the formal vote. But the toll that the material and moral deprivation of the Depression years had taken of the commitment of the SUA membership is clear from the fact that, in this ballot at the end of 1939, of the 2475 ballot papers issued only 1656 members or 66.9 per cent of the membership had taken the trouble to vote.239

Decreased profit margins upon a large capital investment prompted a proposal by the CSOA, on 2 October 1939, to increase freight rates by 20 per cent over those prevailing at 31 August. This resulted in an application to the shipowners from the united front of maritime unions comprising the MTC for a commensurate increase in sea-going wages. When the unions’ application was promptly refused, the matter was brought to the attention of the Minister for Commerce in the Menzies government, who was also chairman of the wartime Shipping Control Board. He informed the council on 26 October 1939 that it was a matter for the federal Arbitration Court, that shipowners were paying very high war risks insurance premiums, and that in any case Australian coastal seamen were "more fortunately placed in the matter of risk than are their colleagues who are operating in ships in European and other northern waters."240 But a 'war risks' bonus was definitely on the horizon with a subsequent application being made to the federal Arbitration Court by the MTC for a 20 per cent increase in seafarers' award rates.241 The seamen may have seen the Commonwealth Arbitration Court as the preserve of lawyers

239 "SUA Annual Election 1939-1940: Final Count", D170/6/9 WUA. Also, SJ March 1940.
240 Minister for Commerce to Secretary Maritime Transport Council, 26 October 1939, cited in SJ December 1939. See also Ministerial Statement of 15 November 1939 and answer to question upon notice of 18 April 1940, CPD Vol.162, p.1141 and Vol.163, p.55.
241 See Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 November 1939. E183/3/6 ABL. Also, SJ November 1939.
preoccupied with common law principles where precedent and the obfuscation of legal formalism took little account of actual industrial practice,\textsuperscript{242} but war-time was about to alter even that situation.

S.J. Butlin has established that from the outbreak of war, avoidance of labour stoppages that might interrupt the flow of war supplies was a primary concern of Government. Butlin found that Government policy was fragmented and piece-meal rather than integrated, and that it was reaction to the exigencies of war rather than a response to any effective industrial or political pressure which ensured that seamen were among the first to receive concessionary and conciliatory gestures.\textsuperscript{243} By April 1940 amendments to the Arbitration Court's responsibilities and procedures were being introduced in accordance with a policy that, in Butlin's words, was:

...the simple one of using wage inducement to attract labour into the limited range of industries with which as yet the Government was concerned, and to preserve peace in those industries. As a short-run policy it was fairly successful because of the conditions under which it operated, and in retrospect it was probably the appropriate policy for the time, although it was evolved not as a conscious and comprehensive view of the issue but as a simple reaction to immediate problems.\textsuperscript{244}

Since it was anticipated that in maintaining the flow of essential war materials, they might be attacked, merchant ships were fitted with guns as a defensive measure. Franklin in Newcastle reported to general secretary Daley, in December 1939, that the Melbourne Steamship Company's\textit{Mernoo}, together with BHP's\textit{Iron Chieftain} and\textit{Iron Knight} each had a gun mounted onboard and their seamen were being given instruction in gunnery at sea.\textsuperscript{245} "It seems rather peculiar", Franklin commented, "that the shipowners quote there is no war risks yet we have this situation prevailing. Hoping this will assist you in your efforts to gain an increase in rates."\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{242}See "Snares of Arbitration" by "Maritime Worker (Sydney)", SJ November 1939.
\textsuperscript{243}Butlin, \textit{War Economy 1939-1942}, p.241-249.
\textsuperscript{244}Ibid. pp.39-42.
\textsuperscript{245}\textit{Iron Chieftain}, with a cargo of coke, sank within five minutes and \textit{Iron Knight} laden with iron-ore sank within two minutes when they were torpedoed by Japanese submarines off the NSW coast in 1942 and 1943 respectively. In each case there was heavy loss of life. Gill, \textit{Royal Australian Navy 1942-45}, p.75 & p.253.
\textsuperscript{246}Franklin to Daley, 6 December 1939, E183/17/1 folder 3, ABL.
When Judge George S. Beeby handed down his judgment on 14 February 1940 in regard to the sea-going unions' application for a war risk bonus of 20% additional to award rates, he began by observing that the control of Australian merchant shipping was now vested in the Admiralty, with both coastal and overseas ships on Australian articles having been brought under wartime regulations. These regulations, he observed, "evidently proceeded from belief of the authorities that substantial war risks existed in Australian waters." Shorty after the declaration of war the National Maritime Board of the United Kingdom had agreed that the special war risks to which merchant seamen were exposed justified the payment of a bonus amounting to an increase of 30 per cent in the wage rates of seamen, firemen and trimmers. Further, by an Act of the Westminster Parliament on the day that war was declared, 3 September 1939, pension rights equal to those paid to members of the armed forces were extended to British merchant seamen. Since the outbreak of hostilities, the Commonwealth Price Fixing Authority had investigated the shipowners' claim for an increase in freight rates of 20 per cent and directed that the increase should be reduced to 10 per cent. Meanwhile, Judge Beeby observed, "it is obvious that for the time being direct war risks of the Mercantile Marine in Australian Coastal and Pacific Ocean ship transport are not very serious." In referring to the evidence and argument before him, and specifically with reference to the calculation provided by the solicitor representing the SUA which showed that on a trip from Sydney to Melbourne including days in port for a ship carrying 5700 tons of cargo the added wage cost arising from a 20 per cent increase in wage rates would be 1.321 pence per ton of cargo, Judge Beeby, however reluctantly, was "forced to the conclusion that war risks and the discomforts arising from war regulations justify the granting of special allowances." So it was purely as a consequence of extraordinary wartime conditions that the seagoing awards were varied in a manner that was considered commensurate with risk, responsibility and discomfort. A 'war allowance' of an

248 Ibid.
249 Ibid.
additional 12.5 per cent on all sea-going award rates for interstate and foreign-going ships and 5 per cent for intra-state ships was awarded on 14 February 1940, and made effective from 15 December 1939.\textsuperscript{250}

Lasting bitterness had been engendered among Australian merchant seamen when they were specifically denied repatriation benefits after the First World War. The attitude of one veteran, with the outbreak of the Second World War, may be gathered from his letter to general secretary Daley on 14 June 1940:

> You and the Executive Officers or CoM should get busy right away on this matter... many of us... have been denied the Rights and Privileges as Returned Men, under the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Preference Act of 1919-20, been on Relief Work... Now they say not only work for the War, but fight for it or else?\textsuperscript{251}

Though the parliamentary wing of the labour movement claimed that it had been agitating for compensatory legislation for seamen for some three or four years,\textsuperscript{252} it was June 1940 before a deputation from the MTC to the Minister for the Navy and Commerce was assured that the relevant Bill was in its draft stage.\textsuperscript{253} And it was not until one year after the declaration of war, with its simultaneous introduction of that British legislation upon which it was based, that the Seamen's War Pensions and Allowances Act became law.\textsuperscript{254}

And then not before a member in the House of Representatives had objected in terms of:

> I should like to know whether or not it means that Australian seamen who are carrying out their duties in the comparative security of purely Australian waters will be treated substantially the same as naval ratings and soldiers who go abroad and run war risks.\textsuperscript{255}

\textsuperscript{250}Judgment, Beeby CJ, \textit{op cit.}
\textsuperscript{251}Rolfe to Daley, 14 June 1940, E183/19/2 ABL.
\textsuperscript{252}\textit{CPD}, Vol.164, 22 August 1940, p.563.
\textsuperscript{253}Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 25 June 1940. E183/3/6 ABL.
\textsuperscript{254}"An Act to make provision for payment of pensions and for the making of other payments in respect of Australian mariners who suffer death, disablement, detention or loss as a result of the present war, and for other purposes." No.60 of 1940. Assented to 24 August 1940. The Bill was given its final reading at 3.50pm in the House of Representatives and at 4.57pm in the Senate on 22 August, the last sitting day of the Fifteenth Parliament. \textit{CPD} vol.164, p.569. "The last hour of the last day of the last sitting of the last Parliament before the federal election in 1940", SJ September 1941.
\textsuperscript{255}\textit{CPD} Vol.164, p.569.
Meanwhile, merchant ships under instructions from the Naval Board sailed with navigation lights extinguished and, in addition to the more familiar hazards of seafaring, maintained a lookout for mines in Australian coastal waters.

At the stopwork meeting of the Brisbane branch on 25 June 1940, ten days after the CPA had been declared an illegal organisation under the terms of the National Security (Subversive Associations) Regulations, a resolution was moved by E.V. Elliott protesting against the "unlimited powers" of the War Precautions Emergency Act. While complimenting those individual parliamentarians who had opposed the introduction of the legislation, the resolution condemned the "industrially and politically traitorous action of the ALP in supporting the Act," which was seen as a means to "completely suppress all Trade Union rights and activities as is done in Fascist countries, and to enforce industrial conscription in its entirety." Another resolution protested against the "Gestapo-like raiding and ransacking" of E.V. Elliott's home, and a telegram from general secretary Daley which advised the members that to voice an opinion on that raid would be contrary to working-class policy was read, and formally disregarded.

Butlin has emphasised that the concern of the Commonwealth Government to avoid hold-ups in essential industries involved Cabinet in what would at any other time have been seen as matters of no significance. Thus the Minister for Commerce, writing in person to Elliott on 23 July 1940, acknowledged Elliott's request for an improvement in the scale of provisions laid down in Schedule III of the Navigation Act and stated that, "after consideration of the matter and after negotiations between the Director of Navigation and the Steamship Owners, I have approved of amendments to the

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256 As when on 22 September 1939 bosun William Usher suffered a compound fracture of the skull and was unconscious for five days, having been bashed against a hatch coaming when Howard Smith's coastal collier *Caledon* took a heavy sea inboard. See medical report Dr T Hamilton to Franklin, 27 January 1940. E183/17/1 folder 3, ABL.

257 Minutes stopwork meeting Brisbane, 25 June 1940. E183/3/9 ABL.

258 *ibid*.

259 *ibid*.

260 *ibid*.

scale as indicated hereunder. "262 Seamen were now to receive three additional eggs per week, fresh instead of dried vegetables, fresh milk whenever practicable, fresh fruit, more cheese, more use of salads, etc. Elliott had again been successful in achieving some amelioration of the seamen’s material conditions.

But in moving a motion of utmost confidence and co-operation with the MTC263 at a stopwork meeting of the SUA’s Sydney branch on 27 August 1940, Chris Herbert, the Sydney branch secretary gave full credit to the major achievements of the Council. These included, he claimed, "wireless aboard ship; amendments to Seamen’s Compensation Act; Central Pick-up Place; 10% War Risk increase; Seamen’s Pensions Act and many other matters, all of which had been brought about through our association with the Sydney Maritime Council."264 Herbert also informed the SUA members that at a meeting of the MTC it had been resolved upon a motion by Daley of the SUA seconded by Captain Lawrence of the MSG that the representatives of the MTC on the Government’s Trade Unions Advisory Panel would at the next meeting of the Panel move that the Government suspend the TWA for the duration of the war "and for any period thereafter in which it is felt that circumstances warrant such suspension remaining in force."265

By now, however, the Communist fraction within the SUA was intransigent in its opposition to the Labourist MTC, regardless of its achievements for the seamen. Barney Smith told the stopwork meeting that he had no faith in the Council or its Panel and would not support it, unless "it could achieve the lifting of the Licences (Dog Collars)." When members Fell and West supported Smith, Chris Herbert retorted that

262 Minister for Commerce to Elliott, 23 July 1940, D170/6/9 WUA.
263 The Maritime Transport Council (MTC) comprised representatives from the Marine Cooks, Bakers, and Butchers Association, Merchant Service Guild, Merchant Service Guild Harbours, River and Coastal Branch, Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, Professional Radio Employees’ Institute, Seamen’s Union of Australasia, Waterside Workers’ Federation, Firemen and Deckhands Association, Coal Lumpers’ Union, and Ship Painters and Dockers’ Union. See MTC publication D170/6/10 WUA.
264 Minutes stopwork meeting 27 August 1940, E183/3/6 ABL.
265 Ibid.
"the remarks of those against the motion intimated that they were only concerned in making a political football of the Seamen's Union, and were consciously or otherwise preventing any further possible chances of obtaining more and better conditions for all Seamen." It was, said Herbert, only as a result of the dedicated and persistent activities of the MTC in concert with the Labor Member for West Sydney that had brought about such improvements affecting the seamen's conditions. Herbert's motion of confidence and co-operation with the MTC was carried by a vote of 142 to 8.

It was thought that the ASF was virtually defunct. Nevertheless, in Sydney at least, non-unionists could still be found to take the jobs of SUA men as occurred in October 1940 as a consequence of a dispute onboard CSR's Rona. Thirty-one members of the SUA - ABs, firemen and trimmers - had been selected to join the ship when the crew changed. But before signing the ship's articles the SUA men discovered that neither of the two cooks onboard were members of the Cooks' union. When approached, the Cooks' union in fact refused to accept them as members. Upon the SUA men demanding that CSR replace the cooks with unionists, the company refused. It maintained that it had a responsibility to the two cooks who had been regularly employed onboard the ship for many years previously. At the shipping office the SUA men refused to sign articles, despite advice to the contrary from their officials, and the Rona eventually departed with a full crew of non-unionists, leaving thirty-one militant SUA members on the wharf, much to the chagrin of both their general secretary and Sydney branch secretary. Unable to manage its unruly members, the Rona dispute was an individual defeat for the SUA, in stark contrast to the laborist successes of the united front MTC.

266 ibid.
268 Minutes stopwork meeting 27 August 1940, E183/3/6 ABL.
269 ibid.
270 ibid.
As a consequence of the German-Soviet Pact of August 1939, and since the declaration of war on 3 September 1939, the CPA had pursued a policy of non-co-operation if not actual sabotage of Australia's national war effort.\(^{271}\) As 1940 drew to a close and the time for the annual ballot for union office approached the tension inside the SUA between the labourist leadership and the communist fraction came to a head over accommodation - for the seamen a matter of perennial discontent. There had been scant effort made by the shipowners to effect improvements to living conditions onboard their ageing coastal fleet during the depressed 1930s. Now, in converting the ship for wartime service, Howard Smith's twenty-seven years old Canberra was being refitted. A special meeting of the SUA in Sydney insisted that in course of the re-fit the seamen's accommodation which was located in the bows of the ship must be moved wholly aft.\(^{272}\) The federal government then intervened. A letter of 5 December 1940 addressed to the SUA general secretary from Attorney General and Minister for the Navy W.M.Hughes, in referring to the dispute in the Canberra, stated that:

> I understand that the men's objections arise from the fear that mines are present in Australian waters. If this is the case, I am prepared as Minister for the Navy, to recommend that the ship be fitted with paravanes without delay. This will ensure the protection of the ship against mines as far as possible. If this is done there appears to be no reason why the men should not accept the advice of the officials of their union [emphasis added] and take the ship to sea.\(^{273}\)

But the acerbic Hughes, who may have considered that he had done his share in effecting improvements to forecastle accommodation, inserted a sting in the tail of his message.

> I might point out that their failure to do so would force me reluctantly to consider recommencing the re-introduction of the regulations under the Transport Workers Act.\(^{274}\)

The familiar clash of uncompromising attitudes resulted. At another special meeting in Sydney, on 9 December 1940, the seamen heard that the CSOA had announced that

\(^{271}\)Thus, chairman CC CPA (L.Sharkey) to CPUSA, 4 February 1941, “we greet you, fighting shoulder to shoulder against the imperialist war. Under the invincible red banners of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, hand in hand the American and Australian workers... will triumph over the war-mad bourgeoisie.” MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 8. ML.

\(^{272}\)Minutes special meeting Sydney, 4 December 1940. E183/3/6 ABL.

\(^{273}\)Cited in minutes special meeting Sydney, 9 December 1940. E183/3/6 ABL.

\(^{274}\)Ibid.
while they had been willing make some alterations to the crew accommodation in the passenger ships *Canberra*, *Katoomba* and *Wanganella* provided that the SUA did nothing to delay the refitting and sailing of the vessels, they were now 'tit-for-tat' unwilling to make any alterations to the accommodation in the *Katoomba* and *Wanganella* in view of the attitude taken by the SUA in refusing to sign articles in the *Canberra*.\(^{275}\) Branch secretary Herbert moved that, in view of the Attorney General's threat, members of the SUA assembled recommend that their fellow members should immediately discontinue their action and offer for employment in *Canberra*. But after the Communist fraction had spoken against Herbert's motion, it was voted upon by the antagonised seamen present and "declared lost by a large majority".\(^{276}\)

By 30 December 1940, when the union was summoned to a compulsory conference by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, eight ships were held up in the port of Newcastle, with the SUA members stating that they would not sail until the ships were fitted with paravanes and degaussing equipment as a defensive measure against mines.\(^{277}\) Next day, at the stopwork meeting of the Newcastle branch, Daley told the assembled seamen that it was the order of the Court that the ships be manned. At the same time he repeated the assurances made by the Minister for the Navy that paravanes would be provided "as soon as possible."\(^{278}\) But his motion that "all members shall offer themselves immediately for employment on all vessels in the terms of the Award" was defeated with 115 members to 48 voting against.\(^{279}\) It was only after a telegram from the MTC, which recommended a return to work on the basis that the Government be given reasonable opportunity to fit the required equipment to the ships, was read to a special meeting of 250 members in Newcastle on 3 January 1941 that the seamen reluctantly agreed to man the ships.\(^{280}\)

\(^{275}\)Minutes special meeting Sydney, 9 December 1940. E183/3/6 ABL.

\(^{276}\)Ibid.

\(^{277}\)Minutes stopwork meeting Newcastle, 31 December 1940. E183/17/1 Folder 3. ABL.

\(^{278}\)Ibid.

\(^{279}\)Ibid

\(^{280}\)Minutes special meeting Newcastle, 3 January 1941. E183/17/1 Folder 3. ABL.
Two months later the CPA officially, specifically, and in uninhibited fashion renounced its support for Daley as general secretary of the SUA. It pronounced then that, "weak elements in leading trade union positions, hitherto on or inclined to the left, are retreating and capitulating under the blows of the class struggle." Daley was associated with Ross and Nelson in supporting the war-effort. They had joined the ranks of the "gang of bourgeois agents because they fear the consequences of the class struggle and hope to save themselves as lackeys of the ruling class". It was, announced the CPA, "the pressure of the bourgeois propaganda, carried into the labor movement by labor MPs and chauvinist trade union leaders, the scaremongering of Fadden and Curtin, the fears for the consequences of the coming blitz" that had so affected the "mass of the workers" as to enable these "renegades to get away for a time with their treachery". Daley was characterised as "the case of a reformist coming our way during the rising tide of our influence, and the influence of unity, in the struggle against fascism and to avert war."

The CPA took some comfort in the fact that Dimitrov had warned of such people. Daley, Ross, and Nelson were associated with the ALP. They had worked closely with the CPA while it suited them. But now they were condemned as renegades. They had deserted to the enemy from their class, from militant unionism and from militant labor.

Ben Chifley recalled the generation to which these seamen belonged when he said:

Hundreds of thousands of them could not get a job... But when the war started, imperilling the freedom of the economic individualists whose only god was Mammon and profit, and whose only concern the ability to continue to pay dividends, these young men were expected to risk their lives.

But that the seamen were exploited as much by radicals as by reactionaries is evident. The resurgence of the union was more a consequence of the exigencies of war than a matter of

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281 The following passage is taken from a circular issued by the CC CPA "To All Districts", 15 March 1941. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
282 ibid.
283 CPD Vol.177, p.1288.
effective leadership regardless of its ideological persuasion. And the improvement in the
seamen's material conditions, as it will become further evident, was bought at a price.
CHAPTER SEVEN.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND CONFORMITY: 1941-1943.

When, in March 1941, the CPA spurned Daley, Ross, and Nelson it pronounced that "the real movement is strengthened by their withdrawal, and their places are taken (though not yet their offices) by new recruits to the struggle for peace and socialism." A leading 'new recruit,' E.V. Elliott, formally advised the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar on 20 May 1941 that, effective from 17 May, William John Daley had ceased to hold office as general secretary of the SUA and that he, Eliot Valens Elliott, was duly elected in his place. Daley, in fact, resigned in a handwritten letter of 15 May 1941 addressed to the presiding officer and executive officers of the SUA in which he stated that he had quit his post regardless of whatever might be the result of the declaration to be given by the FRO. When announced, the final result of the ballot for office revealed that a total of 2003 seamen had registered their votes. Of the three candidates for the office of general secretary Elliott had obtained 58.2 per cent of the total, Daley had obtained 31.3 per cent and D.C. Rolfe had polled 10.6 per cent. In another three-cornered contest Herbert, with 42.2 per cent of the vote, had retained the Sydney Branch secretaryship, defeating the Communist nominee Barney Smith who polled 38 per cent. Franklin, J. O'Neill, H. O'Neill, and Byrne were returned as branch secretaries respectively in Newcastle, Melbourne, Adelaide and Fremantle. W. Eager had been elected as vigilance officer in Sydney. 'Bill' Bird, another Communist, had defeated Casey for office as Brisbane branch secretary when he obtained 54.8 per cent of the vote.

1CC CPA "To All Districts", 15 March 1941, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
2General Secretary SUA to Murray M. Stewart, Industrial Registrar, 20 May 1941, D170/6/10 WUA.
3W. J. Daley to Presiding Officer and Executive Officers SUA, 15 May 1941. E183/18/7 ABL.
4"SUA Final Count Annual Elections 1940-41", D170/6/10 WUA.
5Ibid. Bird joined the CPA in 1941, signing off the Zealandia on 13 March 1941 prior to announcement of the ballot results. See transcript Royal Commission on Espionage, evidence of W. H. Bird, 6 December 1954, p. 1657. Q21. MLMSS 5021 Box 105 (155). ML.
The leadership of the CPA had feared a resumption of faction fighting within the union in the event that Elliott should nominate for the general secretaryship of the SUA.6 And before the announcement of the ballot result, Fintan Patrick Walsh, the anti-Communist general president of the New Zealand Seamen's Union, suspected that the union's FRO had "endeavoured to fix the seamen's ballot in favour of his CP candidates,"7 Herbert told him that during the election "all kinds of filthy stuff was circulated (documentary and orally) as propaganda aboard ships in the fo'c'sles and messrooms and on the street corners and in addition [by] the CP sympathisers working on shore around the waterfront".8 In Brisbane, the leader of the anti-Elliott faction was identified as a certain Norman Hockney a seaman employed in dredges and occasionally in the Brisbane river pilot boat Matthew Flinders.9 Hockney issued a leaflet, entitled To Our Seamen Comrades which, in a parody of Communist rhetoric, advocated that the seamen vote for Elliott for general secretary, Smith for Sydney secretary, Bird for Brisbane secretary and Eager for Sydney vigilant officer.10 These were described as "staunch members of our Party, although until now some of them, including ELLIOTT have had to keep this fact quiet. Now we have told them to work in the open as Communists, knowing that the seamen have not forgotten the 1935 strike when some of our members unfortunately broke the union."11 The leaflet ended with a series of slogans: "Down with the warmongers - Churchill, Daley and Herbert. Smash the War Effort. For a General Strike support Elliott, Smith, Bird and Eager. Support a Communist Australia."12

Elliott took the sham leaflet seriously enough to print an angry rebuttal, describing it as a "libellous roneod leaflet" of which the contents "were about as foul as the members

6Minutes meeting CE of CPA 21 September 1939, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 16, ML.
7F.P.Walsh to Herbert, 11 February 1941, D170/6/10 WUA.
8Herbert to F.P.Walsh 21 February 1941, D170/6/10 WUA.
9See Hockney's letter in the Brisbane Telegraph of 5 December 1939. Also his anti-Elliott leaflet entitled Banned by Bureaucrats, and undated typescripts held in the Elliott collection. D170/6/8 WUA.
10Leaflet, To Our Seamen Comrades, D170/6/10 WUA.
11Ibid.
12Ibid. See also statement of A.J.Wordsworth 13 January 1941, D170/6/10 WUA.
who are peddling it," and the mere possession of which, he warned, constituted a criminal offence.\textsuperscript{13} Calling upon members to disregard personalities and prejudices, politics and propaganda, Elliott announced that he had nominated for election to the office of general secretary "on MY INDUSTRIAL RECORD, and it is on my three years' industrial record in Brisbane that you should register your vote."\textsuperscript{14}

Daley had given no reason for his resignation prior to the announcement of the ballot. However, on the same day that he resigned he provided Keenan with copies of two resolutions emanating from a CoM meeting held in Sydney on 26 March 1941, which formally protested both the unconstitutional manner in which the ballot had been conducted and the erratic behaviour of the FRO. Each resolution was signed by general secretary Daley and by branch secretaries Herbert, Franklin, and H.O. Neill.\textsuperscript{15} Elliott would sign neither resolution, although he admitted that he agreed with their content "in principle."\textsuperscript{16} Keenan, in fact, had come close to sabotaging the election that brought Elliott to office as general secretary.

Keenan's behaviour during the ballot may have been due to his injured feelings as a consequence of his rejection by the CPA leadership.\textsuperscript{17} A stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch on 26 November 1940 had elected him FRO for the annual ballot which was scheduled to take place between December 1940 and 4 January 1941. During the ballot he announced that, of the total of 2000 ballot papers issued, some 360 had gone missing in Melbourne. Having been provided with funds by the general secretary,

\textsuperscript{13}E.V. Elliott to "Members of the Seamen's Union", D170/8 WUA.
\textsuperscript{14}ibid.
\textsuperscript{15}Daley to Keenan 15 May 1941, E183/18/7 ABL.
\textsuperscript{16}Minutes special meeting Sydney, 28 March 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
\textsuperscript{17}When Daley had been nominated for general secretary, the PB observed that "if Daley is elected, then it will be possible to so strengthen our position that K [Keenan] will either change his behaviour or be relegated to the background." Minutes PB meeting 1 July 1937, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 15, ML. Keenan wrote to a leading member of the fraction, "Danny," [Malone?] on 6 December 1938, "you have no idea Dan how sore I am about the whole question, my wipe off is purely a technical point and I feel that some form of pressure must have been applied to you." MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
Keenan then proceeded to Melbourne ostensibly to carry out an investigation. He claimed afterwards that he spent a week investigating the matter in Melbourne. Daley said that Keenan disappeared from sight for a week. The assistant FRO and the two official scrutineers became so alarmed at the continued absence of the FRO that they lodged all ballot papers and documents relative to the ballot with the union’s solicitor, and dissociated themselves from further involvement. Eventually Keenan reappeared and, having approached the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar in Melbourne, obtained the Registrar’s written opinion that the ballot was null and void and that a fresh ballot should be conducted. However, when he returned to Sydney and made his initial report to the members at the January stopwork meeting, he omitted to mention that he had obtained that opinion, admitting it only under subsequent interrogation by Herbert. Meanwhile the fraction was pressing for a resumption of the ballot and declaration of the count, but was outnumbered. A motion by Barney Smith at the stopwork meeting in Sydney that the FRO be instructed to proceed with the ballot was rejected by chairman Fleming, and the chairman’s ruling was upheld by the meeting. Desmond Rolfe, the third candidate for office as general secretary, took the matter to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court with an application that the ballot be declared void and another undertaken in accordance with the Industrial Registrar’s opinion. But Chief Judge Beeby found, on 25 February 1941, that no actual evidence of the alleged irregularities in the ballot had been provided. Declaring Keenan’s evidence to be “valueless”, the judge stated that there was nothing to justify the interference of the union’s executive whose connivance with Keenan had resulted in the ballot result being delayed. It appeared, said Sir George, that on his return to Sydney, “Mr Keenan went back on all he had said to the Registrar and on whatever understanding he had with the Executive when they supplied him with L20 to cover his

18 General secretary’s report in minutes special meeting Sydney, 27 May 1941. E183/3/6 ABL. See also Herbert to F.P. Walsh, 21 February 1941. D170/6/10 WUA.
19 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 January 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
20 ibid. See also Telegraph and SMH of 30 January 1941.
21 Herbert to F.P. Walsh, 21 February 1941. D170/6/10 WUA.
22 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 January 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
23 SMH 12 & 19 February 1941.
Melbourne expenses". What exactly Keenan spent his L20 upon in Melbourne was not disclosed, but it was with what Judge Beeby described as "belated zeal" that Keenan decided to complete the count and demanded that the uncounted ballot boxes be returned to him. Dismissing Rolfe's application that the ballot be declared void, Beeby ordered that the count be completed and the result announced forthwith.

Hasluck recalls that when Prime Minister R.G. Menzies returned to Australia from a besieged United Kingdom on 24 May 1941, he referred to the 'sabotaging' of Australia's war effort by industrial stoppages which occurred despite the government's provision of unprecedented conciliatory arrangements. Menzies vowed that "the 'hard-headed disloyalist' who was out to do harm would be interned. Strikes and lock-outs would be prohibited". But the SUA did not rise to the bait. At that moment its attention was concentrated upon the 'disloyalists' within its own ranks. On 27 May 1941 general secretary E.V. Elliott presented the CoM report on the matter of the ballot to a special meeting of the union held in Sydney. The final item of the report dealt with Hockney, who now provided an early demonstration of Elliott's way with dissidents. It was recommended that since N.R. Hockney, member number 5997, had clearly been guilty of compiling and publishing a certain leaflet during the election, he be expelled from the SUA. And there was to be no question of his later slipping back into the union as Walsh had done. His expulsion was to be clearly recorded by all branches. As for Keenan, he was charged with neglect of duty under Rule 76. Under that rule he was entitled to a hearing by a special meeting of the union, but if found guilty would thereafter be ineligible for nomination to any official position in the union. And with the 'miraculous' re-appearance of the Seamen's Journal in July 1941 the members learned that "Joseph Keenan will be given the opportunity to prove his innocence of the charge at

24CA/175.
25CA/176.
26Cited in Hasluck, Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.364.
27Minutes stopwork/special meeting Sydney, 27 May 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
28Minutes stopwork meeting, Sydney 29 July 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
29Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 24 June 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
the earliest occasion on which a special meeting of the Union can be convened."\(^\text{30}\)

Meanwhile the CoM had agreed that the union's constitution should be 'modernised' to ensure that no alterations would be made to the official rules unless a majority of the CoM agreed that such alterations were urgently necessary. Lastly, the status of the elected leadership of the SUA was to be given recognition with increased wages for officials and a marked differentiation between the rates of pay applicable to senior and junior officials.\(^\text{31}\)

From the moment that Elliott was elected general secretary of the SUA he was seen to be actively engaged in promoting the members' material interests. Through the medium of the Seamen's Journal he skilfully publicised his attention to the real business of the union, that had for so long been neglected. Together with Franklin he attended the ACTU Congress on 2 June 1941. He boarded ships and personally settled numerous industrial disputes involving SUA members. He successfully defended his seamen against attempts to return them to forecastle accommodation in the Wanganella during that vessel's conversion to a hospital ship.\(^\text{32}\) And when, on 19 June 1941, he told Herbert that he considered the Government's impending permit system for seamen to be far worse than the licence system of the TWA, and suggested that the Sydney branch condemn the introduction of permits at its next stopwork meeting,\(^\text{33}\) he was talking the seamen's language from an unassailable position of practical experience.

Three days later, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union jolted the central executive of the CPA into print. Its circular entitled, "For the Victory of Soviet Russia," announced unequivocally that:

The unprovoked attack upon Soviet Russia by the bloodthirsty German fascists imposes upon the Communist Party and the working class the sacred duty of organising for the maximum support for Soviet Russia. This means to do

\(^{30}\text{SJ, Vol.1. No.1, July 1941.}\)
\(^{31}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{32}\text{Elliott to Herbert, 19 June 1941, E183/18/2 ABL.}\)
\(^{33}\text{Elliott to Herbert 19 June 1941, E183/18/6 ABL.}\)
everything possible to ensure the military victory of the Red Army and the crushing of the German Nazis.\textsuperscript{34}

And it was in terms of organising collectively to provide that 'maximum support' that the front page of the July issue of \textit{The Seamen's Journal} carried an article by the 'editor' entitled "The New Social Order". Labour thinkers, it recalled, had for years been warning that fascism was the inevitable outcome of the schism inherent within capitalism. Fascism would breed war and war would breed fascism, they had prophesised, "and so it had come to pass."\textsuperscript{35} Lack of an international policy of collective security had loosed fascism upon the world. Now, the \textit{Journal} admonished, the lesson must be applied not only internationally and nationally, but locally:

The policy of collective security can be implemented by the workers today in the industrial sphere against the attacks of the employer... A closer grouping of the forces of the waterfront workers is essential to protect and advance their interests. There must be a better knowledge of the theory of struggle among seamen... a common policy must be thrashed out. The days of spontaneous action are gone. The days of sectional antagonism are gone. Today action should arise only out of a complete discussion and thorough understanding of the implications to all concerned.\textsuperscript{36}

The immediate need was to establish discipline.\textsuperscript{37} Implicitly, it was essential to look to that authoritative "advance-guard of the proletariat," that Lenin had identified. An authority was urgently needed that would be "capable of assuming power and of leading the whole community to Socialism, fit to direct and organise the new order, to be the teacher, guide, leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their common life without capitalists and against capitalists".\textsuperscript{38} And so, the 'editor' of the \textit{Seamen's Journal} continued:

\begin{quote}
It is we, the workers in industry, who will build the 'new social order'. The old order of exploitation and profit will be intensified into a system of Fascism unless we are educated in theory, and mobilised in organisation, to prevent it. So just what the 'new social order' will be depends on you and me - the only 'new social order' which
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34}Circular No.31 "Statement of the Central Executive CPA", MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
\textsuperscript{35}SJ July 1941.
\textsuperscript{36}ibid.
\textsuperscript{37}The late Ted Roach, former leader of the WWF and a contemporary of Elliott's, stressed that strong internal discipline was essential in giving effect to his union's policy in 1938. Roach, "Commemoration of the 1938 \textit{Dalfram} Dispute", address to the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History; Illawarra Branch, Wollongong, NSW, 25 February 1996.
\textsuperscript{38}Lenin, \textit{State and Revolution}, p.30.
can benefit the seaman is the control of production and distribution by the workers. A system which will give to each worker according to his needs.39

And now was the time, the 'editor' concluded, "It is our task - yours and mine - to start building this 'new social order' right on the job - today, now."40 Meanwhile, another page of the Journal advised members that the 20% war bonus had raised the daily rate of pay of both the AB and trimmer from 11/10d to 14/3d, and that of a greaser or fireman from 13/2d to 15/10d.41

Appearing before Piper CJ in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in Melbourne on 27 August 1941, Elliott successfully appealed for overtime payments to be made to the SUA men in the Melbourne Steamship Company's Lowana. He interviewed the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar and pressed for deregistration of the ASF. He had meetings with officers of the Minister for Labor and Industry concerning abolition of the shipowners' bureaux in Sydney and Melbourne.42 He approached the Minister for Customs in an attempt to have supplies of tobacco, for purchase by the crew, placed onboard ships. Surely the SUA membership had never known such an energetic general secretary, or one so selflessly dedicated to the pursuit of improvement in the living and working conditions of the Australian merchant seamen. Attending conferences of the Ship Building Commission, he voiced the seamen's desires in regard to the accommodation to be provided in the new 'River'-class of cargo ships to be built by the Commonwealth43, and whetted their appetites44 with a report that:

\[\text{39 SJ July 1941.} \]
\[\text{40 ibid.} \]
\[\text{41 SJ August 1941. The Shipping Control Board began requisitioning Australian registered ships in July 1941. Under the Shipping Requisitioning Regulations Statutory Rules 1941, the cost of crew payments additional to the award rates applicable at 1 July 1941 were refunded to the shipowner by the Commonwealth Government. See Butlin, War Economy 1939-1942, pp.187-188.} \]
\[\text{42 Elliott to all branches SUA, 27 August 1941. E183/2 Folder 4 ABL.} \]
\[\text{43 The Commonwealth constructed a total of 13 'River' class ships, River Clarence being the first ready for service in May 1943. See Butlin & Schedvin, War Economy 1942-1945, p.475. Also Pemberton, Australian Coastal Shipping, Appendix II, p.289.} \]
\[\text{44 See motion carried at Brisbane stopwork meeting, 29 July 1941. E183/3/9 ABL.} \]

That this union initiate a policy to ensure that all ships built in the future for the Australian trade shall have quarters built amidships on a special deck provided for the crew, cabins to be provided in place of the old forecastle. We furthermore express our desire that more civilised type of messing arrangement be provided, this to be along
It was tentatively agreed that the whole of the poop would be given over to the seamen with two berth cabins, settees, bunk lights and modern furnishing. The vessels would be of 2,700 net tonnage and would carry 1 bosun 12 ABs, 1 OS, 1 donkeyman, 2 greasers, 15 firemen and 1 attendance [crew attendant] each side. There will be a messroom and recreation room between nos. 3 and 4 [hatches] and it was contended that there would be modern oil winches which would be almost noiseless... The Ship Building Commission is to draw up the modified plans and submit them to the Union for their consideration.45

Was there any valid reason why the Commonwealth's plans should not be so modified? The question was pertinent when the first Soviet ship to visit Australia presented visible proof that the material conditions for which the SUA had so long struggled were readily attainable, under the system of Soviet socialism. Although a cargo ship with a crew of only thirty-two this Soviet vessel carried a qualified doctor who told Elliott that her primary duty was to ensure that the crew enjoyed a balanced diet and lived in hygienic conditions.46 The ship's second engineer was also a woman.47 The third female member of the crew, a steward, served meals in the communal messroom where everybody onboard ate the same standard of food "exactly the same as in a restaurant." Everybody on board wore the same uniform and shared a recreation room known as "the Lenin corner" where they enjoyed the provision of a radio broadcast receiver and books. A meeting of all crew members was held weekly in order to discuss the running of the ship, and the ship's captain assured Elliott that when on duty he was "Comrade Captain" but at all other times he was addressed as "Comrade Alexor". This vessel, Elliot informed a no doubt suitably impressed SUA membership, was only a

the same lines as that now operative for officers and engineers, the present rotten system of mess kits and incompetent boys and aged seamen as mess men to be abolished.

45Elliott to all branches, 27 August 1941. E183/2 Folder 4. ABL.
46S/J August 1941.
47While challenging the dominantly male ethos of the contemporary deck and engineroom workplace, this would have been of particular significance to the seamen given the particularly antagonistic relations that existed between firemen and ships' engineers. See Franklin on "these vicious engineers" circular to branch secretaries 9 November 1938. And, Franklin to Daley 19 September 1939 and 18 December 1940, E183/17/1 Folder 3. ABL. Entries in MIC minutes of 15 April and 15 July 1942 refer to fisticuffs between engineers and engineroom ratings. That of July involved an assault by fireman W.A.Rigby, "who stated that he was under the influence of liquor at the time of the assault," and of whom it was asserted that "Rigby's record was bad." E183/6/2 & E183/6/1, ABL. On the historical perspective of this antagonism see Broomham, Steady Revolutions, p.40 & p.75.
standard British-built cargo vessel, some 24 years old. Nevertheless, "the living facilities provided for the crew under the Soviet flag far surpassed any modern vessel on the Australian Coast. She was a practical illustration of the benefits that have accrued to the Soviet workers since the Revolution." 

The new general secretary could employ conciliatory tones, to suit the occasion. Such an occasion arose when with his executive team of Herbert, Franklin and Bird, Elliott attended a conference of employers and employees called by the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service on 23 September 1941. Presiding over the meeting, P.J. Sheehan as Chief Employment Officer for the Commonwealth Department of Labour, expressed concern in regard to relations between union members and those who in the past had been 'volunteers'. If, as the representative of the rival seamen's federation claimed, a sense of animosity persisted, Sheehan considered that it would be necessary to retain the shipowners' hiring bureaux in order to provide a measure of protection for the non-unionists. But Elliott and his executive were at pains to allay his fears, assuring him that their main concern was to organise the seamen in a manner such that no 'incidents' occurred. Many seamen now employed on the Australian coast were recent entrants to the industry and had no personal experience of the bitter events of 1935/36. The continued existence of the shipowners bureaux, Elliott confided to the conference, merely prolonged that bitterness and provided a source of friction that served only to make the task of establishing harmonious relations within the industry more difficult.

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48 S/ August 1941.
49 Elliott to all branches, 24 September 1941. E183/2 Folder 4. ABL.
50 S/ August 1941.
51 When the North Australian Workers' Union told Elliott that SUA delegates in the Burwah had sought to enlist their assistance in removing former 'scabs', who had subsequently joined the SUA, from the ship, Elliott condemned the attitude of the delegates as contrary to SUA policy which was that "the more non-unionists that can be organised into our union the stronger becomes our case for the accomplishment of these aims" [de-registration of the ASF and abolition of the bureaux]. See Elliott to Secretary Waterside Section North Australian Workers' Union, Darwin, 11 August 1941. E183/19/2 ABL. Likewise, a former fireman seeking a job at sea who admitted that he had 'scabbed' during the 1935/36 strike was told by Elliott that, "we are not interested in your past history, and if you have the necessary qualifications we would be pleased to accept you as a union member." Elliott to E. Foster, 18 December 1941, E183/19/2 ABL.
Elliott avoided a confrontation when representatives of the shipping companies complained that seamen drunk and adrift ashore were making it impossible to maintain sailing schedules and that the situation was deteriorating.\textsuperscript{52} Admitting that some of the owners' allegations might be correct, he contended that the behaviour of a minority was simply a reaction to the increased tempo of shipping movements and to the bad working conditions and the mental strain imposed by the exigencies of war. The vast majority of SUA members disapproved of the dissolute behaviour of a minority and the union was endeavouring to bring the situation under control. After this restrained performance, it was left to the representative of the ASF, with whom the SUA delegates initially had been reluctant to share the conference table, to inform his erstwhile masters that conditions in some ships were actually so bad that no self-respecting seaman would sail in them. Shortly afterwards, on the invitation of the chairman, the ASF representative left the meeting.\textsuperscript{53}

A CPA memorandum of November 1941 stated that the Party's policy since 22 June when "the imperialist war had been transformed into a just war", was to provide full support for the allies and to campaign strongly for the opening of a 'second front' in Europe.\textsuperscript{54} To that end it was imperative that the workers should be organised for increased productivity. Accordingly, the Party would actively discourage any industrial action such as "irresponsible strikes" which in any way hindered the war effort against Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{55} But the CPA was aware that:

\begin{quote}
In carrying out this policy we are suffering from the heritage of the previous period, above all the economist outlook developed amongst the workers is one of the greatest hindrances and difficulties which we have to overcome in the carrying out of our new policy.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{52}Elliott to all branches, 24 September 1941. E183/2 Folder 4. ABL.
\textsuperscript{53}ibid.
\textsuperscript{54}Typescript, 14 November 1941. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
\textsuperscript{55}ibid.
\textsuperscript{56}ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
And among those workers who undoubtedly exhibited an 'economist outlook' were some 2492 interstate merchant seamen (including 90 who were not members of the SUA), of whom 1501 claimed Sydney as their home-port, 455 belonged to Newcastle, 320 sailed out of Melbourne and 92 signed articles in Adelaide.57

Across the front page of the November 1941 issue of the Seamen's Journal, under a banner "Unity of the People," the SUA membership was advised of its newfound social status.

The seamen today occupy a particularly important position, and each can do much to add his strength in the struggle to defeat Fascism... Every merchant seaman on the Australian coast is actively engaged in this war just as much as the seamen in the Navy, or any branch of the fighting forces. Merchant seamen are adding their heroic deeds to the magnificent acts of other workers in the fight against Hitlerite Germany.58

But social status entails responsibility, as the 'editor' emphasised:

We seamen must readily undertake our small part in this great struggle with the same fortitude and strength as our British and Soviet comrades.
We seamen must realise that delay for one day of an Australian ship may be an act of sabotage that will ultimately cause the death of our front line defenders...
We seamen must pledge that no act of Australian seamen will hinder the all-out production and transport of war materials...
The Australian seamen must now be equally as militant in the international fight as they are in the industrial sphere.
Maritime workers must become a leading force in this people's war, and in so doing mobilise international workers' unity.59

Economism was dealt with summarily on page two of the Journal under the heading, "Saboteurs and Provocateurs". But, in fact, it was a matter of striking a bargain. The ASF must be deregistered. The shipowners' bureaux must be abolished. The seamen's working and living conditions must be improved. Wages must be increased. Hours of work must be reduced and greater benefits must be secured through legislation. In return, any action by an individual seaman which hindered attainment of the union's policy would be accounted sabotage. A member advocating such action was committing an act of provocation. No seaman was to allow himself to be provoked into delaying a ship. "To

57 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 September 1941. E183/3/6 ABL. West Australian seamen did not rate a mention.
585f November 1941.
59 Ibid.
decide to stick-up a ship [sic] without notifying the Master and the Union officials, and
giving them a chance to negotiate, is a crime against your fellow members in the
Union."60 That there was need for such a bargain, however, became apparent only when
the reader reached page three of the November Journal. There, under a heading "General
Secretary Reports", Elliott revealed that in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in
Melbourne on 10 November 1941:

The Union would be appearing before the Chief Judge in the Court, stressing the
fact that there was harmony in the industry and that we should be the one and only
Union, and five minutes later Court would be adjourned and we would be in a
compulsory conference being told by the Chief judge that ships were then being held
up.61

His position when representing their interests, he protested, had been rendered both
difficult and ridiculous. The bargain was to be between E.V.Elliott and the seamen.

On 11 December 1941, just four days after the Japanese attack upon Pearl
Harbour, the new Curtin Labor Government summoned all the maritime unions to a
conference in Melbourne for the express purpose of discussing delays to shipping
movements. Sir Owen Dixon, who in previous years had so vigorously advocated de-
registration of the SUA, chaired the conference. Having announced that it might be
necessary to promulgate drastic regulations to ensure continuity of sea transport, he
adjourned proceedings until 19 December.62 During the adjournment, the union
representatives comprising the MTC met in Sydney and on 15 December unanimously
issued a resolution pledging whole-hearted support and full co-operation to the
Government. An "Appeal to Employees in the Shipping Industry" was issued signed by
executive officers of all the maritime unions, including Elliott and Herbert of the SUA,
which stated that any delay in the departure of a ship was viewed as being a hindrance to
the nation's war effort. All affiliate members were requested to do everything possible to

60 ibid.
61 ibid.
62 SJ January 1942.
expedite shipping movements. Again emphasising that it was crucial to the war effort that no ship was delayed by industrial action, the Council focused directly upon the seamen:

Any delay is invariably due either to an industrial dispute or to the disinclination of seamen, for various reasons, to accept positions on board ships. In the matter of industrial disputes we strongly urge both Waterside Workers and Seamen to avail themselves of the present system of speedily adjusting all such disputes through Conciliation Commissioners WITHOUT CEASING WORK. We appeal directly to seamen wherever possible to minimise the number of vacancies occurring on a vessel at the one time, thereby making it easier to fill such vacancies. If you have grievances, bring them under the notice of your officials who are working at top pressure to have all such matters adjusted. WE URGE UPON YOU NOT TO CEASE WORK PENDING ADJUSTMENT. This Council sends out an S.O.S. to all qualified seamen to play their part by coming forward in answer to the call for men to fill all vacancies on board ships. In conclusion we wish to assure you that this Council is working continuously to make your conditions of employment more attractive and feel certain of good results from these efforts in the very near future.63

When the federal Government resumed its conference with the MTC in Melbourne on 19 December 1941, it announced that it was intended to establish a maritime industry board with union representation together with a reserve pool of merchant seamen similar to that created by the British Ministry of War Transport under the ‘The Essential Work (Merchant Navy) Order, 1941.64 The MTC delegates were subsequently invited to Canberra where, on 24 December 1941, they had discussions with Prime Minister Curtin, the Attorney General, and the Ministers for Supply and for Commerce together with their various departmental officials.65 Having studied the draft regulations relevant to the proposed reserve pool of seamen, the union delegates did not favour establishment of a pool, but did favour the establishment of a board in the manner outlined by the Government which they suggested should immediately address itself to the matter of the 44 hour week. They recommended, too, that it consider such matters as accommodation and catering, manning, preference, an increase in the rate of war risk bonus, and recognition of the Merchant Service as a fighting unit.66

63 MTC publication "Appeal to Employees in the Shipping Industry", D170/6/10 WUA.
64 See Ministry of War Transport Notice No. M.198, D170/7/25 WUA.
65 SJ January 1942.
66 ibid. Under a headline, "New Deal for Seamen", The Evening Post reported that it was decided to form a "Royal Australian Merchant Service" with status equivalent to the fighting services. The paper remarked that "ever since Japan entered the war, ships loaded with important war materials have been held up in ports. Owners and seamen have indulged in their customary recriminations against each other." The Evening Post, 5 January 1942.
Demonstrating the importance and urgency which it now attached to the matter of maritime industrial relations, it was only a week later, on 2 January 1942, that the federal Government promulgated the National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations. The purpose of these was "to secure during the present war the adequate and efficient manning of Australian merchant ships and the improvement and safe-guarding of the conditions of all persons serving therein." These regulations brought into being the Maritime Industry Commission [MIC] the chairman of which, Mr Justice De Baun of the New South Wales Arbitration Court, was appointed by the Governor General. Eight members were appointed to the MIC by the Minister for Commerce. Of these, one was a nominee of the Commonwealth Government, two represented the CSOA, and one represented the independent steamship owners. The remaining four representatives were executive officers of the maritime unions. They were Tudehope of the Cooks' Union who was also secretary of the MTC, Captain Lawrence of the MSG, McPherson of the AIMPE, and Elliott of the SUA.

Clause 7 of the Maritime Industry Regulations set out the MIC's area of jurisdiction. This included; hours of work, leave, accommodation and catering, manning, selection, rating, preference, status, war-risk bonus payments, and the employment of seamen in shore labour and shore labour in ships. The MIC was in fact charged with administering the arena within which shipowners and seamen traditionally demonstrated their mutual antagonisms. Moreover, in order that it might carry out its declared purpose in a time of emergency without let or hindrance, the MIC was granted unprecedented power by the federal Government under the National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations, which allowed it at its discretion to issue orders which overrode any existing law or Act or award, whether federal or state.

67Statutory Rules 1942 No.2 National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations. D170/7/25 WUA.
68Minutes MIC meeting 14 January 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
69Statutory Rules, 1942, No.2. National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations, Clause 7 section (1) sub-sections (a) to (l).
70Ibid, Clause 7 section (3).
Accordingly, one of the MIC’s first orders was directed at the Dethridge Award of November 1935 which, in particular, had been the source of much antagonism. When the award was varied in accordance with the MIC’s "Forty-four Hour Week Order 'E'", of 26 February 1942, which was Gazetted on 2 March 1942, the Journal greeted the event ecstatically:

The Maritime Unions of Australia have achieved the most revolutionary progress in the history of the seamen of the world. No member of the Seamen’s Union of Australasia in an Australian ship will now work more than 44 ordinary hours in any week without getting compensatory time off or overtime in lieu thereof.

Continual hold-ups of ships "caused by a few irresponsibles" had seriously delayed the order. Was it any wonder, asked the Journal, that general secretary Elliott "became wild?" In fact, between the first meeting of the MIC on 14 January and its third meeting on 5 February 1942, there had been 22 incidents in which ships were delayed as a result of industrial disputes involving the crew.

Here we had the greatest benefit ever sought and the huge majority of Union members were being denied its introduction because of a few. But after continual delays and fierce arguments it now operates... Actually we secured 44-hour conditions that compare more than favourably with our shipmates in other Unions... There it is. Australian seamen have got what no other seamen in the world have got... The Australian seamen can be rightly proud of their Union leaders and the Labor Government, which together have made this revolutionary improvement possible.

In the January 1942 edition of the Seamen’s Journal Elliott claimed that "the Australian seamen have secured more gains in the last six months of 1941, than they ever gained before in the history of the maritime industry." The planned policy that he had set out on taking over as general secretary of the union (on 17 May 1941), he said, had been achieved. The case for deregistration of the ASF had been presented to the federal Arbitration Court, which had reserved its decision. The shipowners' bureaux had been
closed. Working and living conditions had been "slightly improved in numerous vessels."\textsuperscript{77} Without recourse to a lengthy and expensive arbitration hearing the seamen had obtained an increase in their wages.\textsuperscript{78} The forty-four hour week had been achieved and the 'Capture Clause' added to ships' articles of agreement\textsuperscript{79} so that a seaman's wages did not cease in the event that enemy action so interrupted the voyage that he was made a prisoner of war. It was now time, Elliott told his membership, to consolidate the gains of 1941 and to concentrate on improving living and working conditions and legislative protection. "Any fool can stick-up a ship", he informed the SUA membership, "it takes decent sensible seamen to keep them running when it is vital for the defence OF OUR CONDITIONS [emphasis added] to keep them running."\textsuperscript{80}

When A.S.Elford of the CSOA circularised the members of the shipowners' federation on 23 January 1942 regarding the second meeting of the MIC which he had attended in Sydney on 21 and 22 January, he was able to report that a dispute onboard Scott Fell's \textit{Echunga} had been settled when the cook voluntarily left the ship. Tudehope and Elliott had both admitted that this was an unsatisfactory settlement, with Elliott stating that rather than divulge the name of the seaman who had caused the trouble, "the Union would deal with him if he caused further trouble."\textsuperscript{81} Elliott had also undertaken to endeavour to prevent any delay in the sailing of McIlwraith's \textit{Kooliga} when the seamen onboard demanded that ventilation fans be installed in their accommodation. And when the SUA men in the \textit{Barwon} refused to sail until 'frigidaires' were supplied, "Mr Elliott undertook to do what he could to get the ship away, and it was subsequently reported that she had sailed."\textsuperscript{82} No doubt the members of the shipowners' federation were heartened to learn that the MIC, "after considerable discussion," had agreed that the chairman

\textsuperscript{77}ibid.
\textsuperscript{78}From 1 November 1941 the federal Arbitration Court awarded ABs and Trimmers a 7\% increase in their ordinary daily rate, firemen received an increase of 6.3\%. \textit{SJ} January 1942.
\textsuperscript{79}See copy of 'Capture Clause' D170/7/25 WUA.
\textsuperscript{80}\textit{SJ} January 1942.
\textsuperscript{81}Australasian Steamship Owners' Federation circular F.24, 23 January 1942. D170/7/25 WUA. See also minutes MIC meeting 21 & 22 January 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
\textsuperscript{82}Circular F.24, \textit{ibid}.
should inform the Shipping Control Board of the Commission's opinion that all companies should instruct their masters that, without fail, they should log seamen for any offences committed and enforce all fines as provided under the Navigation Act. And the Commission was debating further disciplinary measures when it was adjourned to a future meeting.  

Elliott spoke of the union's new spirit. "The trust that almost every member has in the leadership of the Union," was new. And then, too, there was "the new bond between rank and file and officials created by the Seamen's Journal whereby all the membership know what is happening in the Union."  

But if the seamen were to have a future, they must mobilise to maintain a ceaseless continuity of shipping movements in order to defeat fascism. And this meant that "every ship must elect delegates, have meetings of members, discuss Union benefits and Union problems, educate new members, discipline any unruly members." A timely letter published in the Journal from 'Fred Sullivan,' addressed to his fellow rank and file members, supported the general secretary's homily:

I think it is time we got together and put our house in order... Although a militarist war is on, we must not lose sight of the fact that the class war still exists. We must still wage our fight against the shipowners for better working conditions. For us to achieve success we must organise on every individual ship appoint ships' committees and give them power to discipline the uncontrollable members, a number of whom are using our Union and are in the industry for their own convenience. Remember, we must be organised to have discipline!  

But delays to shipping movements persisted. There were numerous cases of sailors or firemen going ashore and failing to return so that a ship could not sail on time. Fully laden ships lay against wharves when they should have been at sea.

These things must not occur. There is neither reason nor excuse for them. Seamen are now working for a Labor Government which they helped to elect. The Government now runs the interstate ships... The Government cannot carry out any policy if the workers are going to hinder it.  

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83 ibid.  
84 J January 1942.  
85 ibid.  
86 ibid.  
87 ibid.
The SUA could not and would not be seen as failing in its duty to the Commonwealth Government of the day!

When the final results of the annual SUA ballot which was held at the end of 1941 were announced early in the new year, it was found that of 2640 ballot papers issued 2140 were returned. Some 81 per cent of the membership had registered a vote. Elliott was returned as general secretary with a massive majority of 1764 over his only rival, Rolfe. Franklin, too, was returned with a large majority of 1029 in Newcastle, and Bird comfortably defeated Casey to be returned as branch secretary in Brisbane. John O'Neill and Harry O'Neill were returned in Melbourne and Adelaide respectively, while Byrne in WA had been unopposed. In the Sydney branch, however, Herbert was narrowly defeated by the Communist Barney Smith whose majority of 93 was only 30 more than the number of those who returned informal votes. But however narrow the margin, the result was a triumph for Elliott, who was now able to form a disciplined team with his two 'junior' Communist secretaries in the Brisbane and Sydney branches together with the active co-operation of a militant Franklin in Newcastle. And, as events would demonstrate, neither John O'Neill nor Harry O'Neill, far less Byrne, were of sufficient personal conviction to offer any significant opposition to the now dominantly Communist SUA executive.

On 10 February 1942, just five days before the garrison in Singapore surrendered to the mercies of the victorious forces of Imperial Japan, the chairman of the MIC met with Prime Minister Curtin, Attorney-General Evatt and the Minister for Supply, Mr Beasley. The discussion centred upon the matter of discipline. De Baun told Curtin and his Labor ministers that, in the considered opinion of the MIC, the penalties presently

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883/ March 1942. This was in marked contrast to the 25% participation rate that had elected Daley general secretary in June 1937. See Workers Weekly 9 July 1937.
89ibid. On the recommendation of Tudehope of the cooks' union and McPherson of the AIMPE, Herbert was subsequently employed as an 'Investigation Officer' by the MIC. See MIC minutes 4 & 5 March and 8 & 9 April 1942. E183/6/2 ABL. Acknowledging only that "during the eight months he had been in office, Mr Herbert had co-operated with him to the utmost," Elliott bestowed faint praise upon Herbert at his departure. Minutes stopwork meeting, Sydney 27 January 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
imposed upon seamen for infringement of the terms of ships' articles of agreement were inadequate.\textsuperscript{90} When it was intimated that the Commission should retain full disciplinary powers in its own hands, De Baun provided the Prime Minister with the draft of a suggested amendment to the National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations which would confer upon the Commission the powers that it considered to be necessary for the maintenance of discipline onboard merchant ships, and which it was hoped the Government would shortly authorise.\textsuperscript{91}

The next day, 11 February 1942, at the meeting of the MIC in Melbourne which was routinely attended by Elliott, Mr Edwards of the shipowners submitted a proposal "to secure better discipline."\textsuperscript{92} The shipowners, in effect, proposed that all penalties for infringement of the articles of agreement should be increased in severity. Without fail, all offences were to be entered in the ship's official log-book and all penalties were to be enforced. Discharge certificates were to be issued strictly in accordance with actual conduct, and any seaman who received three bad discharges was to be debarred from further employment in the shipping industry, subject to appeal to the Commission. It was also proposed:

That the Federal Government be asked to take steps for the policing of waterfront hotels and the proprietors thereof be warned to conduct their premises strictly in accordance with the licensing laws. Mr Murphy [CSOA representative] undertook to frame a submission to the Home Security Branch of the Attorney General's Department, setting out the character of the problem and asking for the assistance of the Branch by instituting a wide system of surveillance on the waterfront.\textsuperscript{93}

All these proposals, presented on behalf of the shipowners, were adopted by the meeting.\textsuperscript{94}

A sub-committee of the MIC comprising the two representatives of the CSOA, the federal Government's nominee, and the general secretary of the AIMPE was formed on

\textsuperscript{90}Taken from minutes MIC meeting 11 & 12 February 1942, E183/6/2 ABL.
\textsuperscript{91}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{92}Taken from minutes MIC meeting 11 & 12 February 1942, D170/7/25 WUA.
\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Ibid.}
12 February 1942 to report on measures to ensure enforcement of shipboard discipline.95 Specifically, the sub-committee's task was to advise the MIC on the duties to be allocated to the 'Seamen's Inspector', a grade of official that the Commission proposed to introduce. When the sub-committee met in conference on 13 February it was joined by the secretary of the CSOA and the superintendent of the MMO, Melbourne.96 No representative of the SUA was appointed to or attended the meeting. Bearing in mind that the only union represented was the AIMPE, which was traditionally a pro-shipowner organisation with a history of antagonistic relations with firemen, trimmers, and greasers the bias of this sub-committee is obvious.97

The required report was provided with alacrity. In fact, on the same day that it was appointed the sub-committee recommended a more effective way in which to discipline wayward seamen, "based on the assumption that legal power will be provided to enable the recommendations to be carried out."98 An Inspector of Seamen should be appointed in every port. He should collect and collate information on all discharges other than 'Very Good'. He should warn any seaman who had collected two 'bad' discharges and take the necessary action to disbar any seaman from the industry who collected three 'bad' discharges. He should procure and supply seamen when so requested by a shipmaster, officer, or other representative of a shipowner. He should make it his business to report to the MIC any breaches of regulations by any seaman which might come to his notice. At other times, "he should frequently attend picking-up places for the purpose of observing conduct, noting refusals to offer for work, and generally keep himself acquainted with matters affecting seamen."99 It was also to be part of his duties to assist the appropriate authorities in controlling the liquor traffic "in so far as it affects

95 "Report of Sub-Committee appointed by the MIC to report on Disciplinary Measures", Melbourne 13 February 1942. D170/7/25 WUA.
96 ibid.
97 For the historical aspect of the "excellent agreement" between marine engineers and shipowners see Broomham, op cit, p.41 & p.75.
98 "Report of Sub-Committee appointed by the MIC," op cit.
99 ibid.
The Inspector of Seamen, this latter-day combination of crimp, informer, policeman and press-gang was to be an employee of the State under the direct supervision of the Superintendent of the local Mercantile Marine Office. Lastly, the sub-committee considered that in order to ensure no seaman might avoid the implications of a 'bad' discharge, the option open to a seaman under Section 67(2) of the Navigation Act (to have the master's report of his character omitted from his discharge) should be overridden by an appropriate order of the Commission.

At the morning 'pick-up' in Port Kembla NSW on 25 February 1942 no men would offer to fill the three vacancies existing in the stokehold of the AUSN's Murada. Further efforts to secure the necessary seamen in Sydney at the morning 'pick-up' on 26 February also proved unsuccessful. Elford, of the CSOA, informed a meeting of the MIC that was held concurrently with the dispute that Sydney seamen declined to accept employment in the Murada unless they were paid £1 travelling expenses. Elliott explained that seamen incurred expenses in joining a ship at a port other than their home-port. Furthermore, he reported, the accommodation in the Murada was particularly poor and the coal recently provided had been so bad that the firemen and trimmers in the ship had experienced difficulty in maintaining steam pressure. The shipowners representatives on the Commission were evidently unimpressed, since it was resolved by a majority decision that the SUA should provide men for the Murada at the afternoon pick-up in Sydney on 26 February. If men did not offer for employment in the ship then the Superintendent of the MMO in Sydney was authorised to seek out and select the necessary men. If they refused to sign articles then those men were to be debarred from further employment in the industry pending their cases being considered by the MIC. Mr Elliott was to advise his members of the decision come to by the Commission. The outcome was MIC Order No.8, issued on 2 March 1942, which stated that:

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100 ibid.  
101 ibid.  
102 Minutes MIC meeting 25 & 26 February 1942. E183/6/1 ABL.  
103 ibid.  
104 Extract from report of MIC, 28 February 1942. D170/7/25 WUA.
Any member of any Maritime Organisation who refuses to comply with a request or instruction properly made or given by or in the name of the Maritime Industry Commission to fill a specific vacancy in any ship appropriate to his rank or rating, shall, subject to any further order of the Commission, be debarred from employment in the maritime industry.¹⁰⁵

No sooner had the Murada sailed than it was reported from Melbourne that there was a dispute in the Dundula. Two men had been logged by the master and when he refused to withdraw the loggings the crew had declined to proceed to sea. Elliott's appeal to his members at the afternoon pickup on 5 March having been to no avail, it was agreed by the members of the MIC "after discussion" that the Superintendent of the MMO in Melbourne be authorised to apply the provisions of MIC Order No.8. When he did so, seamen were obtained for the ship which then sailed.¹⁰⁶

Five days later, on 10 March 1942, Huddart Parker's Bass Strait ferry, Nairana, was delayed in Melbourne. The ship was still alongside the wharf on 13 March with the crew refusing to sail because their complement was short of one trimmer.¹⁰⁷ In this case, with the MIC not due to meet until 18 March, Mr Justice De Baun took matters into his own hands. Declaring that he would not permit the vessel and its 300 passengers to be subjected to any further delay he told J.O'Neill, the SUA Melbourne branch secretary, that if the seamen persisted in their refusal to sail they would be punished by the Commission. The ship sailed shortly afterwards. De Baun, having admitted to the Commission members that in this matter he had acted without their authority, it was resolved upon a motion proposed and seconded by representatives of the shipowners that:

The Chairman is authorised to take whatever action he deems necessary to issue orders in the name of the Commission in regard to preventing a hold-up or possible delay to ships, subject to consultation with such members as may be available and to a report being made to the Commission at its next meeting.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Minutes MIC meeting, Melbourne 4 & 5 March 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
¹⁰⁷ Minutes MIC meeting Melbourne, 18 & 19 March 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
¹⁰⁸ ibid.
But when, at the same MIC meeting, Elliott reported the concerns expressed by greasers in Adelaide Steamship's *Momba* in regard to curtailment of shore-leave due to the reduced time that the vessel now spent in port, he was advised by De Baun that "the men must carry on under the present system until some better arrangement had been made, and must not take the law into their own hands."\(^{109}\)

A week later, in Brisbane, the crew of Howard Smith's *Caledon* refused to sail until the chief steward, who had been convicted on a charge of possessing stolen property, was reinstated.\(^{110}\) Upon the advice of the MIC, the Deputy Director of Navigation in Brisbane prosecuted the SUA men under Section 100 of the Navigation Act. Each man was fined £5 or, in default, 14 days imprisonment. As a result, Mr Elford of the CSOA was able to report that the vessel had sailed on 25 March 1942. But with Australia now perceived to be under direct threat of invasion by the forces of Imperial Japan, and with the European spring likely to witness a second German offensive into the Soviet heartland, Elliott's only contribution to that particular meeting of the MIC appears to have been a proposal that at its next meeting the MIC give consideration to a recommendation that schools should be established to provide merchant seamen with training in gunnery.\(^{111}\) Certainly no effective resistance was raised to the introduction, on 25 March 1942, of the MIC's Order No. 19 which "notwithstanding anything contained in any law of the Commonwealth or of any State or Territory of the Commonwealth" provided a list of disciplinary offences and the amount of monetary fine (frequently the sum of five pounds) with which each offence was to be summarily punished. This disciplinary provision which was henceforth to be entered into the articles of agreement of every Australian registered ship,\(^{112}\) included such items as assault, being in possession of intoxicating liquor onboard ship without the permission of the master, drunkenness, possessing offensive weapons, insolent or contemptuous language or behaviour to the

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\(^{109}\) *ibid.*  
\(^{110}\) Minutes MIC meeting Sydney, 25 & 26 March 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.  
\(^{111}\) *ibid.*  
\(^{112}\) National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations, Order No.19. D170/7/25 WUA.
Master or Officers, disobedience of lawful commands, absence from the ship at sailing time, absence at any other time, and exposing lights at night "including the lighting of matches anywhere on the upper deck."113

"It has happened here!" the Seamen's Journal of March 1942 announced. "Darwin has been bombed by Japanese planes and Australian Workers and merchant seamen have suffered from these attacks."114 The extent of that suffering was censored, but of the estimated total of 250 people killed in Darwin as a consequence of the Japanese air-raid of 19 February 1942, the official RAN history states that some 170 were killed in warships and merchant ships in the harbour.115 Burns Philp's Neptuna was caught alongside the jetty discharging a cargo which included a large quantity of explosives. The ship received a direct hit from a Japanese bomb, caught fire, and was blown to pieces killing 45 merchant seamen. Of the other Australian registered ships present, the Zealandia was sunk, while the Manunda was damaged. The Barossa and the Tulagi had to be beached. WA Stateships' Koolama was bombed the next day in the vicinity of Darwin and eventually sank alongside the jetty at Wyndham during another air-raid.

"Australian seamen must uphold the valiant traditions of the merchant seafarers,"116 the Seamen's Journal of March 1942 intoned, and went on to announce that:

We seamen rightly consider ourselves second to none in the militant struggle in the industrial sphere. It is our privilege to prove to the Australian people that we are in the forefront in the fight to smash Japanese aggression against Australia... We seamen must carry the burden of helping to defend our people and our homes as bravely as the British and Soviet workers. We can only defend Australia by keeping all ships moving.117

113 ibid.
114 SJ March 1942.
115 This account is based upon Gill, Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942, pp.589-596.
116 SJ March 1942.
117 ibid.
Then, reverting to a materialism with which the working seamen would have been more comfortable, the *Journal* enthused over the 'fact' that seamen in those ships had secured for them "the legislative basis for the finest marine conditions in the world."\(^{118}\) But only because the maritime union officials had told Prime Minister Curtin "that under decent conditions the seamen would behave decently."\(^{119}\) Elliott's argument was that, provided they demonstrated a willingness to co-operate with their erstwhile enemies, the maritime unions were now in a position to harness the extraordinary power possessed by the MIC and so give effect to their material aspirations:

> It is obvious that the Maritime Industry Commission has unlimited power - always keeping in mind that it can only 'improve and safeguard'. Marine Unions can now avail themselves of the Commission to secure for their seamen the best living and working conditions in the world.\(^{120}\)

Unusual, in that he identified himself as its author, Elliott published an article in the *Journal* in which he responded to criticism from the rank and file. "Some members have shouted that I have thrown overboard all the militant ideas I once voiced," he exclaimed.\(^{121}\) He had been labelled a "shipowners' tool", when he condemned those who delayed shipping movements.

> Well, I reckon the improved conditions secured and my record majority at the ballot speak volumes which any seaman can understand. I am accused of forgetting the class war in my efforts to do everything to help win the war. Well, it's because I'll never forget the class war that I strive and work to win this war. This war is the greatest class struggle the world has ever known. The people of the USSR the socialist sixth of the world, are fighting against the hordes of Fascist Germany - the Socialist Soviet workers against the Capitalist German gunmen. We British are allied to the Soviet. Every gain we make against Japanese Fascism helps the Soviet crush Germany. Victory for the Allies is victory for the workers.\(^{122}\)

And he would defer to no one, said Elliott, in regard to the correctness of his attitude.

But rhetoric was not enough, as had been demonstrated by Keenan in 1936. Elliott endeavoured to show the membership that SUA officials really could harness the

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\(^{118}\) *ibid.*

\(^{119}\) *ibid.*

\(^{120}\) *ibid.*

\(^{121}\) *ibid.*

\(^{122}\) *ibid.*
authority of the MIC to the seamen's material advantage. A Journal report told of how SUA members refused to fill vacancies in the Poonbar, until primitive accommodation in the antiquated 900ton 30 year-old coaster was improved. Bird, in Brisbane, had reported the matter to Elliott, who brought it to the notice of the MIC. Upon the ship's arrival in Sydney it was inspected by the chairman of the MIC and Elliott, accompanied by the manager of the North Coast Steam Navigation Company, and, according to the Journal:

After inspection and measurements had been taken, it was agreed that the whole of the f'r'sle be gutted out and made into sleeping quarters. A messroom was to be built amidships and cabin for the donkeyman and the bosun. The room hitherto used by these two men was to be made available for the use of the firemen as a change room. In view of the age of this vessel and the difficulties of any reconstruction, it is considered that the improvements effected are a good evidence of the benefits of having a MIC.123

The case of the Period, however, did not rate a mention in the Journal. When Howard Smith's 35 year-old steamer was delayed in Sydney in April 1942 for lack of three ABs, the chairman of the MIC applauded Elliott's wholehearted, if unavailing, efforts to obtain the necessary men. The Superintendent of the MMO had been authorised under the terms of Order No.8 to obtain seamen for the ship, but had obtained only one man "as the men attending the pick-up dispersed on his approach."124 At a meeting of the MIC, Elliott reported that he had written to Howard Smith Ltd in regard to the crew accommodation in the ship but had received no satisfaction. "He had told the men to go away in the Period and he would try to get the accommodation improved."125 But Edwards of the CSOA said that though the ship was old, it had been manned for years and the present was not an appropriate time to be laying-up ships for alterations, which in any case would be difficult to carry out owing to the shortage of labour.126 Tudehope thought the attitude adopted by Howard Smith Ltd was unsatisfactory, but Mr Justice De Baun, as chairman of the MIC was of the opinion that if the accommodation was as bad

123ibid.
124Minutes MIC meeting. Melbourne 29 & 30 April 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
125ibid.
126The official history of the war economy records that by mid-1942 a critical situation obtained due to a shortage of ships and the consequent depleted carrying capacity of the coastal fleet. Butlin & Schedvin, War Economy 1942-1945, p.223-225.
as claimed then probably no men would have joined the ship. He was suspicious. It was of some significance, he remarked, that all except a few seamen had signed on. The MIC agreed that the SUA should be instructed to man the ship forthwith, while the Superintendent of the Sydney MMO should be authorised to continue his efforts to compel seamen to join the *Period*. Subsequently, as a consequence of the powers of compulsion exerted by the MIC, the ship sailed with a full complement of not altogether willing seamen.\(^{127}\)

At the Annual General Meeting of the SUA held in Sydney on 31 March 1942, with 340 members present, general secretary Elliott moved a recommendation of the CoM which, though couched in histrionic language far removed from that of working seamen, was nevertheless agreed unanimously by the members assembled:

> That while the Democratic Nations are engaged in this great war against fascism, we, as well as other citizens must change our ways from the ways of peace to the ways of war. That the Seamen's Union of Australasia undertake to man and sail the merchant ships, and to supply and support the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, right into the thick of the combat.\(^{128}\)

But Elliott met resistance from the floor of the meeting when, in stating that "we are of the opinion that Union disciplinary measures to protect the Union is preferable to Government action", he sought to move a further CoM recommendation to the effect that should any ships be held-up "where no Union principle is involved", the membership books of those involved should be impounded and all privileges suspended pending investigation by the union executive.\(^{129}\) The motion was carried but not before seamen present had expressed their concern at the formation of "a bureaucracy of the Executive" and that "it would be used as a means of coercion", and nineteen members had voted against it.\(^{130}\) The AGM, however, was unanimous in its approval of the recommendation that the SUA should continue to support the MIC since it was considered that its decisions to date had been of benefit to the seamen. The final recommendation of the

\(^{127}\)Minutes MIC meeting, Melbourne 29 & 30 April 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
\(^{128}\)Minutes AGM Sydney, 31 March 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
\(^{129}\)ibid.
\(^{130}\)ibid.
CoM put to the meeting by Elliott and carried unanimously was, “that the activities of the General Secretary be commended. We consider that his efforts on behalf of the organisation have been exemplary; his job at present, owing to war conditions, is a difficult one, and he is carrying it out with zeal and sincerity.” So exemplary had this general secretary’s efforts been, in contrast to those of his predecessors, that the union’s financial statement for the year revealed that the SUA possessed a credit balance of £337.3.11d in the bank.

When it was de-registered in March 1942, the outbreak of war had obviously rendered the ASF defunct. It had become an inactive body. It had no function. Certainly it no longer performed the purpose for which it had been initially formed - the protection of the industrial interests of the ‘volunteers’. In fact, the president of the ASF had joined the SUA! With the rival union dead and buried, Elliott had no need to participate in the discussion of preference in employment aboard ship which took place at the MIC meeting of 8 & 9 April 1942. Anyway, the outcome was to the SUA’s advantage with an agreement that “care be taken not to reduce the number of seamen available for employment.” But he did participate actively when the discussion turned to the matter of the little 730ton Alagna held-up by a crew dispute in Townsville. Elliott, at short notice, had personally gone to Townsville in order to persuade the seamen onboard to continue the vessel’s voyage to Darwin. Virtually defenceless, with only one machine-gun onboard to protect them from air attack and having seen the extensive damage inflicted upon a vessel caught in the earlier Darwin raid, the Alagna’s seamen had been chary of sailing into the danger zone until a second machine-gun had been obtained. The Government’s nominee on the MIC was appreciative of Elliott’s prompt action, remarking that:

131 SJ April 1942.
132 ibid.
133 SJ March 1942.
134 Minutes MIC meeting Melbourne, 8 & 9 April 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
135 ibid.
The Naval Authorities had been concerned over the long delay to Alagna, which was carrying urgent cargo, and it was only at his special request that they had refrained from taking immediate action against members of the crew.¹³⁶

But with the thaw in Russia and Hitler’s mechanised forces expected soon to emerge from their fortified positions in order to launch a second offensive into the territory of the Soviet Union, Elliott was in belligerent mood. Again he proposed to the MIC that a gunnery instruction school be instituted for merchant seamen.¹³⁷ And upon the front page of the April 1942 issue of the *Seamen’s Journal* it was announced that:

> The war in Europe is the pivot of Axis aggression. The outcome of the struggle in Europe will decide the future of Australia... We need simultaneous offensives with the Soviet armies. We need a Second Front in Europe.¹³⁸

In matters outside its immediate area of responsibility the MIC was not altogether successful in obtaining conclusive results. It could only accept the advice of the Secretary of the Navy Office, on 13 April 1942, that the policy of the Naval Board was to arm merchant ships "as quickly as guns become available."¹³⁹ And when Elliott proposed that steel helmets be provided for merchant seamen, especially in the northern danger zone, the MIC could only agree that "efforts be made" to obtain such equipment.¹⁴⁰ But it was evident that those efforts had amounted to little. At the end of April 1942 Tudehope of the Cooks Union found it necessary to move a motion that, in the case of vessels proceeding into the northern danger zone, the MIC strongly urge the authorities to provide each ship with anti-aircraft guns, steel helmets, medical outfits to military standard and "a person with a knowledge of first aid of a higher standard than usually possessed by ships' officers."¹⁴¹ Mr Justice De Baun said that he would "get in touch with the Naval Authorities that afternoon."¹⁴² As reported by the crew of a ship that had

¹³⁶ *ibid.*
¹³⁷ *ibid.*
¹³⁸ 30 April 1942.
¹³⁹ Minutes MIC meeting Sydney, 15 & 16 April 1942, E183/6/2 ABL.
¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*
¹⁴¹ Minutes MIC meeting Melbourne, 29 & 30 April 1942. E183/6/2 ABL.
¹⁴² *ibid.*
been attacked, the grisly fact was that "the ship's officers were unable to cope with the serious wounds suffered by members of the crew." 143

In matters with which it was more comfortable, however, the MIC's activities were decisive. Immediately after the bombing of Darwin, Mr Justice De Baun announced that an increased rate of war risk bonus of thirty-three and one third per cent additional to award rates would apply to Australian seamen in vessels trading north of Fremantle on the west coast and north of Bundaberg on the east coast and also on foreign-going voyages including those between Australia and New Zealand. Seamen on vessels on coastal voyages south of the specified ports would receive a war risk bonus of twenty per cent. 144 And, in exchanging the carrot for the stick, three members of the SUA were summarily debarred from the industry for refusing to join a ship when ordered to do so by the superintendent of the Sydney MMO in accordance with the authority vested in him by the MIC's Order No.8. One of them, it was reported, had then had the temerity to return to Newcastle, his home-port, where he had signed articles in a BHP ship. Having tracked down the erring seaman, the MIC told BHP to terminate the man's employment as soon as the vessel returned to Newcastle, and if he "had any representations to make, he should communicate with Mr Elliott and the matter would then be dealt with by the Commission." 145

It was fortunate for that seaman that it was BHP's Iron Prince that he joined in Newcastle and not the Iron Chieftain or Iron Crown. The former ship departed Newcastle on 3 June 1942 bound for Whyalla in South Australia with a cargo of coke but was shortly afterwards torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank with the loss of 12 men. 146 The latter, bound for Newcastle from Whyalla and heavily laden with a cargo of iron-ore, was torpedoed off Gabo Island on 4 June 1942 and sank immediately with the
loss of 37 lives.\textsuperscript{147} The 'danger zone' had shifted south. Gill, the official historian of the RAN in the Second World War, states that the Imperial Japanese Navy's concept of submarine warfare differed from that of the Germans in that merchant ships were considered a secondary target.\textsuperscript{148} Naval units provided the primary target, with merchant vessels providing merely 'targets of opportunity.'\textsuperscript{149} But that situation ended with the Japanese midget submarine raid upon Sydney harbour on the night of 31 May/1 June 1942.\textsuperscript{149} With the expenditure of their midget craft - their primary tactical weapon - Gill says that the five submarines of the 8th Japanese Submarine Squadron, which were then congregated off Sydney Heads, embarked upon a limited campaign of torpedo and gunnery attack upon merchant shipping along the coast of New South Wales. \textit{Iron Chieftain} was the first victim on 3 June 1942. Howard Smith's \textit{Age} suffered in the next attack. Approaching Newcastle, the ship was shelled by a Japanese submarine late at night on 3 June 1942, but managed to escape unharmed into Newcastle harbour in the darkness of the next morning. When dawn broke that same morning, Huddart Parker's three year old \textit{Barwon} north-bound around Gabo Island was assailed by gunfire and torpedo attack, but escaped without damage or casualty. In the same area, later that day, 4 June 1942, \textit{Iron Crown} was sent to the bottom. At 1am the next morning, off Wollongong, Scott Fell's \textit{Echunga} was chased by a submarine and, having fired one round at its pursuer from the gun mounted on its after-deck, escaped into the sanctuary of Port Kembla harbour.

Since the Naval Board suspended all sailings between Adelaide and Brisbane on 4 June 1942, it may have been for lack of targets that the Japanese submarines lying in wait off the NSW coast carried out a brief and indiscriminate bombardment of Sydney and Newcastle on 8 June 1942. However, that same day the Naval Board authorised the resumption of sailings, having instituted a system of coastal convoys for ships of more than 1200 tons whose service speed was less than 12 knots. These vessels would sail in

\textsuperscript{147}ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{148}ibid, pp.27-28. \\
\textsuperscript{149}The following account is based upon Gill, \textit{Royal Australian Navy 1942-1945}, pp.74-77.
convoy on the main coastal routes between Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane and for 200 nautical miles from the Australian coast in the case of ships traversing the Tasman Sea. Next day, 9 June 1942, the British ship *Orestes*, sailing independently, was shelled by a submarine but although set on fire managed to reach Melbourne on the 10th. Finally, a humble Panamanian tramp ship fell victim to the Japanese submarine squadron before a lull ensued in their 'limited campaign' on the eastern seaboard of Australia. Capable of barely seven knots at full steam pressure, straggling behind a convoy bound for Melbourne from Newcastle, the *Guatemala* and its hard-worked stokehold crew was an easy mark when at 1.15am on 12 June 1942 it was torpedoed 40 miles off Sydney.

Reporting on the loss of his company's *Iron Chieftain* from his office ashore, the Superintendent Engineer of BHP's industrial fleet paid qualified tribute to the seamen involved, conceding that, "altogether these men did well, in great contrast to recent events." 150 Then, too, there is a familiar whiff of condescension in the account of the Naval historian Gill, who confuses the merchant seaman's prosaic need to earn a living with the romance of a 'calling':

> Officers and men reacted well, and in the fine tradition of their calling; and their behaviour, and that of their colleagues who were to suffer similarly in succeeding months, offset such slur as had attached to the merchant seamen through the actions of individuals who were not typical of the strong heart that ran through the service. 151

Three individuals, survivors of the *Iron Chieftain*, typical members of the SUA, and Newcastle 'home-porters' were still under medical treatment on 3 August 1942 when BHP, having paid the men up to that date, flatly declined any further responsibility for its former employees and referred Franklin to the Repatriation Commission in Sydney, "as to what they... intend to do about them." 152 Two stewards were in a similar situation, Franklin confided to Elliott. He enclosed medical certificates issued on 15 August 1942, of which the contents of one was typical:

\footnotesize{150Cited in *ibid*, p.75.  
151*ibid*.  
152Franklin to Elliott 17 August 1942, E183/17/1 Folder 4. ABL.}
John Pratt - suffering from neurasthenia - unfit to carry on his usual employment - estimate will be incapacitated for probably some 2 or 3 months, 'if then'. Suffering from insomnia, general feeling of lack of confidence in himself, marked Tachycardia (rapidity of pulse rate and heart action). This is definitely a reaction and is the direct result of his experience in shipwreck. I do not think he will be fit to go to sea for some months yet. I would recommend that, if a suitable shore job could be found for him, it would be to his advantage. 153

"We are losing men at the rate of four and five per week in the port of Newcastle," Franklin told Elliott on 16 June 1942. "The position cannot go on much longer, combined with the fact that men who are still in the industry are not very keen to go to sea." 154 Seamen were seeking employment ashore and blame for that situation, according to Franklin, could be laid at the door of the MIC. It had failed to improve the seamen's conditions and "if it is necessary to keep such a Commission in operation [it] be re-constituted and be instructed on lines beneficial to members of the above organisation." 155 As for the 'benefits' that the MIC had introduced, no two shipping companies agreed as to the application of the 44 hour week, he said. Masters and engineers were inflicting the 'five pound log' on seamen excessively. It was as unreasonable to insist that a man remain at least one month in a ship before he might give notice 156 as it was to debar a man from the industry if he refused to take a job. Franklin, ever outspoken in defence of the material interests of those working seamen that he represented, told Elliott bluntly that:

The personnel of the Commission does not meet with the members' approval, and they view everything with the greatest of suspicion that happens on the Commission, and when anything of a drastic nature is introduced, members are of the opinion that the Commission is working in the interests of the shipowners, and not in the best interests of themselves. 157

153 Medical Certificate issued by J. Tooth Medical Officer, BHP Iron and Steel Works Newcastle 15 August 1942. E183/17/1 Folder 4. ABL.
154 Franklin to Elliott 16 June 1942, E183/17/1 Folder 4. ABL.
155 ibid.
156 Effective from 8 June an MIC order forbade any seaman from terminating his engagement in his home-port until he had completed a minimum of one month's employment in his ship. MIC Order No.27, D170/7/25 WUA.
157 Franklin to Elliott, 16 June 1942, op cit.
Elliott's response was a double-page spread in the July 1942 issue of the *Seamen's Journal*, headed, "All Ships Must Keep Sailing: Members Decide Policy."\(^{158}\)

The general secretary of the SUA had some trenchant criticism to make of the union's membership in the July 1942 *Journal*. The position in the industry in the middle of June, he said, was "criminal and disgusting."\(^{159}\) In fact there were more ships held-up in port than there had been during the strike of 1935/36! Laden with essential war-cargoes, with the crews receiving war-bonus payments, none of these ships could obtain a full complement of seamen. "In many ships as soon as men joined and the vessel looked like getting a full crowd others would quit", he said, and so ships remained alongside the wharf.\(^{160}\) According to Elliott, "the situation became so rotten", that the SUA executive of Bird, Smith, Franklin and Elliott had to be hurriedly brought together in Sydney in order to face the MIC.\(^{161}\) The general secretary reported that Wednesday, 17 June 1942, was spent in a prolonged and bitter argument between the SUA and the MIC in which the seamen's representatives told the Commission in no uncertain manner about "the rotten mates, rotten engineers, rotten accommodation, and rotten food."\(^{162}\) At the end of the meeting, however, the chairman of the MIC having expressed his disgust with the situation, issued an ultimatum:

> He asked everybody to consider overnight the question of whether the Union would control its members or whether the Government would take over the whole industry. This could mean that seamen would be joined up for the duration of the war the same as in the Navy, and to all intents and purposes the Union would go out of existence. Contrary to what some seamen might think, the most pleased persons in the conference were the shipowners. It appeared that some Union members had at last succeeded in smashing the Commission to which the shipowners have always been opposed.\(^{163}\)

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\(^{158}\) *Seamen's Journal* July 1942.

\(^{159}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{160}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{161}\) Bill Bird, the Communist Queensland branch secretary, was on vacation and had to be located by the police and flown to Sydney. The other members of the executive, i.e. the Victorian, South Australian and West Australian branch secretaries were not invited to attend.

\(^{162}\) *Seamen's Journal* July 1942.

\(^{163}\) *Ibid.*
According to Elliott's account, the MIC informed the SUA executive that it would be given an opportunity to convince its union membership that the ships must be manned. In the event of its failure to do so, a pool of volunteer seamen would be established. Subsequently the executive members of the union held meetings in all branches, except Fremantle. At each meeting two predetermined resolutions were agreed by the members. The first resolution was to the effect "that we, members of the Seamen's Union of Australasia... realising the urgency of the situation, instruct members to man ships and take all steps to keep them moving." All members leaving a ship were to be required to register with their local branch office which might call upon them to join a ship as and when required. In that case the second resolution applied; "any member who fails to join a ship when called upon will not be permitted to ship until he attends the next stop-work meeting and is judged by the members."

Within a week of the new policy being instituted, all sixteen vessels that had been held-up were fully manned and had sailed. "There it is!" Elliott announced. "It is quite short and simple. If the first resolution is carried out by the members, the second one need never be put into operation."
The MIC may not, as Franklin concluded, have been beneficial to the interests of the SUA membership but its activities had now provided the general secretary of the union, and through him the CPA, with an unprecedented degree of coercive power over the rank and file seamen.

In banner headlines, the July issue of the *Seamen's Journal* announced: "Steady the Helm!" The seamen now learned that their union had sailed close to the rocks. "There is a Labor Government in Parliament", Elliott announced, "if Menzies was still in power you would not be reading this, because we would not be a Union now." Implicitly, the general secretary had steered the SUA away from destruction. Now his authority was

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164 *ibid.*
165 *ibid.*
166 *ibid.*
167 *ibid.*
further enhanced and the membership was given further reason to be grateful for his effective intercession on behalf of their interests when the MIC announced in an order of 9 July 1942 that, as from 16 June, the war-risk bonus additional to the ordinary wages of seamen in Australian registered ships whether trading intrastate or interstate, in the transtasman trade to New Zealand, or on foreign-going voyages was increased to a comprehensive thirty-three and one third per cent. And, furthermore, in the case of a seaman who served in any one ship for a continuous period of six months the war-risk bonus would be increased to fifty per cent and would be made retrospective from the beginning of that six months' period. In ships carrying cargoes of explosives or flammable liquids, an additional amount of ten per cent above ordinary wage rates would be paid.168

Although Burns Philp's Macdhui was sunk in a bombing attack off Port Moresby on 18 June 1942, the lull that had ensued in the Japanese submarine assault upon shipping on the coast of NSW after 12 June led the Naval Board on 15 July to remove the protection afforded by coastal convoys. The lull, in fact, was only temporary - attributed by Gill to Japanese preoccupation with the allied attack on Guadalcanal.169 With the forces of Von Paulus converging on Stalingrad, Elliott's belligerent slogan was now: "We'll Keep 'Em Sailing! - Open Second Front Now!"170 But when Franklin wrote to Elliott on 3 August 1942 it was to tell him that meetings held onboard various ships in Newcastle on 16 July had culminated in a special meeting of the branch on 17 July at which it was resolved "that no ships leave the port of Newcastle until the present system of convoys be re-introduced."171 It was only after Prime Minister Curtin had intervened and personally assured Franklin on 21 July that "as a certain vessel had been lost" convoys would be re-introduced, that the seamen withdrew their ban.172

168 Ibid.
169 Gill, Royal Australian Navy 1942-1945, p.158.
170 5 August 1942.
171 Franklin to Elliott, 3 August 1942. E183/17/1 Folder 4. ABL.
172 Ibid.
There were two 'certain vessels', in fact. A Greek ship and an American one were torpedoed and sunk off Jervis Bay on 20 July. Yet another American ship was torpedoed 100 miles south of Jervis Bay on 22 July at 5.15am. At 6pm on that same day the Naval Board re-instituted coastal convoys. But the next day a number of seamen were killed in Adelaide Steamship Company's Allara when, sailing independently, the ship was torpedoed and heavily damaged off Newcastle. On 24 July, off Crowdy Head, a torpedo was fired at AUSN's Murada but missed its mark. Then, on 27 July, another Australian registered ship, the Coolana, was shelled by a submarine off Cape Howe, but escaped damage or casualties. The next day, 28 July 1942, at the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch the members stood in silence as a mark of respect for the two ABs and three firemen who had lost their lives in the Allara. The minutes then note that:

The General Secretary reported on correspondence received from the AUSN Company concerning the fate of members of the crew of the Mareeba which disappeared in the Indian Ocean in June 1941. These men were prisoners of a German ship which was torpedoed in the Atlantic on the 31st January 1942 by a German submarine. The submarine stood by and made efforts to save them, but half the crew were lost. The other half are prisoners of war in Germany. Received.

A week later McIlwraith's passenger liner Katoomba exchanged gunfire with and eventually outran a Japanese submarine off Esperance WA. At the same time a fishing trawler was sunk and three of its crew killed when it was shelled and machine-gunned off the NSW south coast by a submarine. And on 7 August, the Mamutu, an island ferry belonging to Burns Philp, was sunk by gunfire after which the Japanese submarine responsible machine-gunned survivors in the water. In all thirty-two crew and eighty-two passengers were killed. August 1942 ended with Burns Philp's Malaita torpedoed while navigating the approaches to Port Moresby.

When the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany, the policy of the CPA overnight became "to do everything possible to ensure the military victory of the Red

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173 Following account is based upon Gill, Royal Australian Navy 1942-1945, pp.158-159.
174 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 28 July 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
175 ibid.
176 Following account is based upon Gill, Royal Australian Navy 1942-1945, pp.159-160.
Army and the crushing of the German Nazis."\(^{177}\) By March 1942, the slogan across the front page of the SUA's *Journal* was "Only Shipping Keeps the Heart Beating!"\(^{178}\) Events in Howard Smith's *Period* in July 1942 demonstrated Elliott's commitment to the CPA's policy. The *Period* was delayed at Bowen in Queensland because its stokehold was undermanned. When two trimmers arrived to fill the vacancies the crew refused to have one of them onboard because he was a non-unionist. When the master ordered the crew to take the ship to sea one trimmer short, all but one man refused to sail. The crew then demanded that Williams, the man who was prepared to sail short-handed in contravention of the union's traditional policy should be paid-off. Elliott sent a telegram to the ship instructing the crew to sail immediately. Meanwhile two more trimmers were obtained and joined the ship which then sailed, leaving Williams on the wharf. When the matter was related to a meeting of the MIC on 15 July 1942, it was agreed that payment of the war risk bonus should be withheld from the crew of the *Period* for the time that the ship was delayed in Bowen and Elliott announced that "the policy adopted by Williams was that of the Union, and the Union would look further into this matter."\(^{179}\)

When two more ships were delayed on 3 August 1942, Elliott demanded a report from Franklin. In view of the serious situation that had arisen due to a shortage of industrial coal stocks the failure of the colliers *Age* and *Mungana* to sail with a convoy from Newcastle threatened serious repercussions.\(^{180}\) "Comrade", he wrote, "you are expected to be at the Maritime Commission on Wednesday."\(^{181}\) Franklin replied the next day, 4 August 1942. Howard Smith's *Age* had failed to sail for lack of cooks. As for the *Mungana*, he had discussed the situation with AUSN's agents, "but as we had no able seamen on the books, it was impossible to get them."\(^{182}\) And there was more industrial trouble at the end of August. With a meeting of the MIC imminent, Elliott wrote to

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\(^{177}\) CPA circular No.31, "For the Victory of Soviet Russia." MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.

\(^{178}\) SJ March 1942.

\(^{179}\) Minutes MIC meeting 15 July 1942, E183/6/1 ABL.

\(^{180}\) A shortage of coal threatened to shut-down the blast furnace at BHP's steelworks in Whyalla, South Australia. See Butlin & Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945*, p.225.

\(^{181}\) Elliott to Franklin 3 August 1942, E183/17/1 Folder 4, ABL.

\(^{182}\) Franklin to Elliott 4 August 1942, E183/17/1 ABL.
Franklin on 27 August asking why the *Iron Warrior* had failed to sail from Newcastle with its scheduled convoy. But Franklin's reply had a familiar ring. Not only *Iron Warrior* but *Arooma*, too, had been delayed as a consequence of a walk-off by ABs and firemen, after a dispute with officers and engineers.

Addressing the August 1942 stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch, Elliott stated that there were some 2700 members employed under the federal award in Australian registered ships. That total included 1500 new members who had been admitted to the union during the previous twelve months, of whom the majority possessed some previous sea experience. Meanwhile, the MMO records indicated that a considerable number of seamen remained unemployed. Why then, were ships so frequently delayed for lack of a full crew? In the month of August alone disputes had delayed seven ships belonging to various Australian coastal companies. Only the previous week, he told the meeting, Howard Smith's *Canberra* had been delayed in the port of Melbourne for lack of two men. The outcome of the industrial situation was that the MIC had decided on 5 August, with Elliott voting against it, that a Mercantile Marine Reserve should be formed.

When they subsequently met as the union's executive, however, Elliott, Smith and Franklin had unanimously carried a resolution "that we endorse the *principle* [emphasis added] of a Reserve scheme." The Reserve would guarantee continuity of wages for seamen who otherwise were unemployed between ships, Elliott said. It would also guarantee that no ship would be held up for lack of a complete crew, bearing in mind that the Commonwealth Government already possessed the power, and had already exercised it on several occasions, to compel men to join ships. The situation was now,
the general secretary of the SUA announced, that "the Union policy and the Government policy on this issue were the same and it appears that the Reserve scheme in its present intended application will create smoother working in the Industry." 189

The proposed 'Australian Mercantile Marine Reserve' was to be established by an order of the MIC and was to be under the Commission's control. Its objectives were to ensure "adequate and efficient manning of Australian merchant ships," by means of a reserve of seamen who would be available to fill all vacancies immediately they occurred. 190 But it was also to be established "for such other purposes as may be necessary to carry out the objects of the National Security (Maritime Industry) Regulations." 191 All Australian merchant seamen whether employed or not, whose last discharge was endorsed 'VG' were automatically to become members of the Reserve. As members of the Reserve, seamen ashore would be required to undergo medical examinations and to report to the superintendent of their nearest MMO as required. Members of the Reserve were subject to the discipline of the MIC at all times and would be assigned to ships as vacancies occurred by the Superintendent of the MMO. And "any member of the Reserve so assigned shall accept the employment," on pain of being suspended from the Reserve and consequently from the industry. 192

When a resolution supporting the formation of an Australian Mercantile Marine Reserve was put to the SUA members at the Sydney stopwork meeting of 25 August 1942, Barney Smith the Communist Sydney branch secretary supported it, saying that:

The minority were not going to sea and the majority were thereby being victimised, that over 200 seamen had been paid off in Sydney recently and had not re-engaged. The Union’s policy was to man all ships, seamen had to go to sea or get out. The Seamen’s Union was a national and international organisation and we were engaged in the international fight to smash Fascism. 193

189 ibid.
190 Draft "The Australian Mercantile Marine Reserve", D170/7/25 WUA.
191 ibid.
192 ibid.
193 Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 25 August 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
From the floor of the meeting a member reiterated a familiar argument. If the members rejected the scheme, he said, there were plenty of non-unionists who would take it up and man the ships. Member F. Thomas was the only voice to speak against the formation of the Reserve. It was tantamount to re-establishing the scab bureaux he warned, and "if men voiced an opinion they would be shot out." Later in the meeting he complained of "the manner in which the General Secretary had come to Newcastle during the dispute in June and stood over the members and threatened them." Elliott denied the accusation, saying that "he was bound to move all decisions of the Executive and the resolutions submitted in Newcastle had been the unanimous recommendation of the full Executive [emphasis added] comprising R. Franklin, B. Smith, W. Bird and E. V. Elliott." And when member Thomas continued his attack upon Elliott by reading a letter composed jointly by member J. Fell and himself which they desired should be published in the Seamen's Journal, the meeting decided 199:1 "that this letter not be published in the Journal or circularised, but thrown in the waste paper basket."

Member J. Fell chaired the stopwork meeting held that same day in Melbourne. There, an old antagonist of the CPA, W. J. Clarke, complained to the 160 members present of having been brushed aside when, during a visit to Melbourne for a meeting [presumably of the MIC], Elliott had had no time to discuss matters raised by the rank and file. Clarke then moved a resolution:

That this meeting regards Mr Elliott as a tool of the shipowners and views his actions and utterances as being against the interests of the Union and its members insofar as he has:
1. Condemned men for demanding convoys.
2. Accused members of helping the enemy.

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194 *ibid.*
195 *ibid.*
196 *ibid.*
197 *ibid.* Michels had observed, in *Political Parties*, p. 177.
Those in office are great zealots for discipline and subordination... They go so far as to exercise a censorship over any of their colleagues whom they suspect of rebellious inclinations, forcing them to abandon independent journals, and to publish all their articles in the official organs controlled by the leaders of the majority in the party.

The Seamen's Voice had served its purpose and would not reappear.

198 Minutes stopwork meeting Melbourne, 25 August 1942. E183/3/14 ABL.
3. Aided and abetted the Commission in its attacks upon Seamen and their conditions.
4. Used *The Seamen's Journal* to blackguard and black-list members of the Union.
5. Ignored the instructions and decisions of members from time to time.
6. Encouraged the placing of restrictions on Members of the Union.
This meeting therefore has no confidence in Mr Elliott and demands his resignation forthwith.\(^\text{199}\)

The Melbourne meeting, having agreed unanimously that it had no confidence in Elliott, a further motion was carried to the effect that: "We the seamen demand the right of free speech and freedom of the press, particularly in our own Union and [in] the case of Fell and Thomas their Article be published in the next issue of our Journal."\(^\text{200}\)

The August issue of *The Seamen's Journal* entreated members of the SUA to "Help End Fascism".\(^\text{201}\) They were reminded of the policy of the union which was "to man and sail merchant ships right into the thick of combat to defeat Fascism."\(^\text{202}\) But that policy was being thwarted because in many cases seamen were not available to man the ships. The object of the Reserve was twofold, the SUA membership was assured. It was to guarantee that no crew would be asked to sail short-handed and that no ship would be delayed for lack of seamen. In effect, a deal had been struck with a Labor Government that "has shown every sympathy with seamen's problems and has sought the advice of seamen's officials."\(^\text{203}\) Material benefits would be exchanged for conformity. The Reserve would bestow material benefits upon the SUA membership and impose penalties should the seamen evade their responsibilities. And the membership was reminded that they had made the decision to participate. Elliott said that he had voted against the scheme when it was first proposed, but subsequently the Union executive had unanimously endorsed the Government's plan after three executive officers [including Elliott] had analysed the situation. And now, "Union members have decided in the most democratic series of meetings ever held that men must man ships."\(^\text{204}\) And to clinch matters, the

\(^{199}\text{ibid.}\)
\(^{200}\text{ibid.}\)
\(^{201}\text{SJ August 1942.}\)
\(^{202}\text{ibid.}\)
\(^{203}\text{ibid.}\)
\(^{204}\text{ibid.}\)
enthusiastic support of the membership was evident in two letters from particularly articulate 'rank and file members' that were printed under the jaunty heading, "Members Say 'Keep 'Em Sailing":

Seamen play a major role... The time has arrived when we must pull up our socks, tighten our belts, and like the Red Army soldier go into battle with a stern, resolute will to win over the barbarians who are smashing civilisation.205

And:

It must be quite clear to all men of commonsense that our very existence as a nation, the safety of our loved ones, and the working-class ideals and conditions built up over a long period of striving and sacrifice by members, are dependent on the defeat of the Axis forces. Are these things not worthy giving our last ounce of strength and endeavour to defend? And shall we allow them to be endangered by the action of a few irresponsible fools in our midst?206

And the 'deal' with the Labor Government was sealed, the membership learned. Elliott had successfully negotiated with the CSOA through the federal Arbitration Court to have deck-boys, for the first time, included in the Seamen's Award. Piper CJ, in the Arbitration Court, had demurred at first, but when Elliott referred the matter to the Commonwealth Government, the application was granted immediately and the Award varied accordingly.207

And there was more, as balm was applied to an old sore. The Minister for Commerce in the federal Labor Government had endorsed the union's submission that seamen injured by enemy action deserved greater benefits than they were at present receiving. "Negotiations over this matter furnish another instance of the willingness of Ministers to confer with Seamen's Union officials to discuss problems affecting members," the Journal announced.208

General Secretary Elliott was notified by Branch Secretary Franklin that shipowners said they were not liable for payment to seamen injured by enemy action. Several injured seamen, in hospital at Branch Secretary Franklin's port, were married men needing money for their families. Minister Scully was phoned immediately and met

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205ibid.
206ibid.
207ibid.
208ibid.
Elliott and representatives of other Maritime Unions in conference the same day [emphasis added].

Elliott had also raised the matter with the MIC, the next morning [emphasis added], and the Government's nominee on the Commission talked with the shipowners concerned. Next day [emphasis added] Elliott was able to advise Franklin that the shipowners had agreed to pay the injured seamen full wages until they had recovered their health and would also pay their medical expenses. Since then, the Minister had advised the SUA that regulations more beneficial to seamen injured by enemy action were being drafted and would shortly be gazetted.

Within the pages of the Seamen's Journal could be found, at last, unqualified recognition by the fighting services of the sacrifices made by the heretofore 'invisible service.' The loss of Burns Philip's Macdhui during a Japanese bombing raid had inspired a poetic effusion from a serving member of the RAAF of which one stanza is typical:

And those who have gone, 'civilians' they're named -
Their deeds will go down in the annals far-famed -
Be they officers, seamen, or stokers unseen,
They're men of a Service - the Merchant Marine.

But after the stirring and poignant sentiments of "Vale Macdhui", the last page of the Journal was completely given over to work-a-day materialism, with information provided on "War Risk Bonus Changes", and "Accumulated Leave Pay" and "Wages When Ship is Lost" and a detailed table showing the Federal Arbitration Court Award rates of pay for all ratings of seamen.

Despite the exhortations directed at them the seamen displayed a marked lack of enthusiasm, or so Elliott apparently thought. At a meeting of the union on 29 September 1942 he referred to the "criminal situation [that] arose in June when many ships lay alongside the wharf for weeks unable to secure full complements, although hundreds of

209 ibid.
210 ibid.
seamen were unemployed. Since the outbreak of war, he told the assembled seamen, forty-seven members of the union had lost their lives through enemy action. Ships had been attacked. In some cases merchant seamen had fought off their attackers and had brought their ships, battered but with cargoes intact, into port. The death toll, Elliott told the sea-going membership, "has been exceptionally light." This prompted W.J. Clarke to pen a piece of doggerel entitled The Red Refusiliers, of which one stanza is typical of many:

We have heard you're short of diggers  
Who would rush to stop a Jap,  
So we'll volunteer as urgers,  
Though we don't fight we can yap:  
And our leaders, guys like Thornton,  
Sharkey, Elliott and Co.  
Will do their very damnedest  
URGING OTHER MEN TO GO.213

And while the enemy exacted a toll of lives - however "light" - war-time conditions increased the routine hazards of navigation on the Australian coast. As Butlin and Schedvin have pointed out, the war meant that ships had to sail without navigation lights, in radio silence, and frequently in dangerously close proximity to other ships in convoys in confined and not always familiar waters. Strandings and accidental damage were the inevitable result. The seaman's workplace, always stressful, became significantly more so in time of war, and this could serve only to exacerbate shipboard antagonisms.

The Mungana, a twenty-two year old steamer belonging to the AUSN, was a case in point. Elliott warned Franklin, late in August 1942, that the Mungana was due to arrive at Newcastle shortly and that the SUA was required by the MIC to take action to prevent a possible hold-up of the ship there or any attempt to influence the crews of other ships

211 Minutes special meeting Sydney, 29 September 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.  
212 Ibid. In March 1944 the Minister for Shipping advised that war casualties among Australian merchant seafarers were 200 dead or presumed dead, 17 prisoners of war and 53 wounded. Among Australians serving in British merchant ships a further 107 had been killed, 129 taken prisoner, and 22 wounded. J.A. Beasley cited in SJ March 1944.  
213 Typescript, The Red Refusiliers, D170/746 WUA.  
then in port.\textsuperscript{215} Earlier there had been a serious dispute in Port Augusta SA. When the ship's master logged some of the crew, all the SUA men onboard the \textit{Mungana} walked ashore. They were then prosecuted by a local magistrate. It had been only as a consequence of the intervention of a certain J. Keenan as spokesman for the crew that the prosecutions had been dropped and they had sailed for Newcastle.\textsuperscript{216} Franklin's report of the situation in the \textit{Mungana}, which at Elliott's request was sent direct to Chairman De Baun of the MIC, was unequivocal. SUA men were continually being logged \textit{[and therefore fined]} by the master. "It seems to be authority run riot", he said.\textsuperscript{217} This vessel had an unenviable record of industrial trouble in every port it visited, with men joining one day and leaving the next. The problem was not simply attributable to the age of the ship and its standard of accommodation, since there were many of the same class of Australian-built former CGL ships on the coast in which men remained for prolonged periods. But in Newcastle, Franklin reported:

From the time of her arrival in this port the vessel was in trouble, men were joining and leaving practically every two hours of the day, and even when she was ready to sail in the early hours of Monday morning, the men were informed that as they had no tea coupons, they would not be able to get any tea. Yet we find in other ships, that where the men have no coupons, their tea continues just the same... The men held a meeting and although they knew they would not get any tea on the trip, further that they were short of two men below, when she was ready to leave, the ship left on time with the convoy, proving that the men of the \textit{Mungana} are not as unreasonable and impossible as the series of loggings would imply.\textsuperscript{218}

Franklin suggested that matters in the ship be investigated by the MIC "as these irresponsible Masters [who] are now given more authority than ever they possessed, are not in the best interests of the smooth running of the ships and the nation as a whole."\textsuperscript{219}

But indifference, rather than antagonism was the cause of industrial problems in \textit{Lady Isobel}, one of Howard Smith's "slum ships."\textsuperscript{220} Franklin went aboard in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215}Elliott to Franklin 28 August 1942, E183/17/1 Folder 4, ABL.
\item \textsuperscript{216}\textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{217}Franklin to Mr Justice De Baun, copied to Elliott, 8 September 1942. E183/17/1 Folder 4. ABL.
\item \textsuperscript{218}\textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{219}\textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{220}Franklin to Elliott 4 September 1942, E183/17/1 ABL.
\end{itemize}
Newcastle on 4 September 1942 to investigate complaints regarding the chief steward and the cook.

It appears that the chief steward will not give members of the crew anything in the shape of dry stores, and when he does condescend to do so he gives them same in small amounts. He at times becomes very obstinate and sarcastic. Briefly everything he does on behalf of the crew seems to be a nuisance. As to the cook, the meat and vegetables etc. are of inferior quality, and everything that is sent along to the men is practically uneatable. For the men coming off watch at night time there is nothing whatsoever in the messrooms and the men are in a state of semi-starvation.221

In the galley, Franklin said that, "I saw the cook ladling cockroaches and dead weevils out of the soup. Also, cockroaches were running over the meat, which had been cut and dished up for the men."222 When he remonstrated with the cook, Franklin said that "he took absolutely no notice of me."223 On deck, Franklin was accosted by some of the ship's officers who, when they declared that they were prepared to support any demand of the seamen for the removal of the chief steward and the cook, he referred to officials of their own union. With the ship about to sail:

The members of my organisation were desirous of holding the vessel up in this port, but I prevailed upon them to take the ship to sea, although I agreed with them that it is pretty hard to have to ask men to take a ship to sea under the existing conditions.224

The seamen were required to commence sea-watches at noon, and with their midday dinner also at 12-noon, an early meal should have been provided, but nobody had had anything to eat when Franklin left the ship at 11.50am. Going ashore from the Lady Isobel, he met the ship's master coming onboard. The latter's only response, having listened to the SUA branch secretary's short opinion of the standard of hygiene obtaining in his vessel, was "thank you very much son."225

But did the seamen have any choice as to whether they would take their ships to sea? The November 1942 issue of the Seamen's Journal contained a 'salutary' warning.

221 ibid.
222 ibid.
223 ibid.
224 ibid.
225 ibid.
For unlawfully absenting themselves from duty on a ship engaged in carrying cargo essential to the war effort, two seamen were prosecuted in Newcastle police court. One received a sentence of twelve days imprisonment and was ordered to pay L5 13 0d costs or in default serve a further twelve days imprisonment. The other seaman, who was only nineteen years old, was ordered to enter into a surety of L20 to obey all regulations of the National Security Act relating to seamen and to pay costs amounting to L5 13 0d or in default serve twelve days imprisonment. Their ship had been delayed for four days, the Journal reported, and "Federal authorities viewed very seriously actions of this kind and would press where convictions were obtained for the maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment." 226

Discipline obtains from regulation. So that it is no surprise to find that in September 1942 a meeting of the union's executive [Elliott, Smith, Bird and Franklin] had "worked over the rule book." 227 In a report on this process contained in the November 1942 edition of the Journal it was declared that many of the 79 rules contained in the union's rule book were "contradictory and vague and urgently needed alteration." 228 One rule, the report continued, insisted that a nominee for office in the union should be a wage-earner, but failed to specify any particular industry. This was important, since in the previous union ballot two candidates for official position had been and were still employed ashore. This had been corrected, the membership was informed, by means of a new rule. Nominees for office henceforth must be wage-earners in the shipping industry and able to show proof of at least two years' sea service or have been, for the previous three years, a full-time official of the union. All the other alterations to the rules had been submitted to and approved by the union's legal adviser, the membership was assured, and "as soon as paper can be secured" the new rules would be published and distributed. The new rule meant, of course, that any rival to the incumbent general secretary at the annual ballot would be at a significant disadvantage since he must

226 cited November 1942.
227 ibid
228 ibid
either come straight from sea or be a subordinate official, a situation that had not previously obtained in the SUA.

Desmond Rolfe had threatened Elliott's accession to office as general secretary when he challenged the validity of the ballot process in the federal Arbitration Court in February 1941. He had again challenged Elliott for the union's leadership and been decisively defeated in the ballot at the end of 1941 Now, on 23 October 1942, Rolfe told Harry O'Neill, the Adelaide branch secretary, that:

I can visualise the tremendous amount of tyrannical power that would be placed in the hands of any unscrupulous Committee of Management or individual of the Committee of Management and the General Secretary irrespective of their political leanings if they are allowed to go unchallenged... I hope you are seized of the importance of this Harry, and at least do something to delay this monstrous attempt at dictatorial and Plenary powers being placed in the hands of any Committee of Management.

And there was substance to Rolfe's foreboding. Four days later, at the stopwork meeting of the Sydney branch a motion was carried unanimously by 280 members, that: "This meeting repudiates all statements regarding the General Secretary which are contained in the minutes of the 25th August and 29th September of the Melbourne stopwork meeting." Member Rolfe was then foolhardy enough to state that he wished to ask some questions. Branch secretary Barney Smith thereupon informed the meeting that Rolfe had not been engaged in the shipping industry for twelve months and was twelve months unfinancial. He asked Rolfe to leave the meeting. Despite Rolfe's protest that he was employed on a contract basis as coxswain of a work-boat on the harbour, it was resolved unanimously that he be directed to leave the meeting. Rolfe was then ejected.

For many years under the secretaryship of W.J.Clarke, the Melbourne branch had actively opposed the Communist influence within the SUA, centred as it was within the

22944CAR174
230Elliott received 1921 votes to Rolfe's 157, SJ March 1942.
231Rolfe to H.O'Neill, 23 October 1942. D170/6/11 WUA.
232Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 October 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
233Ibid.
Sydney branch. Even after Clarke had lost office, the Victorian branch remained antithetical to Communism. And Clarke was chairman of the stopwork meeting in Melbourne on 29 September 1942 when a resolution was carried by 247 to 3 that the motion of no confidence in general secretary Elliott that had been carried at the previous stopwork meeting of 25 August should be reaffirmed and recommended to all other branches. In Sydney at the following stopwork meeting on 27 October 1942 with 280 members present, Elliott took the unusual step of calling for a suspension of standing orders so that the members might discuss the resolutions that had been carried by the Melbourne branch.

Subsequently, the December issue of the union's *Journal* announced, "All Branches Slay Melbourne Critics!" The members learned from the *Journal's* anonymous reporter that Elliott had actually to insist that the members assembled at the Sydney stopwork meeting discuss the Melbourne resolutions. No-one wanted to waste the union's time on a blatant attempt to start a faction fight. But when the Melbourne resolutions were actually read "there were over a dozen members on their feet wanting to speak in opposition." A unanimous resolution by the Sydney branch repudiating the statements of the Melbourne stopwork meeting was printed in the *Journal*, followed by copies of unanimous resolutions of support for Elliott from the stopwork meetings of the Port Adelaide, Brisbane and Newcastle branches. Finally, a resolution of the November stopwork meeting of the Melbourne branch, which Elliott had attended, was printed. With five dissentients, the *Journal* announced in bold-type, the Melbourne branch had resolved: "That we do not agree with the opinions expressed at the Melbourne stop-work meetings attacking the General Secretary." There should be no further argument, the

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234Minutes stopwork meeting Melbourne, 29 September 1942. E183/3/14 ABL.
235Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 27 October 1942, E183/3/6 ABL.
236SJ December 1942.
237*ibid.*
238*ibid.*
Journal concluded. "These decision show conclusively the opinion of the members on the tactics of the movers of the Melbourne motions. They need no further comment."239

The revolt in Melbourne had its sequel. A special meeting of the Sydney branch was held on 4 November 1942 in order "to discuss the proposed Reserve Scheme because of the wish of the unemployed [seamen] for clarification."240 Elliott told the assembled members that the scheme had originally been devised by the MIC, on a suggestion made by the Commonwealth Government, because ships were being delayed as a consequence of a shortage of seamen. There was no longer such a shortage and consequently, he reassured the membership, no need for the scheme to be put into operation. He was opposed to the Reserve scheme - if men were available. But if the situation ever arose again where men did not offer for employment, then it appeared inevitable that the scheme would be re-introduced. And in case the message was not sufficiently clear, Barney Smith added that some members apparently thought that their union officials were responsible for the Reserve scheme. On the contrary, he said, the officials of the SUA had gone to all the branches of the union specifically to advise members to man the ships in order to prevent such a scheme from operating. A resolution was then carried unanimously and broadcast to the entire membership through the medium of the union Journal:

That we strongly protest to the Maritime Industry Commission on the proposed Australian Mercantile Marine Reserve Scheme and that no member of the Union register on the Reserve, and that we recommend such action to all Branches of the Union."241

And with that the meeting closed, the membership of the SUA having placed its trust in the 'reassurance' provided by its general secretary.

239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid.
Two thousand women sold buttons in the metropolitan area of Sydney on 'Merchant Navy Appeal Day' on 16 October 1942. War once more had brought the invisible seamen forth into public view, and public esteem. It was a year since the federal Labor Government had come to power, a year of achievement in government described by the SUA's *Journal* as "without parallel in Australia", while behind the scenes the policy of the still covert CPA was: "Unity in action by all workers' organisations in support of the Federal Government." When the *Seamen's Journal* described the federal government as one which "enjoys a degree of support never afforded to any previous Government," the feeling was mutual with Prime Minister Curtin announcing that:

The merchant navies of the United Nations are constantly in the fighting line. Silently, efficiently, and without fuss they carry on the unending task of keeping the fighting men and supplies moving. The men of our merchant navy have established a high tradition, and the Australian Government warmly acknowledges the great part they are playing in the war effort.

The Merchant Navy appeal raised a total of £18,000 of which £1500 was allocated to the care of seamen in hospitals, £1000 went to the Catholic Institute, £1000 to the Mission to Seamen, £1000 to the Sailors' Home, £750 to the King George's Fund for Seamen, and £250 to the Mission to Seamen at Port Kembla NSW. The balance of £12,500 was used to establish a fund incorporated and registered as a society, the "Australian Merchant Navy Relief Fund", for the relief of seamen who were prisoners of war and to care for Australian seamen resident in tuberculosis sanatoriums. And the SUA's balance sheet was in credit. At the end of 1941 the union was in credit to the amount of £5,337. The credit balance in 1942 was £10,915 and it would continue to increase with the influx of entrance fees paid by a now continually fluctuating membership.
At the end of 1942, at the same time that in the federal parliament Prime Minister Curtin paid tribute to "the magnificent fight by the Russians... one of the inspiring things of this war," 250 Elliott published a list of the union's achievements under his general secretaryship. The seamen had a 44-hour week. "In no other country have the Marine Unions been able to secure a 44 hour week." 251 The ASF had been de-registered and the shipowners' bureaux closed. A 'Capture Clause' guaranteeing continuance of wages for captured seamen had been inserted in ships' articles - but only after the Curtin Government had confiscated Huddart Parker's Zealandia when the company refused to comply. Deck-boys, upon whom "the Union of tomorrow is built" 252 and who "for over fifty years... have been exploited by shipowners" 253 had been admitted to the Seamen's Award as a consequence of Elliott's efforts on their behalf. "The deckboys of today and the ABs of tomorrow will remember that they got their rights by Union pressure in 1942," the Journal announced in bold-type. Upon the union's request, a three-day gunnery school had been established and training in first-aid was now available to seamen. A women's auxiliary of the SUA had been established and it was anticipated that premises in the city would be secured which might be used as an international seaman's club. With the assistance of the SUA, branches of the Chinese and Greek Seamen's Unions had been established. As a consequence of the union's representations, the outfit allowance for merchant seamen who lost their belongings as a consequence of enemy action had been substantially increased. Improvements to the accommodation in many vessels had been obtained and in some cases accommodation had been re-built. Approximately L20,000 had been raised by the Merchant navy Day Appeal in which the union had played a prominent part and the money would be used for the relief of Australian seamen, their widows and their children. And, finally, union action had resulted in the introduction of legislation providing for a range of safety equipment in

250 CPD Vol.172, p.1687.
251 SJ December 1942.
252 ibid.
253 ibid.
ships such as alarm bells, radio equipment in lifeboats, and first aid kits. And all this had been achieved in the course of that terrible year of 1942, when humankind's inhumanity to its own was so amply demonstrated.

Across a centre-spread of two pages, the December 1942 edition of The Seamen's Journal announced in jubilation:

1942 - Record Union Year - All Australian seamen will long remember 1942 as the year of the greatest success ever achieved by seamen in the world.

From the ruins of Stalingrad, Von Paulus and the survivors of his 36th Army would shortly trudge into the living death of arctic captivity under Stalin's regime. The Germans had lost the strategic initiative. The threat to the Soviet Union was ended. In the Russian spring of 1943 the Red Army would go on the offensive and J.B. Miles would publicly announce the CPA's agenda:

Comrades, the working class must be mobilised to destroy root and branch infamous fascism, neither elated nor embarrassed by the aid they receive today from those who will, or those who may, part company with us on the day of victory.

Under the authoritative inspirational leadership of E.V. Elliott and his effective management team of Bird, Smith, and Franklin, the merchant seamen of Australia stood united as never before. But in a Faustian acceptance of the material benefits that it provided, the seamen had been mobilised in conformity to an ideological agenda that was not of their making.

254 ibid.
255 ibid.
256 J.B. Miles to CPA Congress 20 March 1943, MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5. ML.
CONCLUSION

The Seamen's Union of Australia elected its first federal president to office in 1906. Effaced, products of an industrial heritage that was extraordinary in its deprivation, the seamen looked to that leadership both for inspiration and for the practical management of their material interests. It has been the concern of this thesis to examine the manner in which the leadership of the SUA responded to that mandate and to contend that, in the period 1918-1943, the interests of the union's rank and file were subordinated to the particular agendas of successive leaders.

In this study of why and how 'things went wrong' for the seamen, it has been necessary to take a number of contextual themes into consideration. Intransigence characterised maritime industrial relations in the period considered here. And that fact may be related to the economic viability of the shipping industry which is a measure of the health of the international economy. At the same time, since Australia is dependent upon the link provided by shipping for its economic survival, it is inevitable that maritime industrial relations have routinely attracted closer scrutiny by the state than is the norm for other industries. In the period examined, the Commonwealth government introduced legislation that provided explicit recognition of the coincidence of interests of shipowner and state. Specifically the new legislation took account of the widening gap between the levels of skill and responsibility reserved for and exercised by professionally certificated and company employed ships' navigating and engineer officers and those of the casually employed deck and engineroom seamen under their supervision. That recognition took the form of the anachronistic disciplinary clauses of the Commonwealth Navigation Act of 1912, whose precedent was to be found in the United Kingdom's Merchant Shipping Act of 1894.  

1In his report to the annual general meeting of the SUA in March 1944, the union's general secretary remarked that "...navigation legislation in Australia has almost always slavishly followed British
Largely invisible to the general public except in time of war, an international rather than a national figure, and peculiarly subject to the often baneful effect of transnational influence, the Australian seaman was always conscious of his material situation as contrasted to that of the seamen of other nations. Apprehensive of regression to the 'dark and helpless conditions of the British seamen,' he feared supersession by those 'superexploited' Asian, African, and Indian seamen who, under the terms of Asian articles, crewed many ships of Great Britain's merchant fleet. And that fear was justified when, throughout the period considered here, the common concern of shipowners was to extract increasing productivity gains from a high capital investment and to lessen dependence upon labour. For the seamen, that meant de-skilling with a consequent devaluation of their labour. In the long term, it meant an erosion of crew numbers as a consequence of technological progress. In the short term, it demanded enforcement of the restrictive code of discipline instituted by the Navigation Act and extant in those articles of agreement that formed the contract of employment between the seaman and the formal representative of the shipowner's interest - the ship's master.

In embryo, the Commonwealth's Navigation Act had been recommended to the Australian parliament by the United Kingdom's Board of Trade. In an age of imperialism it may well have been that British shipping nationalism saw it as a means to maintain dependence by nullifying a potential source of competition in the liner trade between the United Kingdom and Australasia. However, during the hiatus that ensued before the Act eventually became operative, a progressive investment of capital provided large and powerful British shipping interests with effective control of the existing Australian coastal shipping industry. Ostensibly, the coasting provisions of the Navigation Act afforded Australian national seamen protection from an inroad of cheap foreign labour.
But in itself the Navigation Act was the Australian seamen's 'Achilles heel'. Its coasting provisions were liable to suspension by federal Governments which, while usually unsympathetic to seamen, were ever mindful of the need to protect the nation's sea-borne trade from interruption.

All this might help to explain the antagonism of a particular occupational group, an innate characteristic recognised by E.V. Elliott, when he commented that:

...Always down through the years... the whole membership has been steeped in antagonism towards the shipowners as they have been against the seamen.2

It does not, however, account for the uneven relationship between leader and led which, as this study has sought to demonstrate, so stressed the social body of the SUA. While successive leaders undoubtedly added to that stress, its persistence as a phenomenon must be attributed ultimately to the peculiar environment of the seafarer's workplace.

Environmentally, and therefore socially, and as a consequence psychologically, this was a workplace fundamentally dissimilar to that of 'shoreside' industries. Its peculiarity, incomprehensible to 'outsiders', was remarked by 'insiders' throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Thus Frank Bullen, in his publication of 1900, *Men of the Merchant Service*, remarked that:

It must be borne in mind that the sailor is just a big child, whose opportunities for being understood by shore people are almost nil, who cannot tell you what he wants, and whose life is hidden from you. He lives in a little world of his own.3

The Superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office in Port Adelaide reiterated that view when he told the Commonwealth's Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill on 30

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2E.V. Elliott report to SUA Federal Executive cited in SJ November 1944.
January 1905 that "...I think sailors are different to other people."\(^4\) And then, too, the interim report of that Royal Commission stated that:

...the nature of the seaman's calling doubtless will always differentiate him from Landsmen. But we see no reason why this difference should proceed to such lengths as it does.\(^5\)

Progress was made towards bringing the Australian merchant seaman within the ambit of more orthodox employment when Mr Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration handed down his Seamen's Award in November 1911. It seemed then that respectability was within the seaman's grasp. Public approval was his with the outbreak of War in August 1914. But popular recognition, obtained at a price, was but a temporary aberration. In reality, the seamen's 'difference' was still pronounced when, in December 1920, Mr Justice Higgins observed:

...the seamen, firemen, and other seafaring men - probably the most helpless, the worst treated of all workers. Being always on the move, always dispersed, they have not been so able to combine as others for the improvement of conditions.\(^6\)

Tom Walsh on behalf of the Seamen's Union reminded the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration of its former president's opinion when, on 10 December 1921, he described the seaman as "peculiarly situated" in that "...his periods ashore are so limited that the ordinary trade union conditions as to meetings could not be applied to him very successfully."\(^7\)

And then, in the years immediately after the First World War, the Commonwealth's Navigation Act of 1912 was progressively brought into force. The disciplinary code of that Act, Part II Division 12 and specifically sections 99-115, found precedent in the British Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, whose punitive sanctions a

\(^4\)Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill 1906, Q14654.
\(^5\)ibid, Interim Report, p.11.
\(^6\)Higgins, A New Province for Law and Order, p.88.
\(^7\)Transcript address on behalf of the Seamen's Union 10 December 1921, Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, No.60 of 1921. MS2123 Box 12 Folder 119, NLA.
latter-day 'Jack Cade' protested were such as to subject British seamen to "...most
slavish and degrading laws and regulations." And this was allowed by an "...indifferent,
ignorant public." An Anglican clergyman in Brisbane, in 1925, sought to enlighten that
public with a revelation of the consequences for British seamen who contested with a
powerful and well-organised shipping federation, when the protection of their trade
union was unavailable or denied to them. The shipowners "...were attacking their wives
and families in England by stopping the allotment money paid out of the men's wages."
These shipowners, he declared, "...attacked defenceless women and children."
And that
shipping federation, in large part, controlled the coastal shipping industry of Australia.

The Australian seamen's 'peculiar' situation effectively subordinated them to the
agendas of small but organised 'cliques' and 'coteries' within their union which
contended ruthlessly to obtain and to retain leadership. It gave rise to the situation
described by John Curtin in a letter to the *West Australian* on 1 January 1925:

> I well know how this ramp was staged. The rank and file of seamen, coming from
ships, and personally unacquainted with the details of the situation would listen to
what was told them. The prepared resolutions would be tabled, and, no one with
any knowledge of the circumstances being there to combat the false premise on
which it was based, it would pass on the voices. This kind of procedure is regarded
as brilliant leadership.

A series of special meetings of the Union, called in Sydney in 1928 at short notice and
with barely a quorum present, and used for partisan purposes by a pretender to the
federal leadership, earned the condemnation of Judge Long Innes of the Supreme Court
of New South Wales in Equity. But the union's regular monthly stop-work meetings

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8 *Westralian Worker* 9 January 1925.
9 *SMH* 15 September 1925.
10 The Federation was an association of London shipowners. P&O Lines, which controlled that
association, had amalgamated with BISN and the latter controlled the AUSN and had considerable
influence over Burns Philip & Co, as well as a number of other companies trading on the coasts of
Australia and New Zealand. Professor Broeze has observed that, "...it was a tightly organised fighting
machine of incomparable power, led by Lord Inchcape, who had no sympathy for Australian (or for that
matter British, Indian or Chinese) workers."
11 *West Australian* 1 January 1925.
12 Transcript, 29 October 1928, Judgment Long Innes J, in the Supreme Court of NSW in Equity,
MS2123 Box 10 Folder 100, NLA.
were also subject to manipulation by a minority. This was revealed, in 1931, by bosun Henry Ford. When it was put to him, in the course of giving evidence before a Royal Commission, that during SUA stopwork meetings "...the members determine what the officials shall do, is that correct? He replied:

Certain members... the members that determine that are the members that stop behind at stop-work meetings when the seamen have gone back to the ships. They are the men that never go to sea.\(^\text{13}\)

And those 'certain members' were not averse to engaging in intimidation in order to suborn the majority. Denied the benefit of democratic process, a sense of helplessness pervaded the membership. It occurred when General Secretary Jacob Johnson was assaulted at a public meeting of the union on 23 December 1935 by supporters of the Militant Minority's Joseph Keenan. It happened again when Joseph Keenan narrowly escaped the same fate at the hands of the anti-Communist element on 20 February 1936.

A sense of helplessness translates easily into destructiveness. Reaction, on the part of the rank and file to their situation in the aftermath of the disastrous strike of 1936, took anarchistic form. This provoked the General Secretary of the CPA to comment that "...there is something of an exception here." The seamen, he concluded, "...are really somewhat different to the other workers." They were "...a difficult crowd to hold together. They are most unruly."\(^\text{14}\) There were reports of seamen destroying their membership books and taking employment aboard ship as 'volunteers'. Many neglected to pay contributions to the union. Others, while retaining SUA membership, covertly joined the competing 'union' that had been organised by the shipowners. Loss of unanimity eroded the union's capacity to fulfil its fundamental purpose of protecting and advancing the material interests of the membership. And that membership was composed

\(^{13}\) Transcript of evidence of Australian seaman Henry Ford, 15 September 1931. Royal Commission, 1931, 'In the Case of Jacob Johnson', A432/86 29/170 PT4 Attachment, AA.

\(^{14}\) Minutes CC meeting 1st session 10 April 1936. MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936, Box 4 CY reel 3500 frame 0070, ML.
of numerous small groups of itinerant and dispersed workers who were difficult at any time to contact, far less to organise.

The seamen's perennial credulity has been remarked. At the beginning of the 20th century both Joseph Conrad and Frank Bullen noted the unworldliness of their fellow seafarers. Some thirty years later Tom Walsh remarked on how the membership of the SUA had been 'fooled'. W.J.Daley, an elected official charged with the conduct of the union's annual federal election, made use of the 'distancing' intrinsic to the maritime workplace to avoid making an announcement of the result of the ballot. It was a matter of trust abused. He evaded his democratic responsibility in order to promote a specific political interest. Later, the CPA made use of the seamen in pursuit of its particular political agenda. And an idiosyncratic Jacob Johnson, who had certainly manipulated them in pursuit of his personal ambition, would observe that the seamen were reduced to the status of mere 'pawns' in a game of political chess.

There were two or three hundred unemployed British seamen in the port of Sydney in September 1941, four and a half months after E.V.Elliott took office as general secretary of the SUA. The number of unemployed overseas seamen still present by April 1942 was sufficiently large for a stopwork meeting in Sydney to note, apprehensively, that:

We do not want a repetition of the 1935-36 turnout [sic] when most of the ships had mixed crews. Union men and non-Union men. These men on the outside may prove in the near future to be a dangerous proposition for the Union.

For the unhappy memories of 'battles long ago' still lingered in the first half of 1942. When the cook in MCIlwraith McEacharn's Koomilya accused a seaman of having 'scabbed' in the Barwon in 1928, the SUA men retaliated with a demand that the cook be

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15In Rights of Man, p 100, Tom Paine observed that "...Reason obeys itself; and Ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it."
16Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 30 September 1941. E183/3/6 ABL.
17Minutes stopwork meeting Sydney, 26 April 1942. E183/3/6 ABL.
removed. They were subsequently logged and fined by the master for delaying the ship in Fremantle.\footnote{Minutes stopwork meeting Port Adelaide. 27 February 1942. E183/3/3 ABL.} But the \textit{Seamen's Journal}, by March 1943, reported that the union contained many youngsters who lacked knowledge of industrial unionism or of the seagoing industry. There was need to enthuse these new members with "...the wonderful history and traditions of the Seamen's Union."\footnote{S/ March 1943.} In April 1943, Elliott spoke of "...the huge influx of new members."\footnote{General Secretary's address to AGM of SUA, 6 April 1943. E183/3/6 ABL.} Where previously it had been static, the SUA membership was now dynamic.\footnote{S/ October 1943.} And the enrolment fees from this 'revolving-door' membership provided the union with unprecedented financial stability.\footnote{Elliott, in his general secretary's report to the AGM of March 1944 would state that "...the assets of the Union are now an all-time peak", and would attribute that to "...careful financial administration instead of the needless reckless spending of previous officials." D170/10/1 WUA.}

The influx of youthful members, however, brought its own problems. There were reports of behaviour onboard ships that was "disgraceful and inexcusable." There were "flagrant acts of vandalism."\footnote{General secretary's report to AGM of SUA 6 April 1943. E183/3/6 ABL.} From Newcastle, Franklin reported a vicious attack by young seamen in one ship that had hospitalised two senior members of the union.\footnote{Franklin to AGM, 6 April 1943. E183/3/6 ABL.} The problem was compounded by the exodus of experienced members.\footnote{A former SUA member who sailed in Australian ships in 1943 commented to the author that while prior to WW2 most seamen in Australian ships were of overseas origin, the war "...brought a great influx of young Australians into the industry... I sailed in ships where there were very few men above the age of 21 years and all Australian born." Neville Cunningham to author, 11 June 1997. Letter in author's possession.} Many of the older members were taking shore jobs in the dockyards and on the waterfront. They were leaving the ships to the youngsters, with the result that:

...the industrial knowledge of the newer membership needs care. New members of today, who are to be the core and strength of the Union tomorrow, know nothing of the fact that only two years ago most of the good jobs on the coast were manned with non-Unionists.\footnote{The Sydney branch secretary of the SUA reported to the union's AGM on 27 March 1945 that "...there are about 5,000 ex-seamen working around the Sydney waterfront who would immediately flock back into the Union if conditions become tough and this would create chaos in the industry." E183/3/6 ABL.}
The remedy was to institute a union committee in every ship. These committees would hold regular meetings of SUA members where shipboard conditions and union matters would be discussed and inexperienced members provided with 'guidance.' J.B. Miles, in an address to the Congress of the CPA on 20 March 1943, had noted approvingly that:

...It is no accident that the really militant unions, the unions with policy conforming to the needs of the People's War, the unions led by Communists (coal is a special case), have good discipline and few stoppages. Furthermore, in all cases the position of these workers in relation to their conditions of employment has not worsened, it has improved... It is, therefore, not surprising that, contrary to the fears expressed at times by some comrades, the leaders of these unions are more firmly established in the confidence of members.27

A motion put by Elliott as general secretary of the union to its AGM on 6 April 1943, that was carried unanimously, was that in all vessels:

...ships' committees convene meetings of the crew, and deal with any member responsible for any action detrimental to the Union or any of its members. The decision of the Committee and crew to be reported to the first Union Official.28

In the Seamen's Journal, the 'editor' took the matter further:

Seamen on ships must carry on active organisational work among fellow-Unionists. elect Ship Committees, hold regular meetings, discuss shipboard and Union and political questions. Only by increasing the activity of the rank and file can we develop our delegates and strengthen our leadership.29

And if some members protested that the union should restrict itself to matters of immediate economic interest and not engage in politics, the answer was that "...as all workers are controlled by politics, the Union has always interested itself in politics."30

E.V. Elliott, by 1943, was firmly established as the general secretary of the SUA. A lifelong Stalinist, Elliott would retain office until his retirement 35 years later, and would stamp his authority upon the union. But the manner in which he did so remains to be told in a documented and disinterested way, for the scope of this work permits only an examination of the manner in which he began.

27MLMSS 5021 Add-on 1936 Box 5, ML.
28Resolution. AGM of SUA, 6 April 1943. E183/3/6 ABL.
29SJ/ October 1943.
30ibid. A former member of both the SUA and CPA in the 1940s observed that "...I would say that there were very few ships in the late forties that did not have one or more members of the Party amongst the members of the SU of A." Neville Cunningham to author, 11 June 1997. Letter in author's possession.
In the period studied here Elliott, in office, subordinated himself to the instructions of the CPA. And this was for ideological reasons, for he was a member of that disciplined 'advance guard of the proletariat' whose essential task was the achievement of the Communist state. He was fortunate that the Nazi attack upon the Soviet Union resulted in a coincidence of CPA authoritarianism (in promoting Australia's war-effort in defence of the Russian homeland) with the coercive power bestowed by the Australian federal government upon that Maritime Industry Commission in which he held office. Consequently, in the critical period during which he established his leadership as general secretary of the SUA, E.V. Elliott exerted unprecedented authority over the SUA membership. And the peculiarity of the seamen's workplace lent credibility to that process. Thus:

...Our members, because of the peculiarity of the industry and the small numbers on each ship, need Unionism and uniform policy even more than do shore Unions.\(^{31}\)

Those old 'troublemakers' who remained within the ranks of the SUA were silenced, if only for the time being. New entrants, many of them youthful and vulnerable, may well have been inspired by a recitation - however facile - of the union's history of militant struggle during the previous two decades. But they might be more impressed with the real material benefits provided them by their energetic general secretary and his experienced, efficient, and dedicated management team. Ultimately, anyway, it was a case of 'go to sea or get out.'

It was a distanced and peripatetic membership that elected a succession of union leaders in the period studied here. The ideological agendas of those leaders ranged in historic sequence from utopian socialism through anarchic individualism to Bolshevik realpolitik. But, regardless of that wide ideological spectrum, no one leader overcame the faulty relationship that existed between leader and led, which produced factional groupings within the social body of the union, and resulted in division and convulsion.

\(^{31}\) Editorial, Seamen's Journal, May 1943.
throughout the period from 1918 to 1943. And it was the peculiarity of the workplace that ensured that democracy was thwarted and the seamen subordinated to ideological agendas that, whether in the short or the long term, were not necessarily to their material advantage.

That uncommon working man, the Australian merchant seaman, has been accorded little recognition by historians of the industrial age. Alienated from landward society, subjected to the obloquy of powerful reactionaries, he was subordinated to the agendas of radical agents beyond his capacity to control. Little wonder then that, as an actor within the historical process, the seaman appears as a figure of antagonised labour.
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**ADDRESSES.**


**INTERVIEWEES & CORRESPONDENTS.**

**APPENDIX 1.**

**AUSTRALIAN MARITIME STATISTICS**

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<th>YEAR</th>
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**Crew Data**

![Crew Data Chart](chart.png)

- **MASTERS & OFFICERS**
- **ENGINEERS**
- **SEAMEN**
### APPENDIX 1.

**AUSTRALIAN MARITIME STATISTICS**

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#### Crew Data

```
Year   | 1915 | 1916 | 1917 | 1918 | 1919 | 1920 | 1921 | 1922 | 1923 | 1924 | 1925 | 1926
-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------
Masters & Officers | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   | 30   |
Engineers          | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   | 50   |
Seamen             | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   | 55   |
```
APPENDIX 1.

AUSTRALIAN MARITIME STATISTICS

--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
COMPANIES | 40 | 38 | 29 | 22 | 23 | 22 | 30 | 31 | 30 | 29 | 30 | 30
SHIPS | 212 | 201 | 181 | 173 | 162 | 154 | 154 | 156 | 156 | 160 | 162 | 167
TONS GROSS | 396894 | 371142 | 360458 | 349163 | 319756 | 306876 | 303009 | 302897 | 324891 | 352661 | 362280 | 345182
TONS NET | 214703 | 206083 | 202749 | 196342 | 178549 | 171086 | 172334 | 168056 | 160468 | 197256 | 197130 | 200131
MASTERS & OFFICERS | 606 | 638 | 598 | 563 | 524 | 498 | 512 | 506 | 513 | 547 | 545 | 557
ENGINEERS | 682 | 630 | 586 | 576 | 558 | 514 | 529 | 419 | 548 | 579 | 585 | 606
SEAMEN | 5175 | 4922 | 4710 | 4630 | 4232 | 4072 | 4193 | 4045 | 4264 | 4458 | 4515 | 4563
NET TONS PER MAN | 32.8 | 33.6 | 34.4 | 34 | 33.7 | 33.7 | 32.9 | 33.8 | 33.9 | 35.3 | 34.9 | 34.4

SOURCE:
OFFICIAL YEAR BOOK OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.
No 1, 1908
No 13, 1901-1919
No 8, 1915
No 16, 1923
No 21, 1928
No 28, 1933
No 31, 1938

Crew Data

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[□ MASTERS & OFFICERS □ ENGINEERS □ SEAMEN]
APPENDIX 2.

TABLE 1A.
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES IN 1907 BETWEEN BRITISH NATIONAL SEAMEN IN OCEAN-GOING STEAMERS AND AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL SEAMEN IN INTERSTATE STEAMERS. AMOUNTS IN POUNDS.

<table>
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<th>CAPACITY</th>
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<th>AUSTRALIAN</th>
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<tr>
<td>CHIEF OFFICER</td>
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<td>L12 TO 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND OFFICER</td>
<td>L7 TO 13</td>
<td>L10 TO 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD OFFICER</td>
<td>L6 TO 9</td>
<td>L8 TO 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOURTH OFFICER</td>
<td>L4 TO 8</td>
<td>L8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>L3.5 TO 5</td>
<td>L6.5 TO 7</td>
</tr>
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<td>CHIEF ENGINEER</td>
<td>L16 TO 30</td>
<td>L16 TO 27.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECOND ENGINEER</td>
<td>L12 TO 19</td>
<td>L11 TO 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>THIRD ENGINEER</td>
<td>L8 TO 15</td>
<td>L14 TO 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOURTH ENGINEER</td>
<td>L6 TO 12</td>
<td>L12</td>
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<td>FIREMAN</td>
<td>L4 TO 5</td>
<td>L8.5 TO 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRIMMER</td>
<td>L3.5 TO 4</td>
<td>L6.5 TO 7</td>
</tr>
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<td>COOK</td>
<td>L5 TO 12</td>
<td>L8 TO 12</td>
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<td>CHIEF STEWARD</td>
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<td>L2 TO 5</td>
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NB. LOWER RATES RELATE TO CARGO STEAMERS, HIGHER RATES TO PASSENGER SHIP.

TABLE 1B.
AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES IN 1907 PAID TO LASCAR AND CHINESE CREWS IN BRITISH OCEAN-GOING STEAMERS. AMOUNTS ARE IN SHILLINGS (TWENTY SHILLINGS EQUAL ONE POUND).

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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SOURCE
OFFICIAL YEAR BOOK OF NEW SOUTH WALES. 1907-1908. p.326.
### APPENDIX 2.

#### TABLE 2.

**COMPARISON OF AUSTRALIAN WEEKLY WAGE RATES (SHILLINGS & PENCE).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARITIME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>32s 4d</td>
<td>32s 4d</td>
<td>36s 11d</td>
<td>36s 11d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOATSWAIN</td>
<td>36s 11d</td>
<td>36s 11d</td>
<td>41s 6d</td>
<td>41s 6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIREMAN</td>
<td>41s 6d</td>
<td>41s 6d</td>
<td>46s 2d</td>
<td>46s 2d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>23s 10d</td>
<td>23s 10d</td>
<td>30s 0d</td>
<td>34s 7d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEWARD</td>
<td>18s 6d</td>
<td>18s 6d</td>
<td>23s 10d</td>
<td>25s 5d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RAILWAYS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRIVER</td>
<td>66s 0d</td>
<td>66s 0d</td>
<td>66s 0d</td>
<td>72s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIREMAN</td>
<td>48s 0d</td>
<td>48s 0d</td>
<td>48s 0d</td>
<td>57s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUARD</td>
<td>51s 0d</td>
<td>51s 0d</td>
<td>51s 0d</td>
<td>54s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PORTER</td>
<td>36s 0d</td>
<td>36s 0d</td>
<td>39s 0d</td>
<td>48s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNALMAN</td>
<td>45s 0d</td>
<td>45s 0d</td>
<td>45s 0d</td>
<td>66s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LABOURER</td>
<td>42s 0d</td>
<td>42s 0d</td>
<td>48s 0d</td>
<td>56s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RURAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATION HAND</td>
<td>20s 0d</td>
<td>25s 0d</td>
<td>25s 0d</td>
<td>25s 0d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARM HAND</td>
<td>15s 0d</td>
<td>15s 0d</td>
<td>20s 0d</td>
<td>20s 0d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** VICTUALLING AND ACCOMMODATION (KEEP) PROVIDED IN ADDITION TO WAGES TO SEAMEN AND RURAL WORKERS.

**SOURCE**

*OFFICIAL YEAR BOOK OF NEW SOUTH WALES, 1921.*

pp 602-603.
APPENDIX 3.
EXAMPLE OF CREWMEN'S MENU 1905: AUSTRALIAN INTERSTATE VESSELS.

McIlwraith McEacharn, & Co., Proprietary (Ltd).
Bill of fare for Crew.

Breakfast
- Sunday: Porridge, Grilled steak and onions, Irish stew, Potatoes.
- Monday: Porridge, Chops or curry and rice, Potatoes.
- Tuesday: Porridge, Steak or hashed meat, Potatoes.
- Wednesday: Porridge, Chops or sausages, Potatoes.
- Thursday: Porridge, Steak and onions or curry and rice, Potatoes.
- Friday: Porridge, Minced collops or ling fish, Potatoes.
- Saturday: Porridge, Curry and rice or chops, Potatoes.

Coffee with breakfast.

Dinner
- Sunday: Soup, Roast Meat, potatoes, vegetables, Plum pudding.
- Monday: Soup, Boiled mutton, Potatoes.
- Tuesday: Pea Soup, Corned Beef, Potatoes.
- Wednesday: Soup, Roast mutton, Potatoes.
- Thursday: Soup, Roast beef, potatoes, vegetables, Plum pudding.
- Friday: Pea soup, Boiled mutton and sauce, Potatoes.
- Saturday: Soup, Corned beef, Potatoes.

Tea
- Sunday: Cold meat, Pickles, Jam, Potatoes.
- Monday: Cold meat, Steak or hash, Potatoes.
- Tuesday: Cold meat, Haricot mutton, Potatoes.
- Wednesday: Cold meat, Dry hash, Potatoes.
- Thursday: Cold meat, Chops, Potatoes.
- Friday: Cold meat, Hashed meat, Potatoes.
- Saturday: Cold meat, Potato pie, Potatoes.

Tea at tea-time.

The above bill of fare can be varied by captain as may be found expedient but in no case is the number of dishes to be exceeded.

Huddart Parker & Co added to their bill of fare:
- Any member of the crew throwing food overboard, or otherwise wasting it, will be dismissed, and it shall be the duty of the chief cook to see that it is not thrown overboard or wasted, and that none but those belonging to the ship have meals on board.

Also:
- Bread not to exceed 1lb per man per day.
- Butter not to exceed 1lb per man per week.
- Sugar not to exceed 2lb per man per week.

Howard Smith Company Ltd. provided pudding with dinner twice weekly, but stipulated: "No soup on pudding days."

SOURCE:
Evidence submitted by Robert Grayson, Secretary of Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association. 3rd March 1905.
Royal Commission on the Navigation Bill 1906, Q24986. p.896.
APPENDIX 4.

Australian & New Zealand Ship Casualties of the War 1914-1918.

**ss Aotea Roa**
14,744 tons.
Union SS Co. NZ.
Built 1915 Glasgow.
Taken over on completion by Admiralty.
Torpedoed 1917 North Sea.

**ss Australbush ex Strathgarry.**
4398 tons.
Purchased by Commonwealth Govt Line.
Built 1907 Glasgow.
Torpedoed and sunk in English Channel 13 Nov 1917. Two lives lost.

**ss Australdale ex Strathendrick.**
4379 tons
Purchased by Commonwealth Govt Line.
Built 1907 Glasgow.
Torpedoed and sunk in North Atlantic 19 Oct 1917.
Was carrying coal from Wales to Gibraltar. Sank 165 miles NW by N Cape Vlano. Crew abandoned ship in 3 lifeboats. Boat carrying majority of officers and crew disappeared. Other 2 boats reached French coast. Occupants suffered from skin affliction of ears, hands and feet. Two died on the voyage. Total 27 lives lost.

**ss Barunga ex Sumatra.**
7484 tons.
Requisitioned and Transferred to Commonwealth Govt Line 11 March 1918.
Built 1913 Flensburg.
Employed as transport. Torpedoed and sunk in North Atlantic off Scilly Isles 15 July 1918.
Australian crew. Was carrying 855 Australians mostly invalids and 27 naval ratings and four nurses for repatriation to Australia from Plymouth. All evacuated onto destroyers. No lives lost.

**Burrowa ex Carl Rudgeri Vinnen.**
Barque. 2902 tons.
Captured and Chartered to Scott, Fell & Co. Sydney in May 1915.
Captured by submarine and sunk by bombs 60 miles west from Scilly Islands. 27 April 1917. Crew landed at Penzance.

**Carrabini ex Susanne Vinnen.**
2739 tons.
Captured and Chartered to WA State Sawmills Sept 1915.
Torpedoed and sunk in Irish Sea 1 October 1917.

**ss Conargo (or Carina) ex Altona.**
4312 tons.
Captured and Transferred to Commonwealth Govt Line 12 March 1918.
Built 1902 Flensburg.
Torpedoed and sunk in Irish Sea 31 March 1918. Australian crew.

**Cooroy ex Athene.**
2470 tons.
Captured and chartered to Scott, Fell and Co. Sydney May 1915.
Captured by submarine and torpedoed in Irish Sea 29 August 1917.
ss Echunga
4589 tons.
Adelaide SS Co.
Built 1907 Middlesborough. Registered Port Adelaide.
Torpedoed 5 Sept 1917 English Channel. 27 Australians among crew. 9 lives lost

ss Era
2379 tons.
Howard Smith Ltd. (Jose says Australian Steamships Ltd).
Built 1888 West Hartlepool. Registered Melbourne.
Torpedoed and sunk in Mediterranean 1 May 1918. 11 out of crew of 34 were lost

ss Kyarra
6942 tons.
AUSN Co. Ltd
Built Dumbarton 1913. Registered Fremantle.
Employed as transport. Commonwealth control ended 4 January 1918. Torpedoed and sunk 26 May 1918 in English Channel. Ship foundered 16 minutes after being hit. Crew rowed ashore to Swanage Bay. 6 lives lost. (1 Engineer. 3 firemen. 1 trimmer lost with ship. 1 steward's boy died later)

ss Matunga ex Zweena.
1618 tons.
Burns Philp.
Built 1900 Glasgow.
Captured and sunk by German raider Wolf off Bougainville 6 August 1917. Crew imprisoned onboard Wolf.

Moorina ex Lothringen
5002 tons.
Captured and lent to Government of India in 1915.
Captured by submarine and sunk by gunfire in Mediterranean 5 November 1915.

ss Moresby
1763 tons.
Burns Philp
Built 1881 Middlesborough.
Torpedoed 1916 in Mediterranean.

ss Southborough.
3709 tons.
British ship registered in Australia. Formerly on charter on Australian coast.
Torpedoed off Scarborough East Coast England. 16 July 1918. Partly crewed by Australians. 30 lives lost

ss Undola
429 tons. (Collier).
Coal Cliff Collieries.
Built 1909 Clydebank, Scotland.
Disappeared at sea 1918. Probably struck a mine.

Wairuna
Union SS Co. of NZ.
Captured by German raider Wolf off Kermadec Island NE of New Zealand on 28 May 1917 when bound for San Francisco from Auckland. Crew imprisoned onboard Wolf and Wairuna subsequently sunk.
Warilda
7713 tons.
Adelaide SS Co.
Built 1912 Dalmuir, Scotland. Registered Port Adelaide.
Lent to Admiralty for use as hospital ship 25 July 1916.
Torpedoed and sunk in English Channel 3 August 1918. Australian crew had returned to Australia on expiry of articles in May 1917. Australian officers and engineers remained. Was 'Ambulance Transport' - i.e. camouflaged hospital ship. Heavy loss of life amongst engineering staff plus 118 patients. Total 801 onboard, crew of 80, hospital staff of 60, there were 660 patients, 7 women passengers. "In addition to the engine-room staff and the 16 from the capsized lifeboats, all the occupants of "I" ward (102) were lost." Had made 180 trips across the Channel as hospital ship

Wimmera
3022 tons.
Huddart Parker Ltd.
Built 1904 Greenock, Scotland. Mined and sunk in 1918 off Three Kings Island northern tip of New Zealand. 26 lives lost.

Sources.
APPENDIX 5

Australian vessels - all types and sizes, both sail and steam - lost during 1901 and between 1910 and 1919 inclusive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF VESSEL</th>
<th>VESSEL PASSENGERS &amp; CREW INVOLVED</th>
<th>TOTAL TONNAGE</th>
<th>FATALITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10751</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>50 (11.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14655</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>22 (3.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11829</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>186 (46.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11346</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>170 (50.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>7 (9.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10940</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>52 (14.2%)</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2732</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>14 (8.1%)</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6659</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>25 (15%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12368</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>26 (5.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2370</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>37 (15.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>22 (9.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>86564</td>
<td>3626</td>
<td>611 (16.9%)</td>
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SOURCE
## APPENDIX 6

### INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES AND UNEMPLOYMENT: COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA 1913-1943

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF DISPUTES</th>
<th>WORKERS INVOLVED</th>
<th>WORKING DAYS LOST</th>
<th>PER CENT TRADE UNIONISTS REPORTING UNEMPLOYED</th>
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<td>208</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>622.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>993.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>170.7</td>
<td>1,644.8</td>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>4,689.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>539.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>157.6</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>155.6</td>
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<td>1921</td>
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<td>1,286.2</td>
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<td>445</td>
<td>116.3</td>
<td>858.7</td>
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<td>76.3</td>
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<td>504</td>
<td>152.4</td>
<td>918.6</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>176.7</td>
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<td>360</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>1,310.3</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>200.8</td>
<td>1,713.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>777.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
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<td>259</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>4,461.5</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>54.2</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>134</td>
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<td>246</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>127</td>
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<td>212.3</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>155</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>370.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
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<td>1935</td>
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<td>47.3</td>
<td>495.1</td>
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<td>1936</td>
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<td>60.6</td>
<td>497.2</td>
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<td>342</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>376</td>
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<td>416</td>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>350</td>
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<td>1,507.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<td>1941</td>
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<td>248.1</td>
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<td>1942</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>169.3</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>296.1</td>
<td>990.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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</table>

**Sources**

Plowman, et al., *Australian Industrial Relations.* Appendix 2.1, Table 2.16, p.59.

And

## APPENDIX 7

### TABLE-1

**AUSTRALIAN SHIPS IN INTRASTATE TRADE IN 1935.**

(Excluding Tugs, Lighthouse Tenders, and Pilot Boats)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TONS</th>
<th>DATE BUILT</th>
<th>PLACE BUILT</th>
<th>OWNER</th>
<th>TRADE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alagna</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Grangemouth</td>
<td>Burke</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allenwood</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Tuncurry</td>
<td>Allen Taylor</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arakoon</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>North Coast Steam</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baralaba</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Stettin</td>
<td>AUSN</td>
<td>Old Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergalia</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Troon</td>
<td>Illawarra Steam</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermagui</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Troon</td>
<td>Illawarra Steam</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benga</td>
<td>2052</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Dumbarton</td>
<td>AUSN</td>
<td>Old Passenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaxland</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Glassow</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>NSW &amp; Old Cargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombo</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Leith</td>
<td>Quarries Ltd</td>
<td>NSW Blue Metal</td>
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<td>Bonalbo</td>
<td>960</td>
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<td>Glassow</td>
<td>North Coast Steam</td>
<td>NSW Sugar</td>
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<td>760</td>
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<td>Burntsland</td>
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<td>R.W. Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caro</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>North Shields</td>
<td>Adelaide Steam</td>
<td>Old Cargo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cartela</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>Huon Channel Co</td>
<td>Tas Passenger</td>
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<td>660</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Troon</td>
<td>Illawarra Steam</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>Glassow</td>
<td>North Coast Steam</td>
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<td>Doepel</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>Edina</td>
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<td>Smiths</td>
<td>Vic Passenger</td>
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<td>Gippsland</td>
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<td>Paynesville</td>
<td>Dahlsen</td>
<td>Vic Passenger</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Hunter River Steam</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
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<td>Hall Cain</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>Manning River</td>
<td>Holmes</td>
<td>NSW Cargo</td>
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<td>Hetton Bank</td>
<td>1371</td>
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Total Number of Ships Trading Intrastate 78. Total Tonnage 73,488 grt.
Average Age of ship 18 years.
Average tonnage 942 grt.
## APPENDIX 7

### TABLE-2

**AUSTRALIAN SHIPS IN INTERSTATE TRADE IN 1935.**

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Total Number of Ships Trading Interstate 80. Total Tonnage 258866grt.
Average Age of ship 16 years.
Average Tonnage 3235.8grt.
### APPENDIX 7

#### TABLE-3

**AUSTRALIAN SHIPS IN FOREIGN TRADE IN 1935.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TONS</th>
<th>DATE BUILT</th>
<th>PLACE BUILT</th>
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Total Number of Ships in Foreign Trade 25. Total tonnage 123975grt.
Average age of ship 17 years.
Average tonnage 4960grt.

**SOURCE:**
Pemberton,
*Australian Coastal Shipping*,
Appendix II, pp.251-299.

**NOTE:**
In December 1935 of a total British merchant fleet of 3345 ships (15,206,000GRT) 878 ships (937,000GRT) were engaged in the UK coastal trade.
2467 ships (14,271,000GRT) were engaged in foreign trade.
Of the liner tonnage, 74 per cent was owned by 28 British companies.

**SOURCE:**
Thornton,
*British Shipping*,
p.127.