A history of the relationship between the Queensland branch of the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) and the labour movement in Queensland from 1913-1957

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Chapter 2

The Queensland Labour Movement To

1913

"If we workingmen are to get beneficial legislation, it is largely to ourselves we must trust". Albert Hinchcliffe, President, Queensland Trades and Labour Council, to the Inter-Colonial Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, 1888.

By the 1880s Queensland society had largely evolved from the penal and frontier society of forty years beforehand into a more established and developed colonial outpost. Brisbane in the south east provided a commercial and administrative capital with significant regional centres at Rockhampton, Townsville, and Cairns along the coast with Ipswich, Toowoomba, Gympie and Charters Towers inland. These centres were serviced by ports and an expanding railway system that ensured that by the 1880s all but the most inhospitable areas in the north of the colony were inhabited.

Furthermore what had become evident by the 1880s in Queensland was that the economy would be reliant upon primary industries such as pastoralism, mining and the sugar industry. As predominately rural industries the community of workers that serviced these industries were thus rural communities dispersed throughout a large colony and with various political and cultural beliefs. Unlike working communities in the southern colonies or for that matter in Britain who relied most often on the mostly urban and
‘craft’ based unionists to organise some form of collective labour movement such a movement in Queensland would have to emanate from the rural workers to have any significance by the obvious fact that these workers far outnumbered the urban working communities largely centred around the distant capital of Brisbane. The overwhelming feature of Queensland’s population distribution was that the capital was not necessarily the hub of the community or the economy. Queensland had developed in such a way as to produce a number of significant ‘provincial capitals’ spread along the coast and also inland. These significant urbanised provincial centres served a rural periphery. Thus Queensland’s population was not so much non-urbanised as non-centralised in the capital such as the southern cities of Sydney or Melbourne. How could such a dispersed labour movement be effectively organised? Who would organise it? What policies would it pursue? And what political or industrial influence would it be able to wield?

William Guthrie Spence wrote of the Queensland labour movement: “The labour movement in Queensland differed from that of the other colonies in that it was decidedly and definitely Socialistic from the jump. So soon as it spoke in a collective way it declared for Socialism.” The statement reveals more about Spence and the union he founded than it does about the labour movement in Queensland. The development of anything equating to working class consciousness in Queensland was a gradual process that evolved from pragmatic responses to the changing economic and industrial environment in which it found itself. The development of the movement in Queensland

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2 Spence, W.G., Australia’s Awakening: Thirty Years in the Life of an Australian Agitator. Sydney, 1909, p.175
owed more to the dramatic realisation that the gulf between employer and employee was far greater than previously believed, than as a result of any collective theoretical or ideological catharsis.

In the same year that Queensland separated from the colony of New South Wales, stonemasons working for John Petrie in Brisbane formed a union in order to win an eight-hour day. Two years before, a correspondent to the Courier questioned the type of representative that would take their place in the new Queensland legislature, asking, "...who are to look after the interests of the hardfisted mechanics and working tradesmen of Queen and East Street?"^3 Neither the success of the stonemasons in 1859 nor the query of a lone worker heralded the awakening of the Queensland workers.

The very nature of settlement and industry coupled with the enormity of the colony acted as natural deterrents to working class organisation. More significant, however, was the attitude of the workers themselves. Many of the workers who followed the expanding pastoral industry hoped that they too could one day settle on their own property. In the cities and towns the tradesmen, organised in their craft-based associations, often had much in common with their employers who shared the same skills and similar experiences as their employees. These employees worked hard to become employers themselves. Even the miner, adventurous and opportunistic, relentlessly chased the whispers on the breezes, hoping to find that one big nugget that would free him from the drudgery of wage labour.

The relationship that prevailed amongst the working and employer classes was

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^3 Brisbane Courier, 4 July 1857.
epitomised in 1859 when the new Governor replied to a welcoming address made by the workingmen's organisations when he said:

I perceive, gentlemen, that you characterise your address as proceeding from "working men". I feel certain, however, that you do not mean by that phrase to imply that you belong to any separate class, whose feelings and interests are adverse to, or even distinct from the feelings and interests of any other class of the inhabitants of the colony. In a new and free country...every man is emphatically a "working man."... Capital is powerless without labor, and labor is unprofitable without the aid of capital.\(^4\)

There was no report of a dissenting voice from the assembly.

The *Masters and Servants Act 1860* clearly demonstrated the position of organised labour in Queensland. The Act made it illegal to strike, form unions, breach an employment agreement (ie. cease work or find another job) or even encourage anyone to do any of the above. These offences were punishable by heavy fines and imprisonment. Likewise the *Wages Act 1870*, served to strengthen the position of the employer. Whilst these acts allowed the employer to have the upper hand the reality in the field was a little different in the colony's early decades. The sparsely settled region and rapidly expanding pastoral and mining industries allowed the worker to be in a relatively strong bargaining position when the matter of wages and conditions arose. The employer needed to get his product to the market or be ruined. In such a situation he was rarely prepared to quibble

over an extra two pence!

By the 1880s however the situation had begun to change. From the 1860s successive governments had opened new pastoral districts to the north and to the west, valuable mining discoveries had also been made and the sugar industry was establishing itself as the colony’s most significant agricultural industry. All of these industries required an adequate infrastructure of roads, railways and port facilities, thus providing a boon to the fledgling construction industry. The demand for labour initiated an aggressive Government-sponsored immigration program from Britain and to a lesser extent Germany. With a rapidly expanding economy and increased competition for labour the workers of Queensland found that their bargaining position had become weakened, particularly for the growing numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. Furthermore, workers were becoming concerned about their share of the profits that were making local and overseas capitalists wealthy men. Other issues such as the use of cheap Pacific Islander labour on sugar plantations served to illustrate the growing realisation that the workers of Queensland did have “adverse” and “distinct” feelings and interests from a class that sought to maximise profits for themselves and/or their shareholders and financiers. Faced with growing employer hostility and no direct representation in the colony’s legislative bodies, the workers of Queensland had no option other than to follow their southern brethren and organise collectively.

In October 1879, the first Inter-Colonial Trade Union Congress (ITUC) was held in Sydney. It had been twenty years since Queensland had separated from New South Wales yet the Congress proceeded without a Queensland representative. Again at the
second ITUC held in Melbourne in 1884 no Queensland delegates appeared. The decade marked what was probably the zenith of Victorian liberalism in Queensland under the premiership of Samuel Griffiths from 1883-1888. In that period the Government passed legislation that allowed for the payment of members, the removal of some of the residential qualifications on the franchise and the legalisation of registered trade unions under the *Trade Union Act 1886*. Despite these gains the workingmen of Queensland still wondered about who were representing their interests in parliament and there still remained the Kanaka labour issue that Griffiths managed to avoid at a legislative level despite his rhetoric. The nature of the main primary producing industries in Queensland was changing with overseas companies or local syndicates exerting their dominance over the individual. This in turn affected the political environment with many of the colony’s leading politicians from both sides of the House having vested interests in many of these ventures. The workers of Queensland were becoming acutely aware of the marginal position they were occupying in Queensland society.

The increasing gulf that was emerging in Queensland between employer and employee by the mid-1880s began to manifest itself through the growth of trade unionism. By 1885 unions had been formed, firstly among the craft based industries of printing and building and then the wharf labourers and miners and groups of workers opposed to non-white labour. By this time also the Seaman’s Union had established its

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5 Murphy, D.J., “Queensland” in Murphy, D.J. (ed.), *Labor in Politics*. St. Lucia, 1975, pp. 129-132.

6 For an account of Griffiths’ political career see “Samuel Walker Griffiths: A Liberal Lawyer”, in Murphy, D.J. *et. al* (eds.), *The Premiers of Queensland*. St. Lucia, 1990.

own branch in the colony. These unions often drew their leadership from English migrants with previous union experience. Their concerns were largely non-political and industry based, often concentrating on localised grievances. This began to change, however, on 1 September 1885 when under the presidency of the Seaman's Union secretary, William Galloway, the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council (TLC) was formed. One of the stated aims of the TLC was "...the better representation by members, which working men would send to parliament." Towards this end, Galloway was endorsed as the TLC candidate for the by-election in the Brisbane electorate of Fortitude Valley in 1886. The conservative Brisbane Courier commented of his candidacy, "...For our own part we object to 'machine' politics of every description and a caucus with doubtful authority, does not differ perceptibly from an irresponsible clique." He polled only 111 votes to finish last. Galloway was not to be perturbed and soon used his union profile to gain election for Brisbane's East Ward municipality. Ever the opportunist Galloway soon dispelled with the rhetoric of a 'Labor candidate' and began to adopt the causes favoured by the wealthy mercantile class which dominated and as such enjoyed a career in local government that saw him elected as Mayor of Brisbane in 1890. A vein of support for labour in politics had been tapped by Galloway in the East Ward, however,

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10 Brisbane Courier, 24 March 1886
11 Ibid., 29 March 1886.
12 Murphy, D.J., (ed.), op.cit., 1975, p. 131
much work was to be done to ensure a more disciplined form of political organisation for the labouring classes.

The ITUC of 1885 included, for the first time, seven representatives from Queensland. The Congress devoted much of its time to the question of better political representation of the labouring classes in the legislatures of the various colonies and more collective union action. The following year four delegates attended the Adelaide Congress with similar assertions about the potential role of the nascent labour movement throughout the continent.

The ITUC of 1888 was to be held in Brisbane. Such an honour was not only a fraternal gesture among trade unionists across the continent but also as a recognition of the tremendous progress made by organised labour in the northern colony. Within the first twelve months of the Trade Union Act sixteen trade unions with a combined membership of 2,359 had registered. By 1888 this figure had grown to twenty six unions with 5,385 members. The labour movement in Queensland had also recruited some gifted and zealous organisers and propagandists including Albert Hinchcliffe, Mat Reid and William Lane.

Hinchcliffe and Reid, a printer and carpenter respectively, had both emigrated to

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14 Murphy, D.J., et al (eds.), Prelude to Power. Milton, 1970, p. 315. This figure would not represent the total union membership as registration was not compulsory.
Australia from England. Both were socialist but both too, were pragmatists. The improvement of the working classes would not come by violent revolution but by the organisation of the working class industrially and politically to achieve reforms gradually and through the parliament. Both had a talent for organisation and both were committed to the ideals of an organised political and industrial labour movement. Whilst Hinchcliffe was affable and popular Reid was a sullen and distrustful man who made enemies easily, nevertheless his experience and determination were imperative to the fledgling labour movement in Queensland. Both were urban-based craft unionists with little experience with the rural and mostly unskilled workers that dominated Queensland.

William Lane has emerged as the embodiment of the radical socialist in Labour’s mythology and is given much credit for the growth in Queensland unionism. Born in Bristol he migrated to Queensland in 1885 where he continued his career in journalism. Lane drew on the works of not only British socialists but also American socialists such as Edward Bellamy. Bellamy and his book *Looking Backward*, would dominate Lane’s thoughts with its notions of state owned enterprises and co-operative village settlements. In 1887 Lane founded the *Boomerang*. This radical paper espoused not only Bellamy’s utopian socialism but also gave voice to the ugly racism and xenophobia that would characterise the Queensland labour movement. Lane became friends with, among other prominent unionists, Hinchcliffe and Reid both of whom realised the worth of the zealous propagandist. Lane with his florid prose, praising socialism and the organisation of labour

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15 Murphy, D.J., (ed.), *op.cit.*, 1975, p. 136 and p. 224
whilst fulminating against the evil of organised capital, served this purpose admirably.\textsuperscript{16}

Hinchcliff was elected secretary of the Brisbane ITUC. The delegates heard many arguments in favour of direct political representation by labour candidates. The mood of the Queensland delegates was reflected in the closing remarks of the president of the TLC who stated, "If we workingmen are to get beneficial legislation, it is largely to ourselves we must trust."\textsuperscript{17} Hinchcliff echoed these sentiments in his introduction to the official report of the Congress:

Wage earners have been too often gullied and hoodwinked at election times by the rash promises of so-called labour candidates which are mostly forgotten after they have secured their seats, and now the workers have determined that none but a man direct from the workshop - one from among ourselves - shall be returned in the interests of labour.\textsuperscript{18}

The Congress decided to delegate to the Brisbane TLC the responsibility of drafting a plan for the federation of all Australian unions with the purpose of both industrial and political organisation. Encouraged by this initiative the Brisbane TLC endorsed six candidates for the 1888 elections - Hinchcliffe, Colbourne, Valentine and Johnson in Brisbane and W L Davis and T Hunter in Charters Towers and Carnavon.

\textsuperscript{16} Many author's have considered the role of Lane, see for example Lane, E., \textit{Dawn to Dusk}, Brisbane, 1939, and Ross, L., \textit{William Lane and the Australian Labour Movement}, Sydney, nd.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Official Report of the Fifth Intercolonial Trade Union Congress}, Brisbane, 1888

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
respectively. None were successful. However, in the Ipswich seat of Bundamba, the self-proclaimed Labour candidate, Thomas Glassey, was victorious. Of Northern Irish birth, Glassey came to Queensland via the mines of Scotland and England. Although friendly with Lane and Hinchcliffe, he unsuccessfully sought pre-selection as a Griffithite candidate. Upon changing political allegiance, Glassey was able to appeal to the coalminers and employees of the railway workshops that characterised the labour movement around Ipswich. As Bowden explains, Glassey was also the beneficiary of a political struggle between conservative candidates who usually dominated the Ipswich-based seat. With the conservative vote split, Glassey was able to claim a seat.

At the Hobart ITUC of the following year, under the leadership of Charles Seymour, the Queensland delegation presented its proposal for an Australian Labour Federation (ALF). The ALF was to oversee industrial relations and to organise for the nomination and election of political candidates. The ALF would be divided into district councils who would be affiliated to a general council. The districts would still remain relatively autonomous retaining their power to manage their own funds, levy members, and resolve local industrial disputes and co-ordinate the local movement both politically and industrially. Finance was to be provided by a monthly levy of sixpence per member. One penny of this sum would go to the general council for administrative costs, another to fund a monthly journal and the remainder stayed with the district council. The proposal was directly in line with the request of the Brisbane Congress, yet faced with its

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19 Murphy, D.J., (ed.), op.cit., 1975, p. 135 and fn 12 on p. 224
imminent realisation the southern unionists, fearful of their own loss of power and the strident assault the proposal claimed to be making upon the capitalist system, refused to debate the proposal let alone vote upon it.\textsuperscript{22}

However the situation in Queensland was developing a momentum of its own. In April and May of the same year the impotence of the TLC was starkly revealed when they were unable to prevent the importation of ‘free’ labourers to smash the Brisbane printers’ strike.\textsuperscript{23} Under pressure from within and throughout the Queensland labour movement the TLC disbanded and in June the proposals of the ALF were adopted to form the Brisbane District Council of the ALF. The provisional secretary was Seymour and a Bendigo born boot-maker, David Bowman, was elected president. The year also proved significant in Labour’s quest for political representation when two acts were passed in the Legislative Assembly: one allowing for the payment of members with an annual salary of £300 with a traveling allowance; the other reducing the parliamentary term from five years to three\textsuperscript{24}.

The fledgling ALF had little time to find its feet. In August 1889, dockworkers in London went on strike. Hinchcliffe became secretary of the London Dock Strike Fund. The strike elicited much support in Australia from unionists and non-unionists alike. In Queensland the ALF took a leading role in fund raising and contributed significantly to the £30 000 donated by Australians.\textsuperscript{25} Not surprisingly, the liberal-minded folk of Queensland who vigorously supported the claims of the London Dockers could admit no

\textsuperscript{22} Murphy, D.J., (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, 1975, pp. 136-137

\textsuperscript{23} See Hagan, J., ‘The Queensland Typographical Association’ in Murphy, D.J., \textit{et.al., (eds), op.cit.}, 1970

\textsuperscript{24} Murphy, D.J., (ed), \textit{op. cit.}, 1975, pp. 138-139.

parallel with the plight of workers in Queensland. The ALF was also working towards its
goal of a labour journal. Hinchcliffe, Reid, Seymour and Gil Casey were elected to a
board of trustees, and Lane was appointed as editor. The new journal, the *Worker*, mostly
written by Lane under a series of *noms-de-plume*, began in March 1890. From the outset
Lane expressed the industrial and political motives of the *Worker* and therefore the ALF.
He wrote in the first issue,

> The political attention of the *Worker* will be limited to those questions which
closely affect the welfare of the wage earning masses...Neither of the old political
parties will have its praise or its blame excepting as they treat demands of the
workers for justice and all efforts to secure direct representation for organized
(sic) labour will have its loyal support.\(^\text{26}\)

The true test of the ALF would be the support it received outside of Brisbane,
where the majority of Queenslands unionists and workers were located. With this
realisation firmly in mind, Hinchcliffe, Casey and Glassey toured the coastal, mining and
pastoral districts of the colony in early 1890\(^\text{27}\). One of the most crucial areas for the
success of the ALF would be the central pastoral districts around Barcaldine and
Blackall. Appropriately, then, the first port of call for Hinchcliffe and Casey was the
Barcoo district for the annual QLU and QSU meeting. Hinchcliffe managed to become a
delegate to the meeting and thus espouse the virtues and aspirations of the ALF to the

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\(^{26}\) *Worker*, 1 March, 1890.

\(^{27}\) Murphy, D.J., (ed), *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 139.
bush unionists. The meeting was also attended by the Central District Carriers' Union and the Peak Downs Carriers' Union who were not only considering amalgamating with the larger unions but were also keen on what the men from the city had to say about the new federation. Hinchcliffe's task was not to be that difficult.

The bush unionists were well aware of the benefits closer collaboration with other unions such as the Waterside Workers' and the Seamen's Union could offer them - it was one thing for the pastoralist to smash a strike of shearers or shed-hands with 'scab' labour, but what if he couldn't get the product off the wharves in order to get it to the markets for sale? Kewley was widely known to favour such a federation and, apart from competition from poaching ASU organisers, was able to write to Williams of the Carriers' Union in 1889, "I hope to soon see all Unions in Queensland federated." Likewise, Kewley was an active supporter of the ALF's pursuit of political representation for the working classes. In 1889 Kewley founded and became secretary of one of the largest workers political organisations in the colony - the Workingman's Parliamentary Representatives Association (WPRA).

The meeting overwhelmingly supported affiliation with the ALF and the Barcoo District Council of the ALF was formed. From its headquarters in Barcaldine, the Council assumed the functional organisation of its four member unions and comprised of twenty-four delegates: fifteen from the QLU, seven from the QSU and one each from the Carriers'. Local shearer, Bill Fothergill was elected secretary and prominent QSU

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29 Kewley to Williams, 24 October 1889. M46-E 161 A, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Canberra (hereafter NBAC).
30 Svensen, S., *op.cit.*, 1989, pp. 49-50
organiser, Mick Fanning was elected delegate to the General Council of the ALF in Brisbane. By the end of the year Fothergill had been replaced by Hugh Graham and the Barcoo District Council renamed the Central District Council (CDC).  

The enormous success of the ALF spruikers at their first attempt not only boosted their confidence but also gained them much needed credibility with other unionists throughout their tour. Union leaders such as Bill Kewley helped ease their way by appealing to their district counterparts to "join under one banner."  

District councils of the ALF were quickly established in Wide Bay and Burnett, Townsville, Charters Towers and Rockhampton. The numerical strength of the CDC was indicated by the election of Mick Fanning as vice president of the ALF. Such a decision reflected not only Fanning's considerable personal qualities but also the fact that of the twenty one thousand registered trade unionists in Queensland, the combined strength of the QSU/QLU amounted to approximately twelve thousand of this total.  

Put simply with rural workers accounting for almost half of all union members in Queensland any combined body of trade unionists would be ineffectual without the bush unionists. The ALF had, wisely, realised this and ensured that the bush unionists were adequately represented on the executive of the new body. Clearly, even at this early juncture the involvement of the bush unions was seen to be vital to any effective industrial or political organisation of the labour movement in Queensland.

In May 1890, the ALF would face its first real challenge. A dispute had broken out

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31 Ibid. p. 52.
32 Kewley to QLU Townsville, 28 January 1890, AWU Deposit, M44, NBAC.
33 The figures for QSU (3 721) and the QLU ("nearly eight thousand members") are provided in Svensen, S., op.cit. p. 49 and p. 51 respectively. The number of registered trade unionists is provided by Murphy, D.J., et.al., (eds), "Appendix H: Trade Unions in Queensland 1887-1915", p. 315.
at the Jondaryn Station on the Darling Downs over the issue of the 'closed shop' - the exclusive hiring of union labour.\(^\text{34}\) The station received the full support of the newly created pastoralists' organisations - the Queensland Pastoral Employers Association (PEA) and the locally based Sheep Owners Association of the Darling Downs (SOAD).\(^\text{35}\) The wool was shorn by non-union labour and reached the Brisbane wharves in April. Hinchcliffe reacted quickly and convinced the Seamen, Wharf Labourers' and Lighterman's to declare the wool 'black'. Not only did the local unionists respond but also the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, the New Zealand Seaman's Union, the Coal Lumper's Union of Newcastle, the Adelaide and Hobart Trades and labour Councils and the Port Adelaide Workingmen's Association\(^\text{36}\). Whilst this support was significant it made no contribution to coffers of the ALF and thus realising that neither the QSU nor the ALF were in a financial position to conduct a lengthy industrial dispute, they relied heavily on the solidarity of the Queensland labour movement and a good deal of bluff. Hinchcliffe contacted the shipping company responsible for the transporting of the Jondaryn wool to England, the British India and Queensland Agency Shipping Company. His dispatch not only informed the company of the support of the maritime unions in Brisbane but also indicated that unionists in Britain, grateful of Australia's support during the Dock Strike, could be counted upon.

Hinchcliffe also seized the opportunity to heal the rift between the QSU and the ASU. The encroachment of ASU organisers into Queensland, most notably L.A. Garry

\(^\text{34}\) For an excellent examination of the Jondaryn Dispute see Walker, J., \textit{Jondaryn Station. The Relationship Between Pastoral Capital and Pastoral Labour 1840-1890}, St. Lucia, 1988.

\(^\text{35}\) For an examination of the formation of the PEA and smaller pastoralist associations such as the SOAD see Svensen, S., \textit{op.cit.}, 1989, pp. 55-61.

from the Bourke Branch, provoked resentment from Kewley and support from pastoralists on the Downs who took great delight in seeing the pastoral unions at each others throat. In the couple of months before Jondaryn Kewley had fulminated, "...The Management of the A.S.Union must be a nice lot when they would try and crush another for a few blasted Squatters. They must have a rum idea of Unionism"\(^{37}\), and to Hinchcliffe, "I myself do not think much of Spence or he would have taken action at once to stop Mr Garry's little game."\(^{38}\) Hinchcliffe knew though that no threat of industrial action would carry any bearing if non-union labour could be brought into Queensland. For this purpose he enlisted the support of Spence who promised '5000 horsemen' to patrol the Queensland border to prevent non-union strike breakers heading north. Whether Spence could have honoured his promise is irrelevant as it found its mark. The Company, fearing a ruinous strike in the face of the apparent might of united Australian trade unionism, called a conference and capitulated to the unionists.

The Jondaryn dispute was significant to the history of industrial and political relations in both Queensland and Australia. The victory assured the growth of the ALF whose future would have been doubtful had a defeated QSU/QLU disaffiliated. Despite the presence of Fanning, Jondaryn confirmed the leadership of the ALF, with its urban, craft and industrial union based ethos. Further still, it offered a demonstration of the benefits of collective trade union co-operation. The strike also served to lay the seeds of rapprochement between the QSU and the ASU. However, the strike imbued the ALF and its affiliates with an inflated sense of their industrial strength and power. Indeed, the

\(^{37}\) Kewley to Clarke, 19 March 1890, M46-E161 A, NBAC.
\(^{38}\) Kewley to Hinchcliffe, 19 April 1890, ibid.
pastoral unions even censured the ALF Executive for not pushing for better conditions beyond those claimed. Finally, and most ominously, the strike convinced employers and their organisations such as the PEA, that conciliation, by its very essence, involved compromise and a threat to employer control and profit. They too learnt the value of collective action and busily set about preparing themselves for the next challenge from the impetuous trade unions.

The employers would not have long to wait to exact retribution. In August 1890 a strike had begun in Melbourne by the Marine Officers’ Association (MOA). The MOA submitted a log of claims to the ship owners, primarily on wage rates. The ship owners however refused to negotiate, unless the MOA reversed its recent decision to affiliate with the Melbourne Trades Hall. The MOA refused and walked out. The Maritime Strike grew to involve approximately fifty thousand trade unionists in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queenslnd including the QSU and QLU and other ALF affiliates. The employers and their associations would combine with the colonial legislatures by using troops, police and the enlistment of ‘special constables’ to confront and arrest strikers and to ensure that production was maintained.

The issues from union to union, industry to industry and colony to colony differed in detail, but the central motivation for the trade unions during the Maritime Strike was the inescapable realisation that the economic, judicial and legislative elites of Australian society had aligned themselves squarely against the Australian trade union movement. The strike collapsed with utter failure and often unemployment the fate of the trade unionists. With colonial economies contracting into depression, the employer counter-
offensive and the battle for survival had begun.  

In the same month that the Maritime Strike had begun the ALF held its first meeting of the General Council. The result of this meeting was the formulation and publication of the ALF’s platform. The platform reflected the socialist influences of the urban trade unionists and the propagandist, Lane, as well as the confidence of ALF following Jondaryn. The platform was radical by any measure with the first plank being, ‘The Nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and exchanging wealth.’ The last plank pledged the pursuit of the platform ‘... until social justice is fully secured to each and every citizen.’ The platform concluded by emphasising that, ‘In one year a People’s Parliament will give Queensland workers more justice than can be wrung from capitalistic parliaments in a generation.’

Towards this end the ALF also published ‘The People’s Parliamentary Platform’, which included universal (white) adult suffrage, the abolition of plural voting and a nominee chamber, the enfranchisement of the ‘floating population’ and annual parliaments. The platform stunned and angered both the conservative and liberal-minded sections of the community, with the Jondaryn dispute still fresh and the current struggle throughout four colonies providing a stark example of trade unionism. It should be noted that politically the old rivalries in Queensland had been broken down in this
same month with Griffith and Mcllwraith forming a coalition known as the ‘Grifflwraith’. The district councils of the ALF were likewise alarmed by this strident affront to the existing system and the *ancien régime*. Outside of the Brisbane leadership of the ALF, the labour movement desired a reformation of Queensland society, not its dismantling!

The pragmatists within the ALF General Executive had quickly realised that the labour movement in neither Queensland nor the general electorate were ready for the revolutionary sentiments of the first platform of the ALF. In December, in accordance with the August resolutions of the ALF, the General Executive reconvened in the shearing centre of Blackall in central-west Queensland. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a workers political organization for the purpose of returning workers representatives to the parliament— the Queensland Labor Party. The party would comprise members of ALF-affiliated unions as well as non-affiliated unions and local political organizations (most commonly referred to as Workers’ Political Organisations or People’s Parliamentary Associations) that endorsed the ALF platform. Reflecting the regional nature of Queensland politics, a traditional suspicion of Brisbane domination as well as idealistic notions of democracy, the selection of candidates was left at a local level. The party composition reflected a desire to appeal beyond the union movement that would be required to win seats by including non-industrial organizations that were sympathetic to the labour movement and its policies.

Thus in contradiction to the legends of the movement’s myth-makers the Labor Party in Queensland was not founded in response to the Shearers Strike but before the great industrial turmoil that was to engulf the labour movement in Queensland in 1891.

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44 Murphy, D.J., (eds), *op.cit.*, 1975, pp 140-143
Before that strike had begun the leaders of the movement, as result of the Maritime Strikes' defeat, had resolved that industrial militancy was not the most effective means of forcing chance and that parliamentary success was.

The signs for unionism in Queensland and particularly the bush unions were looking ominous. At the end of October 1890, flush with their success in the Maritime Strike, representatives of pastoralist associations throughout the colonies met in Melbourne to plan for the upcoming season. With the victory at Jondaryn and the recently released ALF platform, Queensland had emerged in the minds of pastoralists and others as the most radical and militant colony in Australia. The conservative Melbourne newspaper the Age, wrote of the conference, "As the pastoralists regard Queensland as the real battleground in the shearing industry the views of the Queensland delegates will have much influence on the decisions of the conference."^45

And they did. The conference passed what would be called the Pastoralists' Agreement. The conference also passed motions establishing a bureau of 'free labour' and secured the formation of a central body to coordinate all pastoral associations - the United Pastoralists' Association (UPA). The 'Agreement' maintained for Queensland the prevailing rate of twenty shillings per hundred and provided for food and accommodation along with other fairly reasonable conditions; and there was no mention of the Union or 'freedom of contract' - the right of employers to engage whom ever they wish, union or non-union. The true purpose of the UPA, however, was expressed in a motion that was carried unanimously, which declared,

^45 Age, 27 October 1890.
That the objects of the Federal Council are to secure unanimity of action on the part of all members of Pastoralists’ Unions, and to maintain freedom of contract in respect of the employment of labour.46

The Pastoral Agreement also included a section that outlined serious reductions in the wages of shed hands - in some cases up to fifteen per cent. The UPA knew that with some of the Central Queensland sheds being the first to operate, that it would be in the northern colony that the Agreement would first be put to the test with rural workers. At a meeting at Blackall in December the bush unions had rejected the Agreement and the scene was set. On 6 January the workers at Logan Downs were presented with the Agreement and promptly rejected it, forming a strike camp of some two hundred workers at Clermont.47

Throughout January and February the confrontation grew as strike camps emerged around Hughenden, Springsure, Cloncurry and Barcaldine. The pastoralists responded by importing ‘free’ labour from the south with the first such workers disembarking at Rockhampton in early February48. With the coming of free labourers or scabs as the unionists preferred clashes became more frequent and the Government rushed police reinforcements and military troops to the strike areas and ‘special constables’ were also sworn in to help maintain order. Hinchcliffe and the ALF were desperately seeking an open conference with the pastoralists, knowing not only could the

47 Ibid., pp. 76-79.
48 Ibid., ‘First Battles’, pp. 73-96 passim.
Queensland trade union movement not afford to maintain around eight thousand strikers but also in the wake of the Maritime Strike that they could count on little assistance from their financially crippled counterparts in the other colonies.

The pastoralists had learnt well from the earlier disputes and refused to come to a conference without the unions accepting the principle of ‘freedom of contract’ - a most unlikely proposition. They knew that the unions were weak, that they could rely on southern labour as well as the growing number of unemployed in Queensland and that they would have the support of the Government. The unions stood firm, believing that the acceptance of ‘freedom of contract’ would lead to the destruction of wages and conditions in the pastoral industry. On 23 March, despite the reservations of the ALF leadership, a general stoppage was called for all bush unionists.

The details of the strike are not the concern of this work. Nevertheless it must be noted that the ferocity and determinedness with which the pastoralists, with the support of the Queensland government, confronted the striking shearers engendered a bitterness that would loom large in Queensland’s industrial and political psyche for decades to come. The strike lasted until June 1891 and ended in abject defeat for the strikers and the ALF. The Pastoralists Association steadfastly refused to meet with the strike leaders or the ALF executive. Military personnel were dispatched by the government throughout the strike regions, ‘special constables’ were enlisted to harass the strikers in their camps and violent clashes often occurred. The pastoralists imported ‘free’ or ‘scab’ labour from the

southern colonies. The full weight of the law was brought to bear against the strikers with the government famously resorting to an archaic British law to convict and imprison fourteen strike leaders. For many within the labour movement the vary existence of trade unionism was at stake and the desperation and shock of the conservative counter-offensive can be ascertained from a plea by the strike committee published in the *Worker*:

There is an organised attempt being made by Australian Capitalism to break down unionism, the immediate point of attack being the Queensland bush unions affiliated with the Australian Labour Federation. This attack is made by the whole capitalistic force of the continent, with the evident intention to extend it if successful to every organized body of wage-earners throughout the colonies...

No attempt whatever was made by capitalists to meet the bush unions in a friendly way to secure an alteration to any of the former conditions of labouring and rates of wages...

The employers refuse to have any such discussion. They want “freedom to victimise” and seem prepared to go to any lengths to secure it. They are determined to crush unionism, and do not want a conference at all...

Therefore we urgently appeal to every Federation, district and union, to every affiliated union, to every individual unionist, and to every sympathiser with unionism, which in spite of slanders and provocation and shortcomings strives earnestly to be honest and to raise men to manhood and woman to womanhood, to

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50 The Act, no longer enforced in Britain, was ostensibly centred on issues of conspiracies to intimidate (variously, intimidating, workmen, inducement to disrupt industry, obstruction of people and inducement to alter the mode of conducting business etc). The Act which eventuated in the imprisonment of fourteen unionist was simply called 6 King George IV.
help our common cause and our bush comrades in this great battle.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite such pleas the union movement in Queensland was dealt a near fatal blow during the strike with not only morale but also finances exhausted as the economy descended into a depression that would last most of the decade. The shearsers would again embark upon a forlorn industrial campaign in 1894 marked by even greater violence with strikers resorting to incendiarism and the military and police opening fire on strikers\textsuperscript{52}.

Both the QSU and the QLU had ceased to be and merged to become the Amalgamated Workers Union (Am.WU). First mooted at the general meeting of the QSU in December 1891 and agreed to at a meeting between delegates of the QSU and QLU in May 1892 a plebiscite of members overwhelmingly supported the amalgamation which became formalised in November 1892. With a membership of only 5,281 (half the number of pastoral unionists that entered the 1891 Strike) the new organisation was to be divided into three autonomous branches centred on the three major railway termini of Longreach, Charleville and Hughenden\textsuperscript{53}. More a loose confederation than one functioning body the there would be no general officers of the Am.WU with each district electing its own officials and formulating its own working rules, nor would any general funds be held by the union. The annual conference was designed more a a consultative forum as opposed to decision-making body. All issues effecting members were to be referred to those members within the specific branch via a plebiscite\textsuperscript{54}. Battle-scarred and financially ruined the pastoral workers had decided that it was time to look to their own affairs in their own region and hoped only to call upon more widespread solidarity in

\textsuperscript{51} Worker, March 1891, (precise date obscured)
\textsuperscript{52} See sources cited in footnote 42.
\textsuperscript{53} Svensen, S., \textit{op. cit.}, 1989, pp. 200-201.
times of acute distress. Also in 1894 the southern pastoral unions finally changed its name the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU) following the successful amalgamation of the GLU and the ASU. Much like the Queenslanders the southern unions had been trying to amalgamate since the end of 1891. Motions were passed and plebiscites held on a range of proposals including amalgamation with the Queenslanders. A range of inter-colonial, inter-personal and classification rivalries prevented instant success and it was only when faced by a hostile negotiation proposition from pastoralists in early 1894 did the majority of branches accede to an amalgamation. Again the new union was to be organised on a largely autonomous branch structure and again localised issues were to be resolved by referral to the branch membership. Whilst hopes were high that an amalgamation with the Am.WU could succeed it would be a decade before those in the south could agree to an even bigger amalgamation with their northern brethren.\textsuperscript{55}

The Shearer’s Strikes served to confirm for many within the labour movement—including leaders such as Hinchcliffe, Reid and Dawson—that militancy would not work against the combined forces of the employers and the state and that parliamentary means were the best way of achieving the movement’s goals. Not only were the events of the strikes compelling motives for this more moderate tactic but also the rapid decline in trade unionism meant that any attempts at militancy were doomed to failure in such a hostile environment. For the remainder of the decade trade unionism in Queensland stagnated with a number of smaller trade unions disappearing altogether. Only the large unskilled and semi-skilled, mainly rural unions maintained any viable membership—mostly through the Am.WU and the smaller mining and railway unions.

\textsuperscript{55} Merritt, J., \textit{op.cit.}, 1986, pp.206-230 \textit{passim}.
As a result of this it was these bush unions and especially the branches of the Am.WU that emerged as the only viable leaders of the industrial and by extension the political labour movement in Queensland. Whilst prominent urban union officials such as Hinchcliffe still had important organisational and propaganda duties to perform the ALF functioned only in the most basic of duties. To the bush unions fell the vital tasks of maintaining functioning branches, providing delegates to ALF and other meetings and conferences of the political and industrial labour, organising industrial action (albeit limited due to the difficult economic environment), collecting subscription fees, enrolling new members and continuing its propaganda via the pages of the Worker. Similarly as a result of its mere existence and numerical dominance the leaders of the rural unions soon emerged as the leaders of the labour movement in Queensland. Simply put, in these difficult times for the labour movement in Queensland it was the bush unions that were able to maintain any semblance of membership and organisation and thus with no viable alternative were able to establish and consolidate the dominance of the bush unions as the most powerful in the Queensland labour movement.

Many other unions existed in name only. By 1894 union membership had slumped with only nine registered unions with a combined membership of only 780 members. Clearly any revival of unionism in Queensland would need to be led by the bush unionists in combination with those dedicated stalwarts in the ALF under the direction of Albert Hinchcliffe. Significantly, also for the bush unions was simple fact that the very maintenance of an organization and a rank-and-file membership would mean that their leaders would play a necessarily significant role in any labour

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organization – industrial or political – that might emerge from the ruins of the era of the
Great Strikes.

Ironically, in March 1891, the same month in which the general stoppage was
called the executive of the ALF produced a revised platform in response to the hostile
reception the first platform received. Wisely, the executive adopted a more moderate
and pragmatic tone keeping in mind the more electorally sensitive purpose of the
platform following the formation of the Labor Party. The revised platform removed the
more radical socialistic planks of the previous one and adopted a more pragmatic
platform designed for broad-based appeal with universal adult suffrage and the abolition
of the non-elected Legislative Council as the first planks.

Having set itself on the course of electoral politics the fledgling Labor Party were
buoyed by some early successes in 1892 when four Labor candidates were returned at by-
elections. Nevertheless, the four MLAs had little direction and it was they who instigated
the first Labor-in-Politics Convention in 1892 to clarify the Party’s platform and
organization for the 1893 elections. As such a tradition was set whereby as nearly as
possible Conventions were to be held approximately every three years prior to the state
elections to state clearly the policies of the Labor Party. The Labor-in-Politics
Convention became the supreme decision-making body of the political labour movement
in Queensland.

That first Labor-in-Politics Convention was attended by the four MLAs,
representatives of the ALF and delegates from the Workers’ Political Organisations. The

57 Murphy, D.J, in Murphy, D.J., et al, (eds), op.cit., 1975, pp.140-143
59 Ibid. p. 94
delegates endorsed the revised ALF platform and thus virtually at its inception the Labor Party set the foundations of its later success by replacing theory with pragmatism. The Convention also elected an executive called the Central Political Executive (CPE). The CPE would be responsible for the official endorsement of Labor candidates, finance, checking electoral rolls, monitoring the other parties and adjudicating in branch conflicts.

Tom Glassey, former miner, accountant and political opportunist led forty-six endorsed Labor candidates into the 1893 elections with sixteen returned to the seventy-two seat Legislative Assembly – respectable but not enough to form an Opposition or hold the balance of power. Despite this early and qualified success the 1890s were to be a continued struggle for the labour movement in Queensland both electorally and industrially as economic depression battered the finances and the membership of unions and the Labor Party. Indeed, the 1895 Labor-in-Politics Convention was cancelled due to financial difficulties.

The period from 1893 to 1907 provided the Labor Party with a mixture of both success and division. Throughout the period the vote for Labor candidates steadily improved as did the economy in Queensland. With the conservative coalition descending into internal disputes the leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party (PLP) Anderson Dawson even occupied the Treasury benches for the week-long “first Labor government in the world”. But trouble was not far off as the movement and the politicians that

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60 Report of the convention was produced in the *Worker* 20 August 1892
61 McMullin, R., *op. cit.*, 1991, p.25
62 Ibid., p. 26
claimed to represent the movement struggled with defining the roles of each.

The members of the PLP had to decide whether they were bound by the decisions of the movement embodied in the Labor-in-Politics Conventions and the CPE or whether they were responsible to the electorate that elected them. The first point of contention was the ‘Pledge’ which bound all endorsed Labor candidates to the policies ratified by the CPE. The second was the issue of alliances with other political organisations in Parliament. Many in the PLP anxious to govern, supported the notion of tactical alliances in return for legislative reforms advanced by Labor. Others within the CPE and ALF such as Hinchcliffe and Reid were suspicious of alliances with those that had little sympathy or empathy with the goals of the labour movement.

However, by 1903 when disaffected Liberals within the government made overtures to the PLP the bait was too tempting to resist. With the CPE effectively controlled by the Brisbane-based politicians during sittings of parliament the CPE supported the coalition with the Liberals to form government with the Liberal Arthur Morgan as Premier. Even Hinchcliffe and Reid realising the potential expediency of achieving legislative reform reluctantly agreed to the coalition. The leader of the PLP, William Browne and William Kidston became ministers in the new ‘Lib-Lab’ government. It was decided to maintain the integrity of the new coalition but to also recognise the independence of the PLP in the House that both Browne and Kidston would be relieved of their leadership roles in the PLP with Peter Airey assuming the leadership of the PLP. Furthermore, the PLP continued to meet separately but would then attend

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64 For a discussion of both the ‘Pledge’ and the debates over coalitions see Murphy, D.J., op. cit., 1975, pp. 156-163
65 Ibid. pp. 168-169
coalition meetings when required.\textsuperscript{66}

The following year Morgan called an election and the Coalition returned an overwhelming fifty-five seats. Significantly, Labor contributed thirty-four of these making it the largest representation of any party in the Legislative Assembly. With such a mandate the Government was able to pressure the Legislative Council into passing the electoral reforms that granted universal adult suffrage and abolished plural voting.

Buoyed by this electoral and legislative success many within the labour movement saw the 1905 Labor-in-Politics Convention as an opportunity to reassert the ideological foundations of the movement and the supremacy of the movement over the politicians. The Convention agreed that there could be no more than half of the CPE could comprise members of the PLP. Furthermore the Convention adopted a socialist objective that advocated:

securing the full results of their industry to the wealth producers by the collective ownership of production, distribution and exchange, to be attained through the extension of the State and local government bodies\textsuperscript{67}.

Kidston and Kerr were dismayed by the apparent return to radicalism and issued a statement condemning the objective\textsuperscript{68}. The tension between those in the PLP who were


\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Official Record of the Fourth Labour-in-Politics Convention}, Brisbane, 1905, p. 17

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Worker}, 29 July, 1905
enjoying the comforts of office and those in the CPE who had seen the usefulness of the coalition as ended continued to grow with Kidston (who had become premier in 1906) urging Labor politicians to pledge their support to him and not to the Party or its platform. The 1907 Convention was set to be a clash between the politicians and the rest of the movement to ascertain who controlled the political labour movement in Queensland. Kidston had effectively forced all those who wished to run as ‘Labor’ candidates in the coming elections to choose between the CPE and himself as Premier.\(^69\)

The fragile ‘Lib-Lab’ coalition was shattered with the PLP dividing exactly in half with seventeen remaining with the CPE and the remaining seventeen declaring themselves Kidstonites. The Convention confirmed this position and defiantly carried motions rejecting coalitions and forbidding any Labor member from occupying a position in a non-Labor ministry.\(^70\) Mat Reid, the President of the CPE encapsulated the new resolve within the political labour movement when he declared, ‘To lose our distinctness would mean failure’.\(^71\) The grimly determined Reid, had, in what would be his finest moment in the labour movement, left no doubt as to the growing confidence within the labour movement in that state and its determination to win government and advance the goals of the movement by securing power in its own right. Furthermore, and significantly for Queensland’s socio-political environment, Reid had identified the Labor Party and the movement it represented as something distinct within that society. Whilst the Party clearly sought to appeal beyond a narrowly defined ‘labouring’ class it did so on the understanding that it represented views and goals that differed markedly from other

\(^69\) Murphy, D.J., *op. cit.*, 1975, pp. 172-173
\(^70\) Crook, D.P., *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 67
\(^71\) ‘Presidential Address’, *Official Record of the Fifth Labour-in-Politics Convention*, Brisbane, 1907
sections of Queensland society.

Labor had survived its first major schism of the twentieth century. Although Kidston would go on to lead a conservative coalition until 1911 the Labor Party would soon increase its eighteen members of 1907 to twenty-seven members by 1909. Labor proved that it could stand alone and become a viable political force. More significantly the CPE and the Convention were able to re-assert supremacy in organising and directing the Party instead of the parliamentarians.

Importantly during this period the labour movement in Queensland had also reorganised its infrastructure in a way that clearly defined administration, policy making and revenue-raising within the Queensland labour movement. The 1898 Labor-in-Politics Convention resolved that in future delegates to the Convention were elected from the local political organizations with no direct representation from trade unions. The move was designed to remove the stigma of union domination from the Labor Party. It was a cynical ploy as many of the local political organisations were strongly influenced by unionists. Indeed, in many local branches, particularly those away from the major centers of population, trade unions and their rank-and-file were the only real bodies capable of organizing and maintaining the local political organization. This geographical and demographic reality had a significant bearing on the influence rural unions such as the Australian Workers’ Union would have on Labor politics. Changes were also made to the CPE where an even balance was to be maintained between the ALF and the PLP. However, as the CPE was based in Brisbane in the southeast its control was effectively handed over to the parliamentarians based in Brisbane with many ALF delegates unable

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72 Murphy, D.J., *op. cit.*, 1975, p. 160
to attend on a regular basis. However, whilst this geographical and financial restriction on the full involvement of the CPE served to give control to the parliamentarians it can be seen that if an industrial organisation (or any other organisation claiming to represent the interests of Labor) was able to ensure a steady flow of its members to parliament then this influence by the PLP on the CPE could effectively shift to this organisation.

Finally this period to 1907 also saw a refinement and moderation in the platform endorsed by the CPE and presented with increasing success to the Queensland electorate. At the 1898 Labor-in-Politics Convention the delegates revised the platform to encompass moderate policies committed to equity and social reform designed to appeal to a broad electoral base. Adult suffrage and abolition of the upper house remained as cornerstones but added were planks seeking to encourage state enterprises, free, compulsory and secular education, closer land settlement and prohibitions on coloured labour. It was a platform clearly designed to appeal to as much of the electorate as possible and was a stark departure from the dogmatic socialism espoused by the first platform of 1890 that had been influenced by the likes of William Lane who had left chasing socialist utopias in Paraguay soon after the disasters of 1891.

The political labour movement that was emerging was one that had evolved rapidly from one of radical socialism to moderate and gradualist reform. Such an approach soon appealed to more voters and the Labor Party in Queensland had become a significant factor in the states political environment. However, whilst many of its politicians came from the north of the state and the rural unions were critical to the organisation and membership of the Labor Party the party still remained limited in its

73 Ibid, p. 161-162
electoral ambitions until a parallel revival of active trade unionism was achieved as it was still the trade unions that were the basis of the Party's organisation, finance and vote.

The Growth of Trade Unionism, the Formation of the AWA, the General Strike and the Amalgamation of the AWU in Queensland

By 1906 the labour movement in Queensland had battled to achieve the modest result of twenty registered unions with 8,332 members. Unlike its southern counterparts the Queensland economy had only a rudimentary manufacturing base which was mostly situated in the south-eastern corner of the state. Only ten per cent of Queensland's workers were employed in secondary industries with two thirds of all manufacturing centered in Brisbane. Primary industries such as pastoralism, mining and agriculture employed thirty eight per cent of Queensland's labour force. Many of these workers were unorganised and this was particularly so in the vast northern region of the state.

A significant boost to the development of trade unionism in Queensland and throughout Australia was provided by the Federal Parliament in 1904 with the passing of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act. A long-held ambition of those trade unionists embittered by the industrial upheavals of the 1890s the major components of the Act were: the compulsion of industrial disputes to be referred to the court if no resolution can be reached between employer and employee representatives; the extension

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74 Evans, R., Loyalty and Disloyalty, Sydney, 1987, p. 15
75 Ibid., pp. 60-61
of the court's jurisdiction to include industrial disputation within the one industry but across state borders; the registration of employer and employee organisations to be recognised by the court; the decisions of the court were binding under federal law (although subject to legal appeal through the High Court of Australia) and most significantly for Queensland unionists it provided for state-based disputes where no equivalent arbitration system existed (as was the case in Queensland) to be referred to the federal court. For a union such as the AWU the potential benefits of such a system were obvious: the court held out the hope of a reasoned and just resolution of industrial disputes without having to resort to the potentially crippling consequences to the union and its rank-and-file that direct industrial action could result in. Furthermore, for a union that had branches in most states covering industries common to all states the potential to be finally recognised as a truly nationally representative industrial organisation served as a powerful motivation for the AWU to support such a system. The opportunity also to increase the AWU's influence within the Australian labour movement could not be denied.

The potential benefits of the federal arbitration system was not lost on those of the Am.W.U. in Queensland either. Neither was the reality that for its members to obtain any advantage from the new system it would need to amalgamate with its equivalent industrial union throughout the country – the AWU. The amalgamation which had been

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76 For a detailed historical and theoretical examination of the arbitration system in Australia see Macintyre, S etc and Macintyre, S, and Mitchell, R., Foundations of arbitration: the origins and effects of State compulsory arbitration, 1890-1914, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989. See also Howatson, R.J, They'll always be back: a chronicle of the events relating to the industrial relations tribunals in Queensland, Industrial Registrar, Brisbane, 1998.

sought to varying degrees by both the Am.W.U. officials and their counterparts in the AWU since the mid 1890s but thwarted by a combination of member apathy, differences in subscription fees, personal animosities and jealousies between industry classifications was now simply essential. The Am.W.U. needed the AWU to facilitate its access to the federal arbitration system and the AWU needed what was now the second largest union of pastoral workers in the country -- the Am.W.U. -- to fulfill its claim before the arbitration court as the sole representative of pastoral workers throughout the Commonwealth.

There were other benefits for both unions beyond the technical confines of the Federal Arbitration Court. Both unions had been engaged in a battle with the employer-funded Machine Shearers' and Shed Employees Union (MSU). The MSU had established branches in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (despite claims to the contrary by organisers, there is no evidence to suggest any significant degree of membership outside of these states) posed a potential threat to both the AWU and the Am.W.U. Comprised mostly of shearing contractors and their employees the MSU soon developed a close working relationship with the various pastoralists' associations which were quick to perceive possible benefits of negotiating with a 'union' whose membership advocated a competitive labour market as opposed to one which advocated guaranteed minimums in wage rates and conditions across the entire industry. If the AWU (especially an enhanced amalgamated AWU) secured registration under the new federal system the

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80 Ibid, pp. 297-320 passim.
chances were it could present itself as a more legitimate representative of pastoral workers than the ‘bogus’ MSU. This would prove even more compelling if the MSU failed to secure registration under the federal system – an end to which the AWU was steadfastly committed.  

For the Queenslanders the MSU issue was symptomatic of divisions within the Am.W.U. By 1904-05 the Queensland union was clearly dominated (numerically) by the shedhands and not the shearers. The shearers who were increasingly entering the labour market as contractors considered themselves to be in a much stronger position to bargain for their more specialised skills with individual employers than either the shedhands could for their labour or the union officials that claimed to represent all. With the state in the midst of a severe drought, the extended resources of the Am.W.U. and the absence of any similar arbitration legislation as had emerged in the southern states and now federally the shearers arguments were not without substance.

Under existing industrial legislation in Queensland the union had little course of redress if they disputed the shearing and shedhand rates as published by the pastoralists nor, in the extreme economic conditions of the pastoral industry, could they do very much to prevent members from accepting these rates. Union officials could assist members or groups of members when negotiating wages and conditions and even submit recommendations to the pastoralist associations but under difficult circumstances the pastoralists held the upper hand and the Union could do little more (other than the more fraught step of direct strike action) than help members pursue employers who breached

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81 AWU Executive Council Minutes, 12 June 1905, AWU Deposit, NBAC.
these agreements through local magistrates. Essentially, using Flanders' concept, the Am.W.U. had lost the ability to impose 'sanctions' upon its rank-and-file. For theQueenslanders the amalgamation with the AWU served to counter the threat of the MSU, access the federal arbitration system and to reassert the Union's authority over its rank-and-file.

By the end of 1904 the members of both unions had voted in favour of the amalgamation which became official at the Annual Delegates Conference of the AWU in early 1905 with the old Am.W.U. branches simply reverting to branches of the AWU. As with the former union structure the Queenslanders enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy regarding local disputes and the day-to-day administration of the branch. They would provide delegates to the Annual Convention Conference where major policies were debated and decided upon.

In May 1905 the AWTJ was registered with the Federal Arbitration Court. In the same month so too was the MSU. It would be two years, however before the 'lusty young giant' would approach the court. The season's of 1905-06 proved the most successful for pastoral workers and the AWU since the days before the Great Strikes of the 1890s. With the drought dissipating and more significantly the threat of the new court looming the pastoralists were relatively generous with its rates for the industry. Through a series of legal challenges, legislative amendments and executive mismanagement the MSU had within a period of twelve months become largely ineffectual finally withdrawing from the

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84 *Annual Delegates Meeting, Australian Workers Union, Sydney, 1905*. Proceedings reported throughout February in the *Worker*.
Commonwealth Arbitration Court by the end of 1905. By the end of 1907 it had ceased to exist. By 1907 the AWU was the largest and wealthiest union in Australia with a membership of 30,000. Full of confidence then the executive approached the Commonwealth Arbitration Court following a conference with pastoralists in May 1907. The resulting award granted by Justice O’Connor was a triumph for the union with many of its claims granted, particularly in regard to wages and conditions for shedhands. The only rebuke received by the union was in its provision of a ‘preference’ clause with the Court deciding that the political activities of the union made it inappropriate to virtually compel membership throughout the industry. The award provided a great source of satisfaction to not only Union officials but also to their colleagues in the Labor Party who were such strong advocates of arbitration. Significantly the award also proved to rank-and-file pastoral workers that the system created greater equality throughout the industry. While some workers, especially shearers in areas such as Queensland and some parts of South Australia and New South Wales, simply had existing conditions from the previous season formalised, for those in areas where conditions were not so good and for shedhands the award was a significant improvement to their wages and conditions. This in turn proved a solid basis upon which the Union could look towards continued growth.

Whilst the industrial situation for pastoral workers throughout the country seemed to be taking great strides the same could not be said for the many semi-skilled and unskilled workers of North Queensland. Due to its remoteness, sometimes hostile employers and the itinerant nature of much of the work industrial organisation in the

87 Ibid., pp. 354-357.
88 Ibid.
North at the time could at best be described as sporadic. In 1907 two burly young miners from the Irvinebank region in the north strode into this void – twenty-three year old Edward (‘Ted’) Theodore and William McCormack aged twenty-eight. Both were well-versed in the available socialist literature of the time and whilst McCormack had only worked in Queensland, Theodore had worked in mines in Western Australia and in the industrial stronghold of Broken Hill. It was at Broken Hill that Theodore had observed first-hand the benefits of a disciplined and centrally organised trade union in the Amalgamated Miners’ Association. From this background the two formed the Amalgamated Workers’ Association (AWA).

The two aspiring labour leaders had to act quickly to ensure the AWA’s survival. A number of other industrial and political organisations such as the Herberton Socialist League had emerged in the area which could possibly attract members away from the AWA. Recruiting methods in the early days of the AWA reflected the tough and uncompromising workers they were seeking to enroll. Many legendary accounts exist whereby new members were convinced more by the fists of McCormack and Theodore or money owed to the two through the two-up schools they ran than to the efficacy of trade unionism. Such tactics were not uncommon where according to one source, ‘most bushworkers took a union ticket or a hiding’.

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91 Fitzgerald, R., ‘Red Ted’: The Life of E.G. Theodore, St. Lucia, 1994, pp. 18-19

Both Theodore and McCormack quickly realised that both industrial and political organisation were complementary and they soon made contact with the ALF and the Labor Party with McCormack seeking recognition from the CPE for the AWA as ‘the leading political labour body in Woothakata’. It was not long before the fledgling union faced its first test when railway navvies on the Etheridge line went on strike over reductions in pay and conditions. The employers, the Chillagoe Company, were confronted with a disciplined organisation which arranged for orderly strike camps and for the leaders of the PLP and the ALF (Dave Bowman and Albert Hinchcliffe, respectively) to assist in representing the workers claims. The company relented.

The AWA’s first annual conference at the beginning of 1909 reinforced the centralised nature of the union when the central executive was empowered with the control of finances, the ratification of policy and the authority to call industrial action. The platform included no significant statements of ideology but focused on practical industrial goals that were important to the rank-and-file: minimum wages in the North, a 44-hour week for miners, state controls over employment conditions, the abolition of foreign labour, better mine inspections and a recognition of the AWA by employers.

Throughout 1909 the AWA engaged in a number of disputes with employers not only resisting the general claims of the union but also regularly refusing to acknowledge the union as the representatives of the workers. During one particularly bitter dispute at the Irvinebank and Stannary Hills mines the reluctance of mine owners to meet with the

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93 AWA Executive Council Minutes, 14 June 1908, AWU Deposit, M50, NBAC.
94 Kennedy, K.H., op.cit., 1977, p. 16
95 Young, I., Theodore: His Life and Times, Sydney, 1971, p. 14
AWA provoked an infuriated McCormack to claim that the situation now ‘necessitates a reckoning at the point of the industrial bayonet’.$^{96}$ Such a determined and fiery response coupled with the successful conclusion of the dispute helped to earn the union its reputation as the ‘fighting AWA’.$^{97}$

Following this victory the AWA developed another strategy to fulfill its combined industrial and political goals. Far from maintaining its militant stance the AWA began to adopt a more conciliatory tone in dealing with industrial matters. The reasoning for this moderation was simple – Ted Theodore (or ‘Red Ted’ as he would soon be regarded by his opponents) was contesting the state seat of Woothakata in the 1909 elections. Legend has it that both Theodore and McCormack tossed a coin to see who would earn the honour of contesting the seat for the Labor Party.$^{98}$ Both knew that whilst the rank-and-file responded enthusiastically to the AWA’s militancy that the general electorate would not accept ‘extremism’. The time was right to adopt a more reasoned and pragmatic tone when considering industrial relations and the employer class. This may also explain why when the AWA was forced into action at the beginning of 1909 that it was McCormack who took on the bulk of the organisation, negotiation and publicity. At such a critical period it was more important for Theodore to seen as the moderate Labor candidate rather than the leader of a militant union.

With the prestige of the AWA behind him, as well as the impressive organisational abilities of the AWA within the electorate, Theodore was easily returned as the Member

$^{96}$ *Worker*, 13 February 1909


for Woothakata along with twenty-seven other Labor candidates making them the official Opposition under the leadership of Dave Bowman. Also elected was another bright young Labor candidate – T J Ryan. Ryan was a barrister of proud Irish-Catholic ancestry who had earned the support of the powerful Longreach branch of the AWU whom Ryan had represented on many occasions. Unlike the brooding, unsophisticated and menacing young miner from Woothakata, Ryan was affable, humorous, quick-witted and in possession of a formidable arsenal of debating and public speaking skills. Ryan commanded respect and affection from many both within and outside of the labour movement in the central west of the state and was easily returned for the seat of Barcoo\(^99\).

The election of these two young lions of the labour movement was a significant step for the Labor Party. Slowly but surely those candidates that were being elected were those without any connection to the era of the Great Strikes, the formation of the Labor Party, the depression or even the Kidston split. They represented the vanguard of the labour movement’s revival in Queensland. Pragmatic, ambitious, enthusiastic and supported by a reinvigorated trade union movement these new Labor leaders looked towards the future rather than an embittered past.

And the revival of the union movement was indeed well under way. In Brisbane the Trades and Labour Council had re-established itself and with the assistance of J A Moir from the ALF many unions were founded or revived, whilst in the established pastoral districts in the central and south west the AWU consolidated its control over the pastoral workers. In Brisbane the revival of the TLC not only gave a much needed boost

\(^99\)Murphy, D.J., *TJ Ryan: A Political Biography*, St. Lucia, 1975, pp. 36-37
to the ALF but also ensured that the organising body became radicalised as a result of the increased representation of urban militants. In 1911 the cooperation between the ALF and the TLC was reflected in the name change of the latter group to the Metropolitan District Council of the ALF. Indicative of the enormous growth in prestige and representative of the number of occupations it covered the AWA was also a member of this body and served to lend a voice of moderation to its deliberations. Nevertheless in 1911 the council adopted a policy of ‘securing the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange’ by parliamentary means.

However, it was in the north that the growth in trade unionism was most significant. Through its successes the AWA had absorbed a number of smaller semi-skilled and unskilled unions and had by 1910 grown to represent 6 000 workers in the North. The union founded only three years ago was now clearly a rival to the AWU and there were those who were already speculating on the power that would accrue to them both if a merger was concluded between the two.

The rapid spread of the AWA throughout the North was in some way facilitated by both the nature of industrial relations legislation in Queensland and the wide range of occupations that required organisation over a large geographic area. The Queensland government which had emerged from the “Lib-Lab’ coalition sought to both appease Labor/liberal sentiment in Queensland and the capitalists by introducing some form of industrial relations system to counter the federal arbitration system which the former

100 Murphy, D.J., in Murphy, D. J. (ed), op.cit., 1975, p. 178
101 Fitzgerald, R., op.cit., 1994, p.42
102 Young, I., op.cit., 1971, p. 16
believed to be overly favourable to employees. The *Wages Board Act 1908* was the amongst a raft of industrial legislation deemed favourable to Queensland workers which included accommodation acts of sugar workers and pastoral industry workers, a workers compensation act and an old age pension act\(^{103}\). Although originally established to regulate wages and conditions in the clothing and manufacturing industries the wages boards soon expanded to consider all industries in Queensland and with a broadly regional division of North, Central and South-East. Of significance to the revitalised trade union movement was the clause under the Act which recognised the right of registered trade unions to represent its members during the deliberations of the wages boards. The ALF as a distinct organisation representing Queensland workers was kept at arms length from the wages boards through the provision which limited union representation on the boards only to those unions specifically related to the industry concerned\(^{104}\).

Whilst the workings of the wages boards were largely seen to work against workers generally due to the lack of worker representation on the boards the formal recognition of trade unions in the negotiation of wages and conditions provided much impetus to trade union growth in Queensland at the time. This was particularly so for a union such as the AWA. As a union representing numerous occupational categories from its inception it was able to appear before most wages boards in the North. This became even more so as it continued a program of amalgamations. Furthermore, due to its ability to organise throughout the Northern division of Queensland and across a broad range of industries the AWA enjoyed a virtual monopoly of unions organisation north of St.

\(^{103}\) Murphy, D.J., in *Murphy, D.J. (ed.), op. cit.*, 1975, p. 174.

\(^{104}\) For a detailed discussion of the Queensland Wages Boards see *Howatson, R.J., op. cit.*, 1998, pp. 74-106 *passim.*
Lawrence (the central Queensland town which marked the extent of the Central division and the beginning of the North). The much maligned Industrial Peace Act 1912 which superceded the Wages Board Act 1908 and emerged in response to the General Strike of 1912 (see below) did little to change this situation and in fact enhanced the benefits of joining a union such as the AWA as it made arbitration before the newly-entitled Industrial Boards compulsory.

In December 1910 the AWA successfully amalgamated with the Amalgamated Sugar Workers' Association. The sugar industry was a major employer in the North and down to the central coastal strip of the state. However, despite its significance to the economy employment conditions were poor as the industry was barely emerging from its notorious past when Polynesian (Kanaka) labourers had been employed in large numbers under horrendous conditions. Furthermore, the industry was structured so that many small-to-medium sized growers were nearly as vulnerable as their employees in the face of almost monopolistic millers exemplified by the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR). McCormack soon realised that the new merger would need to be consolidated by an immediate campaign to address the poor wages and conditions throughout the industry. The millers represented by the Australian Sugar Producers' Association (ASPA) refused to recognise let alone meet with the AWA.

10^8 Fitzgerald, R., *op.cit.*, 1994, p.46-49
The now familiar industrial organisation of AWA strikes commenced with strike camps being formed\(^{109}\). However, a cyclone in the region nearly scuttled the strike before it had a chance to get underway. However, McCormack shrewdly convinced those strikers not already in the strike camps to assist local communities in the cleaning up and rebuilding activities required in the wake of the cyclone. The action did much to earn the sympathy and respect of those communities and proved a morale booster for those in the strike camps which were further reinforced by the deployment of experienced AWA strike leaders to give direction and organisation to the novice strikers from the sugar industry\(^{110}\). Added to this was the benefit of having an AWA leader, Ted Theodore, as a member of parliament. Theodore was able to bring the plight of the strikers to the Legislative Assembly and also secure the support and resources of the Labor Party and the newly established Trade Union Congress of which Theodore had been elected president\(^{111}\).

Although the CSR was capable of sustaining losses nearly indefinitely the smaller growers feared ruin and were anxious to submit to the union’s demands. The CSR still wanted to hold out but the desperate growers forced the ASPA to the negotiating table and within only a few months of merging with the AWA the sugar workers of Queensland had achieved their first significant victory in an industrial campaign\(^{112}\). Ironically, the morale of the strikers and the resources of the union were all but exhausted when the employers agreed to terms, but this shortfall was soon recouped by the union.

\(^{110}\) *Idid*, pp. 103-105.
\(^{111}\) Fitzgerald, R., *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 46-49
when the increased prestige earned by the victory saw a rush to join by the state's sugar-workers\(^{113}\). Although the AWA had grown strong on its reputation as a militant union the reality was that at the core of most of the AWA's major industrial struggles was the fight for recognition and the effort to maintain industrial peace and justice within the industries it covered. The AWA's prime consideration was its right to represent its members within the existing system. It was only when it was politically expedient or when employers failed to recognise the AWA's right to representation that it felt it necessary to resort to the "industrial bayonet".

The AWA leadership had shown that a well organised and disciplined strike campaign with well defined goals and coordinated with the assistance of the ALF and using the influence of the Labor Party could be successful. However, any industrial activity of a militant nature was fraught with uncertainty entering into a political campaign. This was the situation confronting Queensland's labour movement as they entered the election year of 1912. With the successful conclusion of the sugar strike and the growing strength of the movement in general the Labor Party looked towards 1912 with confidence. However, a dispute that had arisen in Brisbane at the end of 1911 between tramwaymen and a private tram company would pit the forces of Queensland capitalism, still stunned by the sugar strike and alarmed by the strength of Labor and against an over-confident and ill-disciplined trade union movement.

Although the Australian Tramway Employees' Association had been registered in December 1910 the American manager of a Brisbane tram company, J S Badger, refused

\(^{113}\text{Ibid. p.47-48.}\)
to recognise the union or permit the wearing of union badges. Badger steadfastly refused to meet either representatives of the union or the ALF. The dispute quickly escalated as both the forces of capital in Queensland lead by the Denham Liberal Government and the trade union movement both of whom viewed the dispute as crucial to the existence of trade unionism in Queensland\textsuperscript{114}.

On 28 January a meeting of forty-three unions declared that if Badger did not recognise the union then a general stoppage would be declared for 30 January. Badger, with the full support of the government and all employers associations in the state predictably refused to submit. The first general strike in Queensland duly went ahead with 20 000 unionists in Brisbane responding along with railway workers and miners at Ipswich and the 14 000 members of the AWA walking out in the North\textsuperscript{115}. The *Worker* clearly stated its position:

...because of Badger's insolent attempt to humiliate those of his employees who have dared to form a union against his wishes, the whole state is in danger of the loss and suffering come like ravening beasts in the train of a general stoppage of work\textsuperscript{116}.

The government was ready for the strike and employed the traditional tactics of organising strike-breaking labour and the recruitment of 300 'special constables'. The tension of the General Strike soon culminated when heavily armed police and mounted

\textsuperscript{114} Morrison, A.A., 'The Brisbane General Strike of 1912' in Murphy, D.J., \textit{et al.}, (eds), \textit{op.cit.}, 1970, pp. 128-131

\textsuperscript{115} Turner, I., \textit{Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921}, Canberra, 1965, p.42

\textsuperscript{116} *Worker*, 10 February 1912
‘specials’ intercepted and violently dispersed a procession of unionists which contained a number of women unionists and sympathisers. The clash became known as ‘Black’ or ‘Baton’ Friday. The *Worker* fulminated:

The blood boils in our veins when we think of Friday 2 February. Never will the sight be erased from our memory. It is burnt in deep with the branding irons of humiliation ... Standing loyally by one another in this supreme crisis, the workers of Queensland cannot lose, though Capitalism hir[ ] its brutal hirelings against them with murderous intent in its heart.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately for Queensland’s trade unionists this sentiment could not be turned into action. Men soon began returning to work within a fortnight. In the North McCormack could see that a disaster loomed and called the AWA back to work to regroup for another day.¹¹⁸ The Strike Committee claimed a tactical victory by forcing the company to the Federal Arbitration Court but the damage was already done. By the time Mr Justice Higgins had found in the union’s favour the unionists had been replaced by non-union labour and the Brisbane-based ALF was financially crippled.¹¹⁹

Queensland’s first general strike exposed the frailties of the union movement and the ALF in particular. For the Labor Party the elections proved a salutory lesson. The Party only returned twenty-five candidates with Denham able to present himself and his government as the defenders of law and order, going to the electorate under the slogan of

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¹¹⁷ *Worker* 3 February 1912
¹¹⁹ Turner, I., *op.cit.*, 1965, p. 43
'constitutional government versus mob rule'. The only bright spot for the Labor Party was its capture of six metropolitan seats for the first time. The AWA’s Bill McCormack followed Theodore into the state parliament.

With the ALF’s finances and reputation in tatters the opportunity had arrived for a new industrial and political leadership to fill the void. At the same time as this opportunity arose in Queensland the federal leadership of the AWU under Ted Grayndler was looking at expanding its coverage through amalgamations. The AWA was an obvious choice for such an amalgamation in Queensland. Despite the reservations of some delegates, including Grayndler and Spence, who feared amalgamations with unions outside of the pastoral industry would breach the terms of federal industrial relations legislation the potential of such a merger proved too enticing and a conference was held with representatives of the AWA and other rural unions such as the Rural Workers Union, Carriers’ and Rabbitters’ in Sydney over three days in June 1912.

Theodore and McCormack came fully prepared to get what they wanted. When debate turned towards not accepting members from other industries such as miners or meatworkers Theodore cut the debate short and testing the resolve of the AWU stated, “if the amalgamation merely contemplated bringing in organisations like the Rural Workers’ Union it would be of no use of the Amalgamated Workers’ Association sitting on further”. He then dramatically got up to leave forcing the others to back down immediately and call him back to the table. Soon after, when the debate turned to

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120 Murphy, D.J., in Murphy, D.J., (ed), _op.cit_, 1975, p.182
organisation, Theodore and McCormack produced a draft document and circulated it amongst the delegates. Not surprisingly the organisational structure proposed was a centralised branch system much like the AWA\(^{122}\).

In 1913 a plebiscite of all members involved overwhelmingly endorsed the amalgamation of the AWU and the AWA along with other rural unions to create one of the most powerful industrial organizations in Australia. For the AWA Theodore presented the case for amalgamation as a step towards greater unity, industrial strength and the ease of one union ticket for a number of industries\(^{123}\). This last point had a particular relevance for a rank-and-file that often changed jobs with the seasons and had previously been compelled to take out a number of union tickets. At the second conference held in January 1913 compromises were reached whereby Queensland adopted the centralised organization of the AWA whilst the other states maintained a larger degree of autonomy. In Queensland it was agreed that the new Queensland Branch of the Australian Workers' Union which took effect from 1 July 1913 would be made up of five regional branches - the three original branches plus two more northern branches. The new branch would be led by Theodore as President, McCormack as one of the Vice-Presidents and the South Australian W.J. Dunstan was brought in as Secretary to counter the power of the former AWA leaders\(^{124}\).

By December 1913 the AWU had over 62 000 members nationally with the

\(^{122}\) Ibid.

Queensland Branch accounting for over a third of this total with 22,231 members making it the largest branch of the largest union in Australia and the largest union in Queensland. As a further indication of its emergence as the premier industrial body in Queensland, the AWU took over the assets of the ALF when the old organisation finally succumbed to its failings in the wake of the General Strike and disbanded. The AWU now had not only its own paper and printery in the Worker Building but the AWU also occupied the ALF's seats on the CPE, giving it five of the eleven seats automatically. Finally, the AWU's emergence as the most significant industrial and political organisation in the labour movement was confirmed when ill-health forced the PLP leader Bowman to resign and he was replaced by Ryan with the Theodore as his deputy.

Thus by the end of the first year of the amalgamation the AWU controlled the CPE, dominated the Convention, possessed the most valuable assets of the movement—the Worker and its infrastructure and had two of its members as the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labor Party. It remained only for the AWU to help turn this influence and direction towards political success at the next state elections in 1915.

\[\text{Ibid., p.114}\]
\[\text{Murphy, D.J., in Murphy, D.J., (ed), op.cit., 1975, pp. 183-184}\]