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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NOTE

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Chapter 8

Collusion, Communism and Collapse: The AWU, the Groups and the destruction of Labor Hegemony in Queensland, 1948-1957

As the Labor Party and the AWU entered the second half of 1948 an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty was pervasive. The Hanlon Labor Government had 'successfully' concluded the railway dispute but at a potentially enormous cost to the Party’s electoral future having employed repressive legislation characterised by intimidation and violence against the strikers. For an aging Clarrie Fallon and his mighty union, its dominance remained, although there were signs that even this influence may come under some challenge as forces on both the Left and the Right of Queensland’s
labour movement were making inroads into the Party machinery once almost exclusively the realm of the AWU. Although still boasting an enormous membership, the AWU had to begin to reassess its industrial and political status in an economy that was slowly developing a manufacturing industry in the post-War period. The AWU-PLP clique that still dominated Labor in Queensland politics needed to devise a strategy whereby it could confront and defeat the Communist Party and its trade union officials whilst regaining the trust of traditional supporters of Labor in Queensland. To do this the AWU and the PLP turned to the newly-established Industrial Groups.

Despite Hanlon’s success, the QCE were stung into activity by the threat posed by the railway dispute, the CPA, and militant trade union leaders. In July 1948 the Executive Committee of the QCE decided to formalise the organisation of the Industrial Groups in Queensland moving that:

(a) that a Committee of three (3) with the power to select proxies be appointed to organise and attend to such business as they consider necessary for the formation, maintenance, and advancement of ALP Industrial Groups.

(b) Such Committee to have the complete backing of the ALP Queensland Branch.

(c) Committee authorised on its own initiative to seek and accept assistance wherever it deems advisable to do so.
The Executive Committee invested tremendous power in the hands of this Industrial Group organising committee, with a great deal of the Industrial Groups activities and finances to its the discretion. The original Committee consisted of Joe Bukowski, Ted Walsh (now Treasurer and Deputy Premier) and Tom Rasey, a member of the Brisbane City Council, Transport Workers’ Union (TWU) delegate to the QCE and closely connected with the Movement. Two things are notable about this inaugural Industrial Group Committee: 1) All three were members of the Executive Committee, indicating the strength of the resolve of this powerful body to combat Communism in Queensland; 2) The Committee was dominated by AWU men in Bukowski and Walsh. Furthermore, these two were two of the most powerful AWU men in the QCE behind Fallon. Walsh as Deputy Premier was the highest ranked Minister with direct connections to the AWU whilst Bukowski, with Dougherty now in the national office, the obvious heir apparent to Fallon.

Whilst, the QCE set about establishing the Industrial Groups, Hanlon had the more delicate task of attempting to heal the rifts which had emerged during the railway dispute between the PLP and the rank-and-file of the labour movement. The first step in that process was the repealing of the anti-picketing legislation which led to the fateful St. Patrick’s Day March which had caused much bitterness. On 1 September, Hanlon announced to the Legislative Assembly that the Government would repeal the offending

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1. Minutes of QCE Executive Committee, 8 July 1948
legislation. The AWU, through Fallon, responded to this sudden turn around with threatening hostility. The day after Hanlon’s announcement, Fallon was reported in the press as stating that ‘non-communist’ unions affiliated to the Labor Party may openly oppose the Government’s actions which:

... might take the form of reorganisation within the party for a more determined lead in support of anti-communist policy, a change of leadership of the Parliamentary party, or establishment of a political party more vigorously opposed to communism or any other anti-democratic party than indicated by the Labour Party’s decision.3

This remarkable outburst from Fallon is significant in a number of ways. The very threat of deposing Hanlon, or even more wildly, forming a new party, reveals the level of fanaticism displayed by the AWU officials and like-minded trade unionists in their efforts to crush the CPA. Furthermore, the very fact that the AWU hierarchy was not informed of this reversal, let alone consulted, is indicative of the waning hold the AWU was having over the PLP and even its own parliamentary representatives. This was further emphasised when, despite intensive last minute lobbying from AWU loyalists within caucus, such as Devries and J.P.R. Hilton, the caucus, presented with a fait accompli, endorsed Cabinet’s actions. As the Courier-Mail reported, undoubtedly with some glee, ‘The AWU finds itself, at the moment, far from the throne’.4

Indeed, despite Hanlon’s closeness to the AWU, it is difficult to imagine any of his Labor predecessors making such an important industrial and political decision without

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3 Courier-Mail, 2 September, 1948.
4 Ibid., 3 September, 1948.
first consulting with those in Dunstan House. For Hanlon the issue was purely political. The actions he took in both the meat industry and railway disputes were testimony to the extent to which he was prepared to go to combat Communism and ensure industrial peace and the primacy of arbitration. However, Hanlon realised that his Government's political future lay largely in the hands of the Queensland labour movement. He had learnt well from the days of McCormack. For a Labor Premier to maintain an oppressive and sustained assault against even militant and unpopular unions was to court disaster. With this choice before him neither Hanlon nor his Ministers needed to consult the AWU – even those who owed their career to that union.

Those within the AWU were beginning to note the changing nature of the Queensland economy and the possible impact this may have upon their union. In 1939, 116,000 Queenslanders were employed in primary industries. By 1947 this figure had fallen to 102,700. In the corresponding period manufacturing had experienced a growth in employment from 70,700 to 91,800. Similarly other sections of the economy in which the AWU had little or no coverage such as commerce, administration and transport and communication all experienced significant increases. Although the AWU still commanded the lion's share of all trade unionists, with nearly 70,000 members, with unions such as the Federated Clerks’ now numbering around 20,000 members it would soon be necessary for the AWU to form some form of alliance with these manufacturing and 'white collar' unions.

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5 *Queensland Year Book, 1952* Brisbane, 1953, p. 323
Despite its numerical strength the AWU was, as ever, industrially weak. With its members geographically and occupationally dispersed, mostly unskilled or semi-skilled and often only seasonally employed, the AWU relied heavily on the arbitration system with its preference clauses and awards and the maintenance of industrial peace for its survival and power. Thus, the direct-action tactics of the CPA and other militants had to be fought at all costs. To win this ideological and industrial battle the AWU would need to ensure that the emerging unions and their officials were free of CPA influence. It was for this purpose that the AWU became a conspicuous supporter of the Industrial Groups. By controlling the ‘Groups’ the AWU could secure compliant and even supplicant allies whilst defeating old enemies and securing its waning political dominance of the labour movement in Queensland.

For the aging and increasingly embittered Fallon, the actions of Hanlon were worse than a betrayal of the AWU but more significantly they could be perceived as an act of weakness by the PLP. By repealing the legislation and then soon releasing those strike leaders still in prison, Fallon believed Hanlon had given the CPA an opportunity to claim some sort of victory. And they did. Even before the rail strike was over, General President of the CPA, Lance Sharkey, was telling the National Congress that:

Major lessons can be drawn from the Queensland strike. The first lesson is the willingness of the workers to fight and the determination with which they carry on the struggle and their ready acceptance of Communist leadership. The second lesson is the change in the attitude of the Labor Party, which hitherto has refrained from using the repressive forces of the State against striking workers. As you know, Hanlon used the coercive powers of the State to the limit. Because of
the increasing intensity of the class struggle, it can be expected that strikes will be met by similar terrorism by both Labor and Liberal Governments.\(^7\)

Characteristically, the CPA were over-optimistic in its assessment of its support amongst the rank-and-file workers as the railway dispute would mark the zenith in CPA support in Queensland which would from this time experience a steady decline in membership. However, the continued presence of CPA unionists, especially within the TLC, coupled with the CPA’s own urgent and self-aggrandising rhetoric and propaganda only served to galvanise support behind the Industrial Groups within the PLP and amongst moderate trade unions.\(^8\)

With the AWU supporting the Industrial Groups, both financially, administratively and politically it was not long before the Groups could begin to claim some success. Having commenced its earliest activities in Queensland in the AMIEU, the Groups had finally captured the majority of positions on that unions executive by 1949. The Groups were also successful at a branch level in the AMIEU capturing both the Central and Southern branch councils.\(^9\) There were other notable successes for the Industrial Groups with the Federated Clerks in 1950 and the FIA in 1951 both falling to ‘Grouper’ majorities. The former had been achieved as the result of a Movement co-ordinated national campaign against the CPA officials such as Alex MacDonald in Queensland and Ernie Thornton the National Secretary of the FIA.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) See for example motions in support of Industrial Groups in QCE Minutes, 14 September 1948, 13 October 1948 and 23 May 1949.


As significant as this victory was on a national basis, the Grouper successes in the FCU were possibly more significant from a Queensland perspective. The Clerks were the second largest union in Queensland with approximately 20,000 members and it was a strong supporter of the increasingly powerful Vince Gair. With the support of powerful AWU leaders such as Fallon, Bukowski and Branch President, Harry Boland as well as key AWU men in the PLP such as Walsh, Harry Bruce and George Devries, plus Gair and the FCU, the Industrial Groups were emerging as an enormously powerful entity in its own right.

In October 1949, H.J. Harvey was appointed to the Queensland Industrial Court. Harvey was President of the TLC and Vice-President of the QCE. His appointment to the Court came as a result of a campaign by both the AWU and the TLC against the tardiness of the Industrial Court whose three judges were struggling with the enormous workload before them as unions scrambled to improve wages and conditions in the post-war era. Naturally the motivations of the two organisations were from a different perspective. For the TLC, the tardiness of the Court only served to strengthen its long-standing critique of the arbitration system as more of a hindrance than a help to Queensland workers. The very fact that the CPA-influenced TLC had led the charge against the Court meant that the Minister for Labour and Industry, Vince Gair, dismissed out of hand the genuine need for the Court’s expansion and the legitimate criticisms of not only the AWU and the TLC but employer organisations as well.

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12 AWU Deputation to Hanlon, March 1948, A/9893 QSA.
13 Queensland Employers Federation Deputation to Gair, 6 January 1950, A/19145, QSA.
For the AWU, however, its campaign to increase the number of judges from three to five had three components. Firstly, there was concern that its members and other unionists were unfairly having to wait for a redress of the wages and conditions many had endured during the war years. Secondly, Fallon and his Executive soon realised that the failure of the Court to expedite cases in a quick and efficient manner only lent credibility to the claims of the CPA and other militants who sought the abolition of the Court. Finally, it could be surmised that the AWU believed that if the Court was expanded, there was every chance that it could be expected that an AWU candidate could pick up at least one of the two positions thus increasing its representation, with former Branch Secretary Jim Riordan already a judge on the Court.

The effect of Harvey’s appointment was to shift the balance of power on the QCE further into the hands of the Industrial Groups when Muldorff of the State Services Union was appointed to replace Harvey and A. Cole, another Grouper from a small rail union, was elected to the Executive Council. However, perhaps the most significant event for both the AWU and the Groups occurred on 11 January 1950 when, whilst attending the Annual Conference of the AWU, Clarrie Fallon died following a stroke. Embittered by the political process, marginalised by Dougherty in the Union he had once ruled without question and dogged by allegations of voting irregularities in Queensland, Fallon had increasingly found solace in the bottle. He was 63 years old. With his passing, the labour movement had lost one of its most ruthless and powerful yet least understood figures.

14 QCE Minutes, 23 December 1949.
One obiturist succinctly described the enormity of his influence stating simply, 'What he said today became government policy tomorrow.'

Harry Boland succeeded Fallon as President of the QCE and as Branch Secretary of the AWU. Significantly, Joe Bukowski became Branch President of the AWU. Thus Bukowski was now President of the largest and still most powerful union in the State as well as the Chairman of the emerging force in Queensland politics – the Industrial Groups. Clearly, Bukowski could see that he too could attain the same level of power and influence as his mentor Fallon, if only he was able to control these two groups with seemingly the same goals – the destruction of Communism and the continued dominance of the Labor Party in Queensland.

For the time being the AWU was quite happy with the way the Groups were operating. So too it seems were most unions and branches affiliated to the ALP. Numerous correspondence was received from branches and unions throughout Queensland expressing their congratulations to the QCE for establishing the Industrial Groups and seeking assistance in forming Groups in their own areas. Only the Trades and Labour Council and some of its affiliates registered any protest.

The relative approval with which the labour movement and the electorate in general had responded to the Labor Party’s overt opposition to Communism was evident in the election results of 1950. The Government was returned with a commanding majority in an expanded Legislative Assembly of 75 seats. Under the re-distribution

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16 See QCE Minutes, 24 March 1950 and 2 February 1951.
17 See for example *Minutes of the QCE Executive Committee*, 14 September 1948, 13 October 1948 and 23 May 1949.
18 *Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE*, 20 December 1948.
which had been implemented in 1949 the State had been divided into four zones: Northern, Western, South eastern and Brisbane Metropolitan. Whilst the re-distribution was purportedly designed to ensure that rural voters were not under-represented, the result was that rural voters became over-represented in what has been described as the ‘Hanlon Gerrymander’.\(^{19}\) The Labor Party won 42 seats in the new Parliament; the Country Party 20; the Liberals (formerly the Queensland People’s Party) 11 with only two successful Independents – Tom Aitkens and A. Coburn.

This impressive electoral result is made even more so when it is realised that the election was fought in the wake of the Federal Labor Governments failure to implement its bank nationalisation policy and a disastrous national coal strike and its subsequent electoral defeat by Menzies’ Liberal-Country coalition.\(^{20}\) In Queensland the coal strike was vigorously supported by the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and resulted in some rationing by the State Government. However, the Grouper controlled AFULE refused to declare coal ‘black’ as the ARU had done and the strike soon collapsed in August 1949 amidst much hostility directed at both the Chifley Government in crushing the strike and the CPA which had allegedly provoked the strike.\(^{21}\) These events obviously had no damaging effects on Labor's electoral fortunes in Queensland with the Government, the AWU and the Industrial Groups all forming an imposing and undeniable alliance against the CPA.


Yet another important change occurred in the political balance of the Executive Committee in late August 1951. A chronically ill Ned Hanlon was granted six months leave and Gair became Acting-Premier. Hanlon would never return to his post dying in January 1952. Gair was elected Premier on 6 February and was requested to attend the meetings of the Executive Committee before being officially appointed to the Executive Committee on 20 February. Now for the first time in Queensland there was a Labor premier who had no connection whatsoever with the AWU and who was the most vehement supporter of the Groups and thus ensured the almost complete domination of the Executive Committee by Groupers. More ominously for the AWU, Gair had pointedly refused to accept membership of the mighty union which had been a long-held tradition for Labor Premiers in Queensland. Clearly Gair was making a bold statement about the future direction of the Labor Party – it valued the AWU, but it would not be beholden to it. The question thus arose, if not the AWU, then who?

Vincent Clare Gair was born in Rockhampton in 1901. Always overweight, he was a tubby child with poor eyesight and was an obvious target for schoolyard bullies at St. Joseph’s Christian Brothers College. It has become part of Labor folklore that one such bully at St. Joseph’s was the burly son of a Polish migrant family, the young Joe Bukowski. Gair joined the Railway Department as a clerk in 1916 and through the FCU became interested in Labor politics in the seat of South Brisbane. In 1932 he defeated the

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22 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 31 August 1951.
23 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 6 February 1951 and 20 February 1951.
Attorney-General in the Moore Government, the controversial fellow Catholic, Neil Macroarty. Ambitious, he remained on the back bench for ten years. Gair was not a favourite of Forgan-Smith and as such Gair believed that the Premier and his AWU cronies had conspired to exclude him from higher office.\textsuperscript{26} It was not until Forgan-Smith’s retirement that Gair entered the first Cooper Ministry in September 1942. Like many Labor leaders before him Gair was arrogant, dictatorial and possessed an amazing capacity to hate. Although many other political and ideological factors that were to follow Gair's succession to the premiership, the Premier’s personal distrust of the AWU and the animosity between Gair and Bukowski cannot be dismissed as unimportant.

Changes in the QCE Executive Committee continued. In April 1952, the long-serving secretary of the QCE, Sid Bryan announced his intention to resign in June of that year.\textsuperscript{27} He was replaced by the loyal AWU District Secretary for the Northern District, Jack Schmella, yet another hard-drinking, no-nonsense AWU official from the North.\textsuperscript{28} The Executive Committee was now solidly ‘Grouper’ aligned with only Boland and Schmella of the AWU not directly linked to the Groups although they too clearly supported the Groups at this time. Even in the Industrial Group Committee there were changes when in 1950 Ted Walsh resigned upon his re-election and return to the Cabinet. He was replaced by ETU official and newly elected member for Fortitude Valley, Mick Brosnan.\textsuperscript{29} By 1953, Brosnan too, would be a member of the Executive Committee. In the space of a few years the once stable Executive Committee had undergone numerous changes in personnel. Where once the consistent factor upon the powerful Executive

\textsuperscript{26} Costar, B., op. cit., 1990, p. 460.
\textsuperscript{27} Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 16 April 1952.
\textsuperscript{28} Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 27 June 1952.
\textsuperscript{29} Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 5 September 1950.
Committe was the AWU and its politicians, now amidst a Cold War atmosphere of virulent anti-Communism the dominant factors on the Executive Committee were politicians and union officials aligned to the Industrial Groups.

At the election held on 7 March 1953, the Labor Party recorded its strongest victory since 1938. Labor won fifty seats with the Liberal-Country Party Opposition returning only 28 seats (Liberal 8, Country 15). More significantly for Labor it had achieved a total majority in votes cast of 39 000 representing a swing of approximately 10 per cent towards it. A swing against Country and Liberal candidates was recorded in every seat in the State. The Labor majority in the House was emphatic and it appeared that the Labor dynasty in Queensland was secure for the next generation of Labor politicians.

Amidst such a complete victory there was little controversy at the 1953 Labor-in-Politics Convention which began on 23 March in Rockhampton. With the Industrial Groups acting as the conduit the AWU and the PLP dominated one of the quietest Conventions on record with the dominant factions using their numbers to pass their motions and to stifle and gag debate of the few dissenters. On the only real contentious issue – the Industrial Groups – the Convention was overwhelmingly in favour. Of the fourteen resolutions before the Convention dealing with the Groups, eleven were of support whilst three – from the Amalgamated Postal Workers', the Boilermakers' and the

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Norman Park Branch called for the disbanding of the Groups on the grounds that they were opportunistic, disruptive and not representative of Labor Party policy.\footnote{Official Proceedings of the Twenty-first Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1953.}

The report of the Industrial Group Committee which was read to Convention by Bukowski was endorsed by 105 votes to 7. The report claimed that the efforts of the Groups to diminish the influence of Communism in the trade union movement had met with great success and could add to the growing list of unions under Grouper control the Federated Liquor Trades Union and the Queensland Colliery Employees Union. To those who would question the role of the Industrial Groups Bukowski concluded:

Some people may claim that there is danger for Labor in the Industrial Groups, and for that reason we should abolish them. To that I would say that Labor has always lived dangerously. It has progressed in the face of danger from the extreme left and the extreme right. Labor has fought and won in the political and industrial fields, and will go onto greater triumphs. But the unions cannot be pestered with Soviet heelers in their ranks, who, judging by their past efforts, helped to destroy the Chifley Labor Government ...\footnote{Report of the Queensland ALP Industrial Group Executive Committee, in Official Proceedings of the Twenty-first Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1953.}

With the Convention being conducted in a spirit of high co-operation and little cause for debate, Felix Dittmer moved a seemingly innocuous motion regarding annual leave for workers:
That it be the aim of the Labor movement to obtain for the workers three weeks' annual holidays in southern areas and four weeks in the northern and western areas.³³

With Queenslanders already enjoying at least two weeks annual leave the motion hardly seemed controversial and was seconded and unanimously carried by the Convention without discussion.

However, the veneer of co-operation between the QCE and the PLP was shaken in the middle of 1953 when the QCE received news of the intended introduction by the Government of an amending act to increase significantly the salaries of both State and municipal politicians. The proposed increases tapped a vein of frustration amongst the many trade union officials in within the QCE who were struggling to gain many significant improvements for their members from the Industrial Courts. Indeed, many believed that, as with every other public servant in Queensland, the politicians should be subject to the rulings of the Court. Although a lengthy motion, the original motion against the pay rise submitted to the QCE by the AFULE's H.L. Edmonds is quoted verbatim as it provides an excellent synopsis of the frustration felt by many within the Queensland labour movement:

That this meeting of the Queensland Central Executive, ALP, regrets that the Parliamentary Labor caucus has abrogated to themselves the right to increase their salaries by £200 and their allowances by £200, which is

palpably excessive, particularly insofar as Metropolitan Members are concerned.

Considers that the non-implementation of Arbitration in such an important matter, can only hamper the solution of anomalies in Wages, Margins and Allowances which beset the Trade Union Movement, and can only be calculated to weaken the prestige of Trade Union Officials who advise their membership to submit their grievances to Conciliation and Arbitration.

Observers that if the decision of Caucus if allowed to stand in its present form can only result in an indiscriminate expansion of the Theory that Might is right, bringing in its train a growth of chaotic Trade Union Direct Action.

This Executive, after full consideration, decides that the Parliamentary Labor Party be requested to reconsider its decision in relation to the payment of increases, particularly the increase of £200 in the Metropolitan Members Allowances.34

Eventually the PLP compromised by increasing their salaries by half of the original proposal. In the midst of the dispute Bukowski left the politicians in no doubt as to the seriousness of the issue stating:

No green light has been given the Parliamentary Labor Party to proceed. I should imagine, if they do, they will no that there is a danger signal just around the

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34 Minutes of the QCE, 20 July 1953.
corner ... To those people who suggested to me that the QCE climbed down from its former attitude, I have said that we can take another and more effective way to deal with any Labor Parliamentarians whom we consider to have violated the wish of Labor’s ruling body.35

Thus Bukowski was confronting the perennial question of Labor in politics throughout Australian history – who decides Labor policy and the actions of its politicians? The first shots had been fired in a bitter and ultimately destructive conflict.

Outside of Queensland, Labor was in turmoil. H.V. Evatt had succeeded Chifley following his sudden death in 1951. In that same year the Menzies Government, having had the Communist Party Dissolution Bill overruled by the High Court, initiated a referendum that would outlaw the CPA. Although strongly condemning the principles of the CPA, Evatt was able to convince the Federal Labor Party to oppose the referendum. The most persuasive argument put forward was that of freedom of speech and democracy. Another reason for opposing Menzies was the rather general definition of what a Communist was with reference to being adherents of the teachings of Marx and Engels. Clearly some planks of the Labor Party did just that and if the referendum was passed could there be the chance that one day the Labor Party’s enemies could use this definition to ban the Labor Party?!

For the Labor Party in Queensland the decision of its Federal Leader presented it with some difficulties. How could such vigorous opponents of the CPA be seen to support it? More ominous, however, was the spectre of causing a split with the Federal

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35 *Worker*, 17 August 1953.
Party. The QCE and PLP neatly side-stepped the problem by issuing statements in support of Evatt and the ‘No’ campaign whilst remaining conspicuously low-key on the hustings. The Labor Party were more than happy to allow the militants within the Queensland Trades and Labour Council to bear the burden of the ‘No’ campaign. After an arduous campaign, Evatt managed to lead the ‘No’ campaign to a narrow victory with New South Wales and Victoria carrying the day for the ‘No’ case. Significantly, however, it was the Labor state of Queensland which recorded the lowest ‘No’ vote in the Commonwealth with only 44.57 per cent of Queenslanders supporting the ‘No’ case.

Evatt and the Federal Labor Party were then seriously damaged on the eve of the 1954 Federal election by the Petrov Affair. The controversy involving an official at the Soviet Embassy and subsequent royal commission implicated Evatt via his staff. In an environment of ‘Cold War’ hysteria, Labor’s chance of regaining Government was lost. In his despair Evatt sought to blame someone for his defeat. His answer was the Groups who were trying to obtain power for themselves by undermining Evatt. He perceived this threat to emanate most strongly from Victoria where B.A. Santamaria and ‘the Movement’ were based. Evatt ordered an investigation into the Victorian Branch of the ALP and the influence of the Industrial Groups and the Movement. The result was the complete re-organisation of the Branch with the election of an anti-Grouper executive.

However, Evatt had not arrived at this decision on his own. He was led to it in no small way by the General Secretary of the AWU, Tom Dougherty. Dougherty had

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originally been an enthusiastic supporter of the Industrial Groups but was becoming suspicious of their increasing influence within Labor administration. This was particularly so in his new fiefdom of New South Wales where he and New South Wales Branch Secretary of the AWU, Charlie Oliver, occupied commanding roles on the New South Wales Executive of the ALP. In 1953, the Grouper dominated executive in New South Wales blocked Dougherty’s attempt to run for the Sydney City Council. In November of that same year the same executive had ruled that an Industrial Group be formed within the TWU not to fight Communists but fiercely pro-ALP union officials over whom hung allegations of corruption and voting irregularities. The possible implications of this resolution was not lost on Dougherty or Oliver. Corruption and maladministration had long been the focus of the AWU’s critics (not without some justification!). If enough members of the New South Wales Executive could be convinced of the veracity of these allegations then the unthinkable could occur – the establishment of an Industrial Group with the AWU!

From this point on Dougherty was an implacable enemy of the Groups with both he and Oliver refusing to re-nominate for the New South Wales Executive in June 1954. As with Fallon before him, if Tom Dougherty was anti-Grouper then so too from this point on was the AWU. This new development placed Joe Bukowski in the unenviable position of having to choose between the Groups and the AWU. Supported by other pro-Group officials of the AWU, Bukowski briefly entertained the idea of contesting the General Secretary’s position against Dougherty. However, fellow Queenslanders such as Edgar Williams and Gerry Goding from the North and Far Northern Districts were also

becoming increasingly hostile to the Groups who were seeming to operate for no other reason than to elevate Grouper candidates to high office in the Labor Party at the expense of AWU candidates. Realising he did not have the support of these two enormous Districts and many others, Bukowski wisely opted to refrain from challenging Dougherty. 40 With Dougherty, and by October, Evatt, now openly hostile to the Groups, Bukowski had little choice but to recant and become a vicious opponent of the Industrial Groups. Queenslanders were even treated to the farcical spectacle of Bukowski claiming that he had never really been a true supporter of the Groups and had only appeared to support the Groups in his role as State Chairman in order to monitor its activities. 41

At the special conference called by Evatt to be held in Hobart in March 1955, six delegates were to represent every State. Queenslands delegates were Gair, Walsh, Cole, Bushell (Bricklayers’), Bolger (State Services Union) and Boland. The conference was called with the purpose of ratifying the anti-Grouper purge of the Victorian ALP and generally disassociating the ALP from the Groups. Two delegations from Victoria, one pro and one anti-Grouper, presented themselves at the Hobart Conference with the Federal Executive rejecting the credentials of the pro-Grouper delegation. As a result seventeen delegates including five Grouper-aligned Queenslanders, boycotted the Conference. Only the AWU’s Harry Boland remained to attend the conference that would ratify the Victorian re-organisation and condemn the Groups.

40 Ibid., pp. 218-220.
41 Ibid.
Immediately following the Hobart Conference the QCE held a Special Meeting. Bukowski moved a motion condemning the five delegates for having failed to carry out the trust placed in them by the QCE and for assisting,

... rebellious elements in other States in an attempt to bring the ALP and Affiliated Unions into disrepute throughout Australia thereby giving our political opponents an opportunity of capitalising upon the situation...^42

But Bukowski did not have the numbers and after an exhausting and bitter debate which lasted six hours the motion was defeated 31 to 23. Indeed, the Groupers used their numbers to pass a motion supporting the actions of the Hobart five.^43 This meeting defined for the first time the factions that would dominate the labour movement in Queensland in the immediate future – the AWU and the anti-Grouper unions affiliated to the TLC versus the Grouper aligned politicians and trade union officials.

From this meeting the situation began to deteriorate rapidly between the AWU and the PLP and between Bukowski and Gair. The most enduring alliance in the history of the Queensland labour movement, and the sustaining force of Labor's near forty year domination of Queensland politics was at an end. In order to preserve its position of power and influence in Queensland, the AWU had willingly unleashed the Industrial Groups upon its militant enemies within the Queensland TLC and the CPA. Ironically, the very same organisation the AWU thought would preserve its power now presented a more concerted and sustained attack on AWU domination than any militants had ever managed in the past.

^42 Minutes of the QCE, 25 March 1955.
^43 Minutes of the QCE, 25 March 1955.
Amidst a flurry of correspondence from branches and affiliated unions, both supporting and denouncing the Hobart resolutions, Bukowski was able to orchestrate a unanimous motion in support of the Hobart Conference by appealing to the unity of the Party and by invoking the Party’s constitution regarding Conference decisions. But Bukowski and the AWU could not rely upon this sort of pressure indefinitely. Bukowski would need to ensure that at the 1956 Labor-in-Politics Convention that the AWU and the other anti-Group unions were organised to rid the QCE of Grouper influence. To do this he would need to enter into an alliance with the TLC. In the course of forming this alliance Bukowski became good friends with TLC Vice President and Boilermakers secretary, the ambitious Jack Egerton. In order to cement this new alliance the anti-Grouper faction needed an issue other than simply the Groups whose anti-Communist rhetoric still appealed to the electorate and many within the labour movement including of course the AWU.

The issue that was settled upon was the three weeks annual leave motion which after nearly three years the Government had not implemented on the grounds that it was uneconomical. In November the QCE carried the following resolution which was carried by 38 votes to 10:

That this meeting of the QCE expresses its dissatisfaction with the interpretation placed by the Parliamentary Labor Party on the decision of this body in relation to leave entitlements and we hereby direct and instruct the Parliamentary Labor Party to prepare the necessary legislation for presentation to the present session of

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44 See for example Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 15 April 1955 where 18 resolutions, mostly in support of the Hobart Conference, were received.
45 Minutes of the Executive Committee of the QCE, 10 May 1955.
Parliament to provide for four (4) weeks' annual leave for shift workers and three (3) weeks for other, and further direct and instruct all members of the Parliamentary Labor Party to support such legislation.\textsuperscript{46}

Following a delegation from the PLP in December it was resolved that the PLP should report back to the QCE in the first week of February in 1956, just prior to the Labor-in-Politics Convention. When the two groups reconvened the PLP maintained its economic argument and the scene was set for an explosive Convention.

In his Presidential Address, Harry Boland, whilst appealing for unity, made his attitude clear stating:

Let us function as one big family. Let us forge unity in the Labor Government. We cannot have that unity at the expense of the destruction or the throwing overboard of some principle associated with the [labour] Movement which many of those people would have us do. The majority decisions have always been obeyed by the minority and that is how it will continue, and I suggest that is how it should be.\textsuperscript{47}

Motions calling for the Government to immediately implement the three weeks were carried but Gair responded by questioning the Convention's ability to direct the Government:

It is very obvious ... that Parliament would not be a supreme body if its members were subjected to outside coercion, intimidation or direction ... But, surely, you must have some confidence in us, the elected members of the Government itself.

\textsuperscript{46} Minutes of the QCE, 11 November 1955.
Surely you must give us some credit for knowing where we are going, and what is in the best interests of the community.\textsuperscript{48}

Gair was entering into dangerous territory by questioning the authority of the Convention and QCE delegate Jack Devereux of the firmly anti-Cooper AEU, willingly rose to the challenge:

\ldots does Mr Gair suggest that as a member of the parliamentary Labor Party he is not subject to any discipline from \ldots the Queensland Branch of the Australian Labor Party? \ldots Is it suggested that outside the ballot box or the plebiscite Parliamentarians are completely free to do as they choose? I submit that you do not believe that.\textsuperscript{49}

A compromise was eventually arrived at whereby Gair undertook to address the leave issue. This served to placate many delegates for the time being. Gair subsequently made no reference to the issue in his election speech as he agreed to do.

In other matters the victory of the AWU-TLC alliance was complete. All traces of the Groups were deposed in the elections to the QCE and only three politicians in total were now present on the QCE – Gair, his Deputy Jack Duggan and Felix Dittmer. Duggan saw himself as the mediator between the two factions whilst Dittmer was decidedly anti-Group. As a matter of course the Executive was now dominated by the new AWU-TLC clique. Gair was now very much alone in the Executive Committee.

Whilst all this was happening further disruption was occurring in the pastoral industry where for the first time since the 1890s the AWU had given official support to

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
striking shearsers. At the end of 1955 the United Graziers Association had successfully applied for a fifteen per cent reduction in the shearing rate. Since 1949 shearing rates had been adjusted in accordance with wool prices. With the Korean War came an increased demand for wool and both graziers and pastoral workers enjoyed a boom. However, following the war's end in 1952 demand had steadily dropped. Bukowski declared that if he were a shearer he would not shear under the new rates and by 1 January 1956, shearsers across the state were on strike.\(^50\)

These were heady times for the AWU. Not only was it engaged in its first officially sanctioned pastoral strike since the 1890s but it was doing so in defiance of the rulings of the Industrial Court. Since the retirement of Jim Riordan from the Court in 1952 and Gair's refusal to replace him, the AWU had no representative on that body for the first time in twenty years. Bukowski could thus justify the AWU's breach with the arbitration system claiming in April.

... the Courts decisions in recent times were the most inconsistent ever known in Australia's Industrial History...\(^51\)?

By March the newly-forged alliance between the AWU and the TLC had ensured that 'black' wool shorn by non-union labour could not be moved with railwaymen, storemen and packers and wharfies all going out in support of the shearsers. Gair realised that he could not risk a direct confrontation with the shearsers until after the 19 May elections. Amazingly, despite the internal strife that was occurring within the labour


\(^{51}\) Minutes of the Industrial Committee, 10 April 1955.
movement the ALP was once again returned with a comfortable majority having secured 51.2 per cent of the vote.\textsuperscript{52}

In June the Industrial Court deleted the preference clause from the shearer's award. Gair responded by supporting the authority of the Court. The situation changed dramatically in July when Harry Boland died suddenly. Bukowski thus became both Secretary of the AWU and President of the QCE. In the same month the AWU re-affiliated with the TLC\textsuperscript{53} thus giving the TLC enormous credibility amongst Queensland workers. Now Bukowski, the most powerful trade unionist in Queensland was set to finally confront Gair, the most powerful politician in Queensland.

By September 1956, with millions of pounds of wool still sitting on the Brisbane wharves, Gair was under pressure to act to ensure the prosperity of Queensland. In desperation he made the fateful decision to accept the assistance offered by Acting-Prime Minister Arthur Fadden to supply troops to load the wool. The move played straight into the hands of Bukowski and the TLC. Bukowski warned that, 'As a Labor Premier, Mr Gair should understand that once a man steps across the line against the people within the Labor movement, it is very hard to step back again'.\textsuperscript{54}

With the dispute worsening as it entered its tenth month Gair declared a state of emergency on 4 October and ordered the storemen back to work. A secret ballot two days later by storemen voted to return to work. Gair then made a direct appeal on 10 October for the public service commissioner to intervene to end the dispute and thus forced the AWU back into the Court. The Court made an interim award that reinstated the

\textsuperscript{52} McMurchy, A., \textit{op. cit.}, 1983, pp. 260-262.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Worker}, 16 July 1956.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Worker}, 10 September 1956.
preference clause and raised the rate awarded in 1955 by five per cent. Bukowski claimed victory and the dispute ended after ten months of hardship and bitterness. However, at a political level, Bukowski had successfully managed to drag Gair into an acrimonious dispute against Queensland workers.\(^55\)

With the shearing dispute over the AWU-TLC aligned QCE could now focus upon bringing the PLP to heel over the annual leave. In February the QCE again raised the issue with the PLP and resolved that:

... In the event of this decision not being implemented, members of the Parliamentary Labor Party who do not support the Convention’s decision are advised that they will be dealt with by the QCE in accordance with the rules of the Party.\(^56\)

In March a special meeting of the QCE resolved that Gair should explain why he should not be expelled from the Party.\(^57\) At that meeting on 24 April Gair continued to claim that the Government could not afford the extra week and that it was his responsibility to implement the Convention’s decision when the State could afford it. Gair was then asked to leave where following a discussion it was resolved by a vote of 35 to 30 that Gair should be expelled from the Labor Party.\(^58\) Although many on the QCE were against Gair the vote was close because many, including the AWU’s Edgar Williams and Gerry Goding, baulked at actually bringing down a Labor Government. Nevertheless, Bukowski, Egerton and the militants prevailed.

\(^{56}\) Minutes of the QCE, 28 February 1957.
\(^{57}\) Minutes of the QCE, 11 April 1957.
\(^{58}\) Minutes of the QCE, 24 April 1956.
Gair and his supporters became the Queensland Labor Party and formed a minority government until it was dissolved on the vote of the ALP and the Opposition. The Country-Liberals were returned to office after nearly more than twenty years although it actually recorded a two per cent swing against it. It was Gair's eleven seats which split the Labor vote and delivered power to the conservatives. The AWU alliance with the TLC was short-lived and was in tatters by the end of 1958 but the TLC were now the dominant force in Labor politics. The AWU had ruthlessly and then desperately manipulated the Labor Party machine in Queensland for over forty years to ensure its power and influence within the Queensland labour movement and to ensure the continued electoral success of Labor in Queensland. When that power seemed under threat it willingly made alliances with groups it thought it could control and was eventually prepared to risk a Labor Government to guarantee that influence. But in a changing industrial and political environment it had over-reached itself and thus eventually surrendered its power and Labor politics to the militants it had so regularly sought to destroy. With the passing of the AWU's influence so too went the stability which was necessary to return Labor Governments in Queensland.