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'We Film the Facts':
The Waterside Workers' Federation Film
Unit,
1953 - 1958

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Lisa Milner
BA (Hons)

Communication and Cultural Studies Program
2000

DEDICATION

To the memory of Keith Gow (1921-1987)

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Abstract

'We Film the Facts': The Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit, 1953-1958

This thesis explores the history of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit. Comprising three filmmakers, Norma Disher, Keith Gow and Jock Levy, this union production group operated in Sydney from 1953 to 1958. Within an environment which was generally hostile towards militant labour, it produced seventeen short films on a range of topics for the Waterside Workers' Federation and other labour and left-wing organisations. To date, no comprehensive history of the work of the Unit exists.

The work begins by giving a history of the Unit's operation. The second chapter explores the theoretical approaches to the topic. The Unit operated at a point of intersection of film, industry and culture, and the disciplinary areas of cinema studies, labour history and cultural studies are interrogated as to their utility in presenting a critical history of this group. The following chapter provides the context for the WWFFU, and examines the industrial, cultural and cinematic spheres of activity which existed as a background for the WWFFU's existence in Sydney from 1953 to 1958. Chapter Four undertakes a close analysis of three key films, examining how these filmmakers responded to industrial and political campaigns, and how the Unit's output related to its context. The final chapter reflects upon the provision of this history and the issues raised, including the changing nature of class in Australia, and representation within the documentary.

This thesis contributes to a succession of Australian cultural histories. The localised milieux in which the Film Unit operated, its economic, political and social structures, were historically specific formations. Popular culture of the 1950s has often been positioned as predictable, but this is because a specific activist working-class culture has seldom been examined. Bringing a localised working-class cultural formation, such as the WWFFU, to a critical analysis is a valuable way to see beyond such positionings.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been completed without the supportive guidance and supervision of Kate Bowles and Glenn Mitchell. The staff and postgraduate community of the Communication and Cultural Studies Program at the University of Wollongong supported the writing of this thesis with their academic, administrative and moral assistance and encouragement. Norma Hawkins (*nee* Disher) and Jock Levy, formerly of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit, have sustained my research with their extremely generous assistance, sharing information and recollections with me through this project's journey. My doctoral candidature was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award. The Communication and Cultural Studies Program and the CRITACS Centre at the University of Wollongong have provided me with travel grants. The Maritime Union of Australia has provided funding and other assistance. Staff of the Sydney Film Festival, the Search Foundation, the MUA ACTU, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), AMWU, TLC and BWIU have permitted access to their archives. Workers at Screen Sound Australia (the National Film and Sound Archives) in Canberra and Sydney, especially Jane Adam and Simon Drake, have assisted my research.

For the directions they gave along the way in studying Australian film history, I would like to thank my colleagues at the Sydney Film Oral History Group, especially Martha Ansara, Judy Adamson and Graham Shirley. Many activists and filmmakers have assisted my research with interviews, advice and information, and they have brought the topic of this project alive for me in many ways. A special thanks to John Hughes for his work with, and for, the WWFFU members, helping them to take their place in history. Lastly, I remain grateful for the generous personal support of John Roberts and, during the last stages, Pete Randles, Colleen McGloin and Rebecca Albury.

The author acknowledges permissions from the Australian Film Institute, John Hughes, Norma Hawkins and the Maritime Union of Australia for the use of the illustrations in this work. Copies of the three films detailed in Chapter Four are available for viewing at Screen Sound Australia, McCoy Circuit, Acton, ACT.

List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission/ Corporation
ABS	Australasian Book Society
ACSEF	Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AMWU	Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union
APC	Australian Peace Council
ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Company
BL	Builders' Labourers Federation
BWIU	Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia
CFMEU	Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
DOI	Department of Information ⁱ
MIT	Maritime Industries Theatre
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NBAC/ANU	Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University
NFSA	National Film and Sound Archives
RFA	Realist Film Association
SFF	Sydney Film Festival
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SORA	School of Realist Art
TLC	Trades and Labour Council
WEA	Workers Educational Association
WWF	Waterside Workers' Federation
WWFFU	Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit

Note to the Reader

The MLA documentation system of parenthetical referencing has been used throughout this text, and endnotes have been used for discursive comments on the text, also according to the MLA system. I am aware that this may be an unfamiliar referencing system for many historians.

ⁱ Throughout its history, the government film production unit (as distinct from the controlling body) credited as the Film Division of the Department of Information, the Film Division of the Department of the Interior, the Film Division of the News and Information Bureau of the Department of the Interior, the Commonwealth Film Unit and Film Australia; for the purposes of this work I shall refer to it as the DOI.

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Prologue

Scepticism and the Film Historian

This thesis explores the history of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit (WWFFU), a trade union production group that operated in Sydney from 1953 to 1958. It begins, however, with an encounter with a television mini-series made many years later. From the late 1970s there has been a prolific growth in the number of film and television programs celebrating Australian history. The 1950s have been a particularly fruitful decade for these works, with Australian audiences watching productions like *Newsfront*, *Silver City* or *Celia*.¹ Particularly for viewers who have not lived through the period, like myself, the 1950s becomes known initially through the perceptions promoted in these works.

The 1987 mini-series *The True Believers* focuses on political events in Australia in the years from 1945 to 1955, notably the split in the Australian Labor Party.² With its narrative weaving around the central characters of Robert Menzies, Bert Evatt and Ben Chifley, the eight-hour program builds up a general impression of Australian life during that decade. Ian McGarrity, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Acting Director of Television, commented that 'what the drama hopes to achieve is a portrayal of historical events and personalities which, while perhaps not factual in every detail, will nevertheless convey the atmosphere and overall sense of events and personalities of the time' (8). Through histories such as *The True Believers* Australians are invited to recall the 1950s as a progressive time, with an overall sense of stability and security, overlaid with a general feeling of polarised opinion, in which conservatism was the standard, Communists were denigrated, and militant unionists were depicted as 'hard-faced fanatics'. I became interested in the archival footage interwoven with the more prevalent dramatic sequences of this program. The inclusion of archival film in such productions is a common device, but what does it do to the presentation and interpretation of history? It raises a number of issues about the construction and reconstruction of the past on celluloid and an assessment of the relationships between drama and documentary, fact and fiction.

If I had applied a straightforward textual analysis to this mini-series, I would include an assessment of the use of archival footage in a historical production. But I wanted to interrogate this archival footage more closely, so as not to make any presumptions about it. I decided to concentrate on one sequence that depicted a group of miners during the 1949 coal strike, brandishing 'Nationalise the Mines' banners at a protest march. Was it, in fact, archival newsreel footage, as it had been implied in the mini-series? From what newsreel company had it come? Where had it been shot? What were the details of its production? This led me to the vaults of the National Film and Sound Archives (NFSA), and their collections of Cinesound and Movietone newsreel footage. There, I found that this sequence did not originate from a commercial newsreel production as I first thought, and as I suspect other viewers may have been led to believe. It was, in fact, an excerpt from a film that had been made by a trade union film unit. Here was a clip which was presented as newsreel footage in a historical recreation. It made the use of archival footage in the mini-series even more complex; what was presented as documentary evidence was itself recast.

The striking miners were originally recorded by the WWFFU, and the sequence which masqueraded as newsreel footage in *The True Believers* was an excerpt from *Hewers of Coal*, made in 1957 for the Miners' Federation. Militant organisations commissioned the Unit to make works that perceived the value of film as a political and educational tool. Their productions were often documentary in nature, and supported improvements to working and living conditions. My discovery of this masquerading newsreel footage raises many issues. Some are about the work of the WWFFU; others interrogate the re-use of its footage, and the representation of wharfies, and other blue-collar workers such as miners in visual media.³

Noel Sanders writes of the popularity of works such as *The True Believers*: 'processes of reading and viewing history are now increasingly mass media-oriented; and increasingly what we "know" of the past is reduced to what gets cycled and recycled in the media ... what is now "remembered" is what media words or images "remember" for us selectively' (116). Finding the

source of the protest footage changed my interpretation of this sequence as newsreel. The two guises of the film sequence raise questions about the selective nature of history, and how we construct our past through cinema. If the mini-series itself was recasting footage, then perhaps McGarrity's opinion on the representative nature of *The True Believers*, which he hopes 'convey[s] the atmosphere ... of the time', should be questioned as well – were the 1950s just as this work, and other histories, had depicted? What does the de-historicisation of the footage signify for history, and for film?

Being sceptical about the original sources of footage in this mini-series had brought me to the topic of this thesis. My research on the appropriated footage was guided by my interests in Australian film and politics, and this thesis reflects my political background, alongside the desire to make a contribution to Australian cultural history. My identities as an Australian film student and a historian led me to investigate the representation of the WWFFU in our cinema history. A healthy scepticism is required in any historical project. The word 'scepticism' derives from the Greek *skepsis* meaning inquiry or doubt (Sykes 1012), and inquiry into the textual characteristics of *The True Believers* led to the project of a history of the WWFFU itself. Similar sceptical reflection is necessary on commonplace inferences of life in Sydney in the 1950s, film in Sydney in the 1950s, and the very nature of the WWFFU and its film-work. A banner displayed on the Unit's production van boasted that 'We Film the Facts' (Fig. 1). Is this what occurred? Perhaps the Unit's representations were no more factual than those in the *True Believers*.

After seeing the miners' footage in *The True Believers*, and not being able to find a great deal of comment on the work of the WWFFU, I embarked on research for the compilation of a history of the Unit. This entailed more research at the National Film and Sound Archive, as well as unions and other organisations, the uncovering of films and documents, and the undertaking of a number of interviews with filmmakers, as well as past and present members of Sydney's political, labour and artistic spheres. There are four questions which this thesis will address. Why did the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) establish a film unit? Why was it in 1953? What did the Unit achieve? And lastly, why did its work end in 1958?

When I initially encountered the body of work that the WWFFU had produced, my political sympathies led me to view their films as exemplary: it seemed that, against commonly held ideas about wharfies in the 1950s—as I had read from mainstream newspaper reports of the day and had seen in commercial newsreels—these films did, indeed, seem to be telling another side of the story. But was it the facts? As this thesis will demonstrate, the WWFFU filmmakers, along with their union, placed a great emphasis on the authenticity of their work compared to these other media of their time. But after embarking on a series of oral history interviews with the two surviving Unit members, I found that there were a number of scenes in their films that they had recreated. For example, in their second film, *The Hungry Miles*, there is a sequence that depicts the life of the wealthy ruling class during the Depression: they feasted at grand banquets, the filmmakers argued, while many other Australians suffered enormous privations. One of the producers proudly related the preparation for this scene when the wharfie producers went to Sydney's State Theatre and shot footage of its magnificent chandelier. They borrowed actors, costumes and props from the New Theatre, and one of the filmmakers borrowed his aunt's candelabra for the banquet table, to recreate what they believed was a scene from the ruling-class environment.⁴

The filmmaker I interviewed was quite insulted when the ABC, in requesting information on that scene, referred to it as archival footage. She exclaimed, 'all the trouble we went to for that scene, and he thinks it's archival footage!' Just as *The True Believers* recreated the miners' history 'wrongly', the WWFFU had, 35 years earlier, similarly recreated this scene of the ruling class. In both instances it was a case of recreating 'the other'. Was this recasting 'wrong' as well? What does it mean for me, as a sympathiser of the work of the WWFFU, to find out that they recreated scenes themselves? It points to the fact that, as with all other perceptions, political sympathies are discursively constructed formations. I had an interest in the political and cultural realms of the 1950s, and these films seemed to be showing me a side of that period I had rarely seen before. What was I to make of the evidence that these documentaries from that period were not all completely authentic? Through the course of my research, I discovered that the WWFFU

films had not only recreated scenes of the ruling class, but many scenes from the waterfront workers' history. Paula Rabinowitz reminds us that 'documentaries have and present values; they are persuasive, not simply artifactual', and they are viewed by 'a spectator whose position is located within history, essentially remaking the relationship of truth to ideology by insisting on advocacy rather than objectivity' (7). Although I previously thought I generally understood how all texts are mediated, had I not gone on to further research on the Unit, I may have held a less critical view of their work.

It is relevant today to investigate the WWFFU in considering not only their own production and recasting, but also the more recent re-uses of their footage. *The True Believers* has many resonances from its production, and its screening as part of Australia's bicentenary celebrations of white invasion. An interrogative history of the WWFFU is doubly relevant at the end of the twentieth century, as the union of waterside workers continues to call on their tradition of militancy and solidarity to overcome perceived attacks from government and big business. And, as was particularly demonstrated in 1998, sections of the Australian mainstream media are still representing wharfies in such ways, with comments that 'the rows of idle forklifts sitting at Webb Dock in Melbourne are a reminder that this new battle is merely the latest in an unending class war waged for most of this century' (Sheehan). Australia has enjoyed a long history of union activism, and the WWFFU's representation of strikes and other industrial issues will have resonances when placed beside more well-known representations of these issues, or more recent ones – including the front page newspaper photographs of striking Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members protecting their children from fights with police (Russell and Kennedy).

¹ *Newsfront* is in itself a film worthy of close study, being one of the first Australian feature films to combine dramatic scenes and archival footage, and one that takes as its subject the work of cinematographers of the 1950s. Scott Murray describes *Newsfront* as 'Noyce's *only marginal* examination of how Len and his newsreel mates were responsible for almost the only cinematic images Australians had of their country' ('The 1970s and 1980s' 89) [my emphasis].

² *The True Believers* was an ABC/Roadshow Coote and Carroll co-production. The series won an AFI/Logie award for best mini-series of 1988. One review states that 'the effect of a series like *The True Believers*, partisan as it is, is unwittingly a profoundly conservative one' (Walter 40).

³ At the same time that I was researching *The True Believers*, reports of the 1998 docks dispute led me to consider contemporary media coverage of wharfies and other workers in Australia.

⁴ The New Theatre is an independent Sydney organisation; for details see Chapter Three.

Fig 1. The WWFFU Kombi van in the 1956 Sydney May Day March (Norma Hawkins)

Chapter One

Getting the Message Across: A History of the WWFFU

Histories of the WWFFU exist, but in generalised terms (Shirley and Adams 195-196; Moran, 'Documentary Consensus' 99; Moran, *Projecting* 68; M Beasley) and in a thesis (Watkinson). This chapter seeks to answer the two questions 'what did the Unit achieve?' and 'why did its work end in 1958?' It provides a detailed account of the Unit's history and working practices, and considers the historical framework of the Unit's operation from industrial and cultural aspects. It appraises audiences' and critics' experiences of the Unit's films, and their subsequent re-uses by other filmmakers. David Bordwell notes that 'a cinematic poetics refuses a division of labour among theory, history and criticism' ('Historical' 373); and this chapter reflects this approach.

Formation

The establishment of the WWFFU can be traced to the stage of Sydney's New Theatre, where the three Unit members, Keith Gow, Norma Disher and Jock Levy (Fig. 2), had been working for some years.¹ Apart from their work at the Theatre, Disher was a clerk at the Sydney Trade Union Club, while Gow and Levy were employed as waterside workers. In 1953 an opportunity arose which allowed their theatre work to extend to the men's place of work on the wharves. Jock Levy approached his union leader, WWF Sydney Branch Secretary Tom Nelson, to ask for permission for the theatre group to use the union's hall, in the Branch Building at 60-66 Sussex Street. Nelson agreed, and Levy and others established the Maritime Industries Theatre (MIT) later that year. Levy observed that, for him, 'it had always been a sort of a challenge to us to get ordinary blokes working in the industry to come to the theatre' (WWFFU, Interview with John Hughes and Margot Nash, hereafter known as Hughes interview). As they did in other cultural projects, some wharfies collaborated with the theatre experiment and volunteered to take part

in the MIT's activities, particularly in set construction and stagehand work. As well as their New Theatre work Disher, Levy and Gow participated in the MIT. The program for their only presentation states:

MIT arose out of the actions of a number of people who are [*sic*] working on the Waterfront and who had some experience in theatre. They came together and decided that it would be of great value to their fellow-workers to have an amateur theatre group of their own on the spot. In this way they could provide satisfying entertainment and an avenue of expression for those men, their wives and children who might otherwise find it difficult to enter such a field. (*Travellers* 4)

From this statement of aims, it is apparent that there was a conscious effort by the MIT participants to provide working class entertainment for the working class. They also recognised that wharfies' families had a contribution to make to cultural activity, and might be open to participating in this group, as it had been expressly established for their benefit.

The Travellers played in March 1953 as the only season of the MIT. Its program explained that the ambition was 'to present current issues in a direct manner to people who are concerned for their future happiness and peace' (2), in the same vein as the New Theatre's philosophy. Ewan MacColl, one of the founders of the Communist Party Historians' Group in the UK, wrote this play. Like much of his work, which the MIT described as 'concerned with an unequivocal investigation of the most urgent issues of our times' (*Travellers* 2), *The Travellers* was an anti-war drama. Levy was director and producer for this presentation, and he also took on an acting role, while Disher and Gow worked in set design, construction, musical accompaniment and costuming. The performance of *The Travellers* set the precedent for theatrical work in the Sussex Street hall; following the loss of its rented venue in Castlereagh Street, the New Theatre was offered the use of the Sussex Street venue, and they played there under the auspices of the WWF Cultural Committee.

With a background that included some filmwork, Gow suggested the production of a trailer film to encourage fellow waterside workers to come and see the play. Some rehearsal scenes were filmed using a borrowed Bolex sixteen millimetre camera, and a short, untitled work was

made by Gow and Levy. Nelson gave his permission for them to screen the trailer in the Branch hall during lunch breaks.

A prominent campaign during this period of the Federation's history was to achieve industrial pensions. After Nelson received a report from rank and file workers on the popularity of the trailer for *The Travellers*, he asked Levy if he and Gow could make a film to support the pensions campaign. Levy remembers that he 'consulted with Keith, and we decided it was a challenge and we should give it a go' (Address). The success of the trailer in attracting audiences to the play encouraged Gow and Levy to continue with their filmwork, and they agreed to Nelson's request.

Although Nelson had initially asked Gow and Levy if they could produce the film, the decision to expand the Federation's activity did not come solely from the leadership. At a stop-work meeting on 7 July 1953, a majority of the rank and file approved the proposal. A precedent for filmwork within the Australian union movement was established as the WWFFU was instituted and *Pensions for Veterans* was produced. As to the salaries of Gow and Levy, Nelson had written as a condition of their employment that 'employees engaged on the [film] work shall be paid at the casual rates for waterside workers. When the unit is not engaged in the making of films, its members to resume their normal work as waterside workers' ('Report' 1). Gow and Levy asked Disher to help on the soundtrack, and she worked on *Pensions for Veterans* on a voluntary basis.

Levy outlined his opinion on the circumstances underlying this production:

An enlightened union management ... saw an opportunity of mounting a defence against the attacks that it was under ... it had a general purpose, this film. We wanted to get as much support and as much sympathy as we possibly could. The proposition they were putting up – that the veterans should get pensions from an industry – hadn't been done in Australia. Not only did it concern the waterside workers. If they could make a breakthrough here, it could be a follow-on thing, and the rest of industry could also be responsible for the workers. So it wasn't only concerned with the immediate campaign for veterans to get pensions; it took in the whole of the trade union movement. (*Film Work*)

In his opinion, then, the film was made as a tool of opposition to the attacks under which the Federation leadership saw itself. It was to help mobilise support for the union's actions, not only for the immediate beneficiaries of the pensions, but, eventually, the whole working class.

At the beginning of 1955, the Union increased members' compulsory levies from £7 to £7/10/-, to cover a number of activities outside conventional union operations, which included organising an educational program as well as 'the development of film production as a vital means of advocating the policy of the Federation' (*Hungry Miles* Pamphlet). From that time onwards, the WWF employed Gow and Levy as full-time filmmakers. The Unit's second production, *The Hungry Miles*, premiered in February 1955. It presents a history of the Sydney waterfront, a story of the unionists' struggles for improved working conditions, with an emphasis on unity. The film's program produced by the three filmmakers explains:

In establishing a Film Unit for the production and presentation of Documentary Films to the public and to its members, the WWF recognises the need to use the most important medium of our time. Commercial cinema at its worst reflects an appalling absence of cultural background of international understanding and a dangerous escapism from the social problems which only an alert public opinion can lead to a satisfactory stage of solution. In presenting *The Hungry Miles* the WWF brings to the people an important social document filmed from the viewpoint of those most vitally concerned—the Waterside Workers themselves. In continuing to make documentaries of this character, the WWF hopes to show to as wide an audience as possible, the problems of the Australian working people and to contribute to realising their hopes and aspiration.

Their statement shows the Unit's intention to work with different aims to commercial production operations: they saw the need to challenge the dominant use of cinema as entertainment. The 'dangerous escapism' they saw in these works reflects the view, held by some on the left in Cold War Sydney, that the majority of feature films normalised conservative social and political outlooks at the expense of more realistic representations. They believed that commercial cinema omitted an important component, the viewpoint of the working class, and that the WWFFU's work could fill this gap. They also believed their films would eventually not just be screened to Federation members but a wider public, the Australian working class.

Later in 1955 a WWF Federal Council meeting transferred the administration and financial responsibility of the Film Unit from the Sydney Branch to the Federal office. It was also during this period that Disher was invited to join the Film Unit in an official, full-time capacity, and she was put on the WWF payroll.

Production

From 1953 to 1958, under the *imprimatur* of the WWFFU, the three filmmakers produced six films for the Federation and ten for other groups or individuals.² The films focused on social and labour issues including industrial disputes, safety, nationalisation of industries and housing shortages. In almost all cases, these topics originated from the commissioning organisation, whose leaders and members worked in close collaboration with the filmmakers. Most of the WWFFU films can be classified as documentaries. There are also two animated films and four that may be classified as newsreels. They were made primarily for union members. A 1956 report written by the Unit members notes that 'a vast potential audience of more than a million trade unionists is waiting' for their work ('Report from WWFFU' 2). In other circumstances the interest of a wider group was targeted. This can be seen in works such as a film made for the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU), *The Housing Problem and You*. Each film, however, was produced in the service of the working class; encouragement of one group to mobilise on an issue would hopefully benefit the broader working class.

The filmmakers maintained that they worked collectively, not taking on strictly defined crew roles. As Levy recalled, 'the members of the unit didn't want to specify who did what in terms of job descriptions; we were a unit, we were interdependent' (Telephone interview). While he asserted their collective working practice, however, they still needed to make decisions on the actual allocation of jobs. It was most often Gow, with his experience in film production, who was director and cinematographer. Levy contended that 'without Keith, there wouldn't have been a Film Unit: [he contributed] his expertise, his undoubted flair and feeling for the media

[sic] of film and his ability to master all the elements of film making and finally his great energy that he gave unstintingly' (Address). Disher took on many roles, from making costumes and selecting musical accompaniments to writing the narration and editing with Gow. Levy appeared before the camera in a number of the films and negotiated with union executives, consulting with them on productions; according to Gow, 'Jock Levy was the guy who supplied the political leadership, the union leadership, via the union executive. He was the one who always knew the correct union line' (Moran interview). As well as film production duties, the Unit performed still photography work for the WWF's compensation claims, and as publicity and journalism for publications in the labour movement. One of the Unit's reports asserted that

in the past eighteen months £47,000 has been won where shots of the accident conditions were produced in court. Mr J Young, President of the Sydney Branch states that photographs have been of great assistance in helping juries to understand the circumstances of the accident in the fullest detail and have consequently hastened many cases to a successful conclusion. Providing valuable publicity material, the Unit has covered with the still camera many aspects of activity within the union, current events such as demonstrations, campaigns around working conditions and wages, meetings, sports and cultural events. (Paper, June 1953)

The Unit worked from a room at the top of the union's Sussex Street building, where production work and editing took place. They produced animated sequences and cartoon films on a handmade animation bench housed in the basement. For the first film, they borrowed a camera from Bob Matthews, a former member of the Melbourne Realist Film Association (RFA).³ In early November 1954 the Unit members requested funds from the Federal Executive to buy a Bolex sixteen millimetre camera and a tripod, adding that 'this equipment would of course be used in the interests of the Federation, and could act as powerful propaganda in showing to the general public the correctness of our past fights and the justice of present claims'. Their request was granted 'in the interests of the Federation' (WWF, Federal Council Meeting Minutes).

The WWFFU produced their work on colour film as well as black and white.⁴ They travelled to many sites to shoot their location footage. These included the Sydney wharves from Woolloomooloo to Darling Harbour, Cockatoo Island, the Sussex Street WWF building, the

Royal Botanic Gardens, the areas surrounding Bankstown and La Perouse, as well as factories and construction sites. They recorded sequences outside Sydney in Melbourne, Newcastle, Port Kembla and Wollongong, on wharves and coal mining areas, and at Canberra's Parliament House. All WWFFU films are composed only of footage shot by the unit, except *Hewers of Coal* (1957) for which, Gow recalls, the Unit obtained Cinesound archival material and hand-painted selected sequences (Hughes interview).

Soundtracks generally consist of a voice-over narration laid over prerecorded symphonic music. Sound effects as well as newly recorded music were also used in some works. Waterside worker and musician Arnold Butcher had met the Unit members through his association with the New Theatre, where he arranged and performed music. The Film Unit commissioned him to write a work for one film.⁵ They also recorded the songs of a Sydney wharfie, Dick Hackett, who accompanied himself on his ukulele. Voices from the Waterside Workers' Choir and Cedric McLaughlin's Link Singers feature on the soundtrack of other films.

The Unit involved wharfies and other workers, especially builders' labourers and miners, in their production practice as performers, extras or helpers. Harry Black remembers his performance as a judge in *Bones of Building*, for instance. In the course of research for this thesis I interviewed a number of retired waterside workers and union executives from the Sydney and Wollongong areas, and on all occasions the work and personnel of the WWFFU were remembered positively and enthusiastically. In most cases the people appearing in films were from the relevant industry, be they waterside workers, seamen, miners, builders' labourers, rank and file workers or union officials. The filmmakers sometimes seconded actors from the New Theatre. Others who collaborated on the films included Sydney wharfie-artists Harry Reade and Clem Millward, who produced titles and credits, artwork, graphs and animation sequences.

Known as the 'voice of Australia' to many of his contemporaries, radio announcer and actor Leonard Teale recorded the narrations for eight films.⁶ The WWFFU chose Teale for his good

voice, and as a narrator who rarely fumbled his lines. Levy believed that he was sympathetic to the sentiments behind the WWFFU films (Telephone interview). Teale's work for the left-wing WWFFU did not noticeably affect his career, and he continued his work as an actor in film (he performed in some of the few feature films made in Australia in the 1950s)⁷ and television, perhaps most notably in *Homicide* from 1965 to 1973.

In the practices of the WWFFU a heightened sense of collaboration is evident from three factors: the collective nature of the filmmakers' production work, their inclusion of other workers in this process, and the conscious intention of the filmmakers to investigate the community of their films' subjects. First, the nature of the Unit's work often allowed collective decisions to prevail over individual desires. The backgrounds of the three filmmakers, stemming from their experiences of living through the Depression and their understanding of the contemporary political and industrial context, coloured by their political beliefs and their membership in the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), were factors in the films' construction, as were their experiences in the New Theatre, and Gow and Levy's work as wharfies. Through these circumstances they had come to see collective work as positive. A general unanimity prevailed; because outlines and scripts were developed collectively, and production and editing approached in the same way, a unity of purpose was maintained. This was in contrast to the tighter hierarchy of other production units such as the Department of Information (DOI), newsreel, and feature film units, where technical and artistic work was segregated and where some workers, because of their skills, were irreplaceable (see Bertrand, 'Theory'; Moran, *Projecting*).

A second form of collaboration was the participation of other workers in the filmmakers' practices; they welcomed such assistance. It was not a 'closed shop' like most other production units, but a more inclusive working practice that used, and expanded, a living network of workers, film participants, artists and audience members. These people were familiar with and sympathetic to the purpose of the films.

In a third instance of collective operation, the Unit members extended their energies to investigate the industries they documented. Levy commented on a difference he perceived between the Unit's worker-as-filmmaker circumstances, and other film production personnel who did not have direct experience in the industries and areas of life that they chronicled: 'we were workers on a job. We could see things that should be common knowledge to every member of the WWF ... I think the advantage was ... because we were working down on the waterfront, not some outside group ... but from our experience from underneath' (Hughes interview).

I argue that the immediacy Levy describes, of directly encountering working and living conditions in their political and social contexts, made for a particularly close examination of those circumstances. It was not only a characteristic of films made within the waterside community. For the Miners' Federation commission of *Hewers of Coal* for instance, Gow and Levy immersed themselves in the working and living community of the miners. At the Nebo coal mine on the NSW south coast, they worked alongside miners, without disclosing their reasons for being there, to gain experience in the industry (Hughes interview). The three filmmakers then moved to the Hunter Valley mining area for the duration of the filming. Disher recalled their trip:

it was a wonderful experience to have gone up there and to have spent six weeks with the miners and their families ... we got to know so many people. We heard so many stories about the Depression and the lockouts, and the cave-ins, and the specific trials of the men and their families who worked in the mining industry. (Hughes interview)

Their practice of integrating, as much as possible, into the lives of their films' subjects, worked against commercial filmmaking conventions. The producers worked to help their subjects understand why and how their work was occurring. They gave them every opportunity to share in the process, rather than being alienated.⁸ It gave the Unit members the feeling that they were representing their subjects more accurately; it also may be responsible for bringing a more sympathetic bias to the films.

In 1954 Nelson outlined the objectives he wanted the Film Unit to embrace:

- (a) To bring in a dramatic and educational form the policy of the Federation to its members.
- (b) To inform other trade unionists of the current struggles of the Waterside Workers and to enlist their support.
- (c) To help create good relations with all sections of the community and to assist to make and develop independent working class films with other trade unions and working class organisations. ('Report' 1)

Following on from the intention of the WWF and other labour organisations to employ a wide range of techniques in transmitting their views to the broader community, Nelson viewed the objectives of the WWFFU films, like many other documentaries of their time, as persuasive as well as educative. Countering the stance of the government, industry and capitalist press was important for him, and he brought this perception into his objectives for the Unit.

Alongside the immediate issue of fulfilling the commissioning group's brief, the Unit's films were produced as propaganda. The Unit members were clear about the political aims behind their filmmaking, as a 1956 report demonstrates; this document states that the Unit was 'a strong and persuasive weapon that [operates to] materially assist the [CPA] party program within the trade union movement' (WWFFU, 'Report June 1956'). These idealists found their inspiration in the Leninist *dictum* that art should be used as a weapon. Lenin had claimed further that in the struggle for a better world, 'of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important' (qtd. in Bordwell and Thompson 458), and the Unit's films functioned to realise this. They provided an alternative representation of events and issues to capitalist media producers' anti-radical and anti-militant reportage. In 1998 historian Margo Beasley observed that in the 1950s 'the wharfies were demonised in the mainstream media in a way that is almost hysterical when you read it now. The mainstream media really relied on the most ridiculous stereotypes—lazy, thieving, drunken, strike-prone, bludging wharfies that we all hate' (Interview). Tom Nelson had recognised these 'unfair attacks against the union' (*Hungry* 122) and this awareness contributed to his support for the establishment of the Film Unit.

Support from within the Executive of the Federation, as well as other unions, was enthusiastic for the measure of the Unit's work as propaganda. A 1957 report by WWF Federal Assistant General Secretary Ted Roach reflected this:

our Film Unit is beginning to gain real recognition, and more and more Unions are becoming conscious of the value of this new form of visual propaganda, becoming aware how importantly it counters the difficulties presented us and the working class in general by employer owned and controlled papers, films, radios and publishing houses. ('Report to WWF')

With this statement Roach identified the 'employer owned and controlled' media, the establishment media, as having different philosophical aims to the WWFFU. The Unit's work challenged what Roach, and many others on the left, perceived as the anti-wharfie, anti-union and anti-working class position of the capitalist press and newsreels. This challenge was on behalf of the WWF as well as the broader labour movement. Such a visualisation of politics would, it was hoped, unite and strengthen the subordinate group, the working class, against business and government, whose interests were protected by the capitalist press. Australian sociologist and historian RW Connell reminds us that such a situation 'is an outcome of the normal, regular processes by which commercial mass communications work in a capitalist system, producing and reproducing an ideological interpretation of the world' (*Ruling* 195), and the WWFFU worked to intervene in these processes with their own interpretation.

The WWF had employed many forms of propaganda, since the 1903 publication of the first issue of the *Waterside Workers' Gazette*. In the 1950s Federation propaganda included talks in workers' groups and in public areas such as the Domain, leaflets, deputations to Parliament, radio presentations, and publicity in left-wing and labour publications, especially its own *Maritime Worker*. Much of the trade union movement viewed the development of the Film Unit as necessarily innovatory. In an acceptance of the mood of progress and development which was common in the post-war era, turned to the advantage of the labour movement, a NSW Trades and Labour Council (TLC) member said in 1957 that 'we believe that the development of an apparatus of this character is in keeping with the modern trends in all phases of life, and places in the hands of trade unions a tremendously powerful weapon—visual propaganda'

('Film-Making'). This was not just a locally held belief. The World Federation of Trade Unions had bought some of the Unit's work, and in 1957 its General Secretary, Louis Saillant, wrote that he believed the Film Unit was 'a very important initiative' for the whole Australian trade union movement.

It was not only its supporters who believed that the Film Unit assertively contributed to the Federation's existing propaganda strategies. In the estimation of one agent within the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the WWF maintained 'an effective propaganda organisation, including a weekly newspaper and a film unit' ('Some Notes'). The right wing publication *News-Weekly* informed its readers that 'WWF funds have been used to pay for Communist propaganda films ... to the Communist Party, in terms of propaganda value, the profits [from the use of WWFFU films] have been bigger than the shipowners make on shipping freights' ('Communist "Fronts"'). The journalist did not elaborate on the way these profits were realised, but believed the films had a positive propaganda force, and had, to that point at least, been successful as such.

Between 1956 and 1958 a number of labour organisations commissioned films from the Unit. As their work extended throughout the labour movement, the Unit members, as well as some WWF executives including Roach, planned films for other sectors of the community, including a proposal to help cover the Melbourne Olympics (WWFFU, Letter to Whitchurch).⁹ In 1956, the Film Unit members designed a series of short cartoon films. They developed the animation table in the basement of the Sussex Street building for these, and established an organisation called Link Films. Under the name of Link Films, two films were produced out of a projected series of twenty-five, most of which were based on Aboriginal narratives, in an early instance of the interest shown in the indigenous population and its culture. Their sale to schools, both in Australia and overseas, and to the new market of broadcast television, was designed to fund the widening brief of the Unit. In correspondence to filmmaker John Heyer about the marketing of this work in opposition to the growing popularity of American cartoons from Disney and Warner Brothers, Levy wrote that 'it seems it will be difficult to find a sponsor who will risk box

office receipts by backing a cartoon film which is a little different, e.g. no talking ducks or mice'. In 1957 the Unit members thought they had found a distributor for the Link films, and entered into an agreement with Legendary Films Pty Ltd. A contract was drawn up, to the effect that the Film Unit would now function as Link Films, whilst still under the control of the WWF (Contract). The agreement was not finalised, however, and the Unit produced no more films under the name of Link.

The failure of the Link project to expand the Unit's work to a wider audience did not lead directly to its termination. Although the producers had not made a film for their own union since early 1956, there was no lack of filmwork. The WWFFU's achievements were becoming increasingly well-known throughout the Sydney labour movement, and organisations in a number of industries were keen to sponsor the Unit's production of promotional and educational films. In October 1957 the Actors Equity commissioned the Unit to record a demonstration of Equity members in Canberra, for a film that was never completed. The Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union entered into negotiations with the WWF over the production of a film designed 'to acquaint the public, and especially members of other Unions, with the particular problems of our industry' (Field). The NSW Teachers' Federation, under the leadership of prominent communist Sam Lewis, was at that time one of the few white-collar unions to join the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the NSW TLC. This organisation had decided to commission a WWFFU film on education, and prepared a script in 1958. In response to increasing problems associated with automation in many blue-collar industries, the ACTU set up an Automation Committee in 1956, and the TLC made some moves towards commissioning a film on the issue, for which wharfie Clem Millward wrote a draft script. BWIU Federal Secretary Frank Purse was a strong supporter of the work of the Unit. In 1957, encouraging others in his union to support the production of the proposed automation film, he wrote:

Those who have read the script are most impressed and feel that such a film would be a most valuable contribution to a proper understanding of the social problems which arise from technical developments and which are confronting the workers today. It is estimated that a half hour colour film could be produced for £1,600. If this was shared

equally between seven Unions the cost per union would be £230. Already some six unions have indicated their willingness to produce such a film and it is anticipated that others will also be prepared to participate in such a joint venture, thus further reducing the cost per union.

With this planning of filmwork for other organisations, as well as the sponsored productions already completed, there was a change of feeling within the WWF Federal Executive. By the middle of 1956 there had already been indications to the Unit members that

if the Film Unit is to continue and extend, the financial responsibility must be borne by more than one trade union. This need is emphasised by a proposal from Mr Ted Roach that the personnel of the Unit be reduced. Mr Roach is convinced of the value of the work of the Unit but is undoubtedly concerned about the continued financial burden to the Federation. (WWFFU, 'Report June 1956')

Roach did not reduce the Unit's number of staff. He assessed the Unit's increasing work on outside jobs, and proposed to terminate the production of film within the WWF, and instead to establish a trade union co-operative film unit within the ACTU. He canvassed the idea throughout the Sydney union movement, and in August 1956 convened a meeting to discuss the proposal. There he screened three films and outlined his ideas on how the Unit's work could continue, emphasising the benefits to the labour movement at large:

Films of a general character should have a broad appeal. They could deal with the social, economic and industrial problems confronting the workers, the need for planned development and the general work of the Trade Unions including Trade Union cultural and welfare work. (Report. n.d.)

Roach suggested that 'in the event of the failure of the NSW TLC to set up such a Co-operative by 31 January 1957, the Film Unit should be disbanded by 28 February 1957' (WWF Federal Council Meeting Minutes. 12 October 1956). The Federal Council did not pass this motion, and suggested a less summary approach whereby Federal officers should 'use their best endeavours to achieve this goal as speedily as possible' (Amendment). Council did, however, signal its appreciation of the Unit's work:

Council is of the opinion that the work done by the Film Unit has been of tremendous value to our Federation and we congratulate the Unit on the high standard of its work. However, the field of operation within the Federation is limited and consequently the comparative cost is fairly high. Viewing this aspect we believe that much greater scope and much greater value in relation to cost can be obtained by reforming the Unit into a Trade Union Co-operative. (WWF Federal Council Meeting Minutes. 2 November 1956)

The debate continued, led by terms such as 'value', 'costs' and 'self-sufficiency'. In one report Roach reminded the Executive that 'associated with conviction of the importance of this type of film production is the question of cash, and the necessity for unions to find fairly large sums of money if they are to participate' (Report to 1957 Conference). Executives from other unions saw the significance of a collective: Roach reported that the plan won general support from at least nine unions within the ACTU.¹⁰ This was apparently not enough: the TLC failed to organise the Trade Union film co-operative, and the WWF disbanded its Film Unit in the winter of 1958.

The most apparent cause for this was the unions' financial situations. Tom McDonald, who, through the 1950s was an executive of the BWIU (one of the unions that had supported the co-operative plan), recalled that, in his opinion, 'it had become a question of unions always having to weigh up priorities, because they've got cost factors and limited resources. And I think that while everyone agreed [that the Unit deserved to continue], it was a lower priority than a lot of other things' (Interview). In 1981 WWF General Secretary Charlie Fitzgibbon, reflecting on the history of the Unit, wrote that the WWFFU was discontinued 'because of rising costs which the Federation was unable to meet at the time'. He elaborated on this, further justifying the decision by highlighting the expenditure involved:

The Unit never achieved anything remotely resembling self-sufficiency and the only costs retrieved were those involved in supplying copies of films to Branches at a cost met by the Branch concerned, both on the basis of expenditure way below true unit cost. A few copies sold to educational organisations, etc., were costed more or less on the same basis ... the Unit performed valuable service but was only able to do so because the Federation took over the responsibility of meeting the expenses involved up to the stage where it became too burdensome [for the Sydney Branch]. (3-4)

The opinions of the Unit's work as both 'valuable' and 'burdensome' showed the conflicting priorities of the Federation as to the political and financial worth of the Unit. Its initial aim had

never been to make a profit, but to augment the Federation's propaganda arsenal. In a 1956 report, the filmmakers asserted this:

Our experience in the sixteen millimetre documentary field is that little financial return can be expected. However, because of the tremendous power of the film medium and the increasing possibilities for expanding exhibition, we feel that the *propaganda value* must be the first consideration. We feel that film production should not be regarded as a means of profit making, nor even able to secure financial returns equal to the outlay. It should be regarded as a valuable and persuasive weapon—a worthwhile expenditure equivalent to the Trade Union Press. (Report) [original emphasis]

It was not the aim of making something that would sell to the public that supplied the impetus for production, but the political commitment and creative drive of these producers.

The lack of funding is only one cause for the Unit's demise. As well as this, there was a sense from within parts of the Federation that some people were not the best people to market the co-operative proposal. When the Sydney Branch controlled the Unit, Tom Nelson's support was fundamental to the group's existence.¹¹ After the Federal office took over responsibility for the WWFFU from the Sydney Branch, Roach became involved in the Unit's administration. Jock Levy believed that 'he was not the right man for the job. He had no enthusiasm for it' (Personal interview). A rank and file member believed that 'Roach didn't see the possibilities of the unit, but Tom Nelson did; Roach was a narrow economist, and not a politician in the broad sense of the word, but Nelson was' (Parker).

Gow sensed that 'that was the end of our run anyway. You can't just keep on going at that pace with that kind of creativity without exhausting it—the area—and without exhausting yourself ... especially at the rate that we worked, you burn up your creative area as a unit pretty quickly' (Hughes interview). Levy considered that by 1958, 'we'd almost done what we wanted to do. Because I think that if we were to continue, we would have had to continue in making films on a commercial basis, and there were so many difficulties with that' (Personal interview). For Disher, the Unit's output 'represents five years of my life which I found stimulating and, in

retrospect, very worthwhile, and I feel proud of the work that the three of us did in that time' (Interview).

Distribution and Exhibition

A history of any production organisation should not only examine its development and the production of its films. It should also consider how the filmmakers used their work. This part of any filmmakers' work should not be overlooked. Filmmaker and WWFFU researcher John Hughes writes that the 'distribution and exhibition element often tends to fall into the background when cultural historians focus on the more evident artefacts of film production' (Email).

The filmmakers deliberately did not seek screening of their films in commercial cinemas; they were first and foremost produced for the trade union movement. Their film practice was a more communal view of using film, rather than the prescriptive one of the commercial media, and it operated independently of capitalist exhibition and distribution systems. The 1950s was a time in which ways of seeing film other than in commercial terms were increasing. Albert Moran observes that films such as the Unit's:

occupy very different institutional sites ... from ... the commercial cinema ... they occur in venues other than conventional cinemas; they institute different financial and organisational arrangements around the making, circulation and projection of the films; and they rearrange the relationship between film and viewer. ('Alternative' 120)

It is valuable to elaborate on these different institutional sites within which the WWFFU films existed. Each work had a unique distribution and exhibition history. Judging from the mention of film screenings in journals and meeting minutes in the trade union and screen communities, they were regularly screened months and years after their production. The types of screening venues and organisations used were, on the whole, organised and patronised by the working

class. The filmmakers themselves believed that this factor was a large component of the success of the films. A report written by the Unit members noted that they believed that their productions 'have been screened many hundreds of times in connection with many trade union campaigns. They have undoubtedly helped forge strong links of unity and determination in the ranks of the Waterside Workers themselves' (Paper).

The films were intended in the first instance to be seen by unionists. Prints were dispatched to all branches of the WWF, and were screened to many thousands of members, often at mass meetings. The most common venue in Sydney was the Leichhardt boxing stadium, which could seat up to ten thousand people and was used for stop-work meetings. Films screened alongside speeches, and executive and speakers took their places in the boxing ring. They also screened for wharfies in the lunch hour and after working hours in the Sussex Street hall and in other branches, and at executive, delegate and rank and file meetings. These screenings were advertised in handouts and by word of mouth as well as in branch newsletters and the Federation's national paper, the *Maritime Worker*. The films were usually shown in conjunction with, and therefore reinforced by, a talk, a stop-work meeting, performance, concert or other event. The Sussex Street hall was a popular venue as a result of this type of activity. The proximity of the Film Unit's office, just upstairs from the hall, helped the filmmakers to become closely involved in the community of the Federation. 'There were so many wharfies when we were there, it was really buzzing with life', Disher recalled. 'A lot of them would come upstairs in the lunch hour and see what we were doing, telling us stories' (*Sixty* 32).

In the 1950s WWF executive Tas Bull hired public halls throughout Hobart, and screened *November Victory* and *The Hungry Miles* to wharfies as well as a wider audience. He believed that this type of distribution of the films

was a way of helping to get the message across to the public about the situation that our union had confronted over the years. We also showed them to our own members and other unionists, at lunchtime meetings and things of that type. So the films were not just records. They were never intended to be just records; they were also used for purposes of

inspiring people into the future. And I think they were actually a wonderful concept.
(Interview)

Like other WWF leaders, Bull agreed with the Film Unit's aim of inducing the audience to a higher level of political awareness, by presenting the history of the Federation from the viewpoint of the executives and filmmakers. A letter from a Hobart wharfie who had attended one of Bull's 1954 screenings gives an indication of how the films were received:

Having seen the waterside workers' film on the case for pensions here in Hobart, I cannot help but sing praise to all who played a part in the making of this fine picture. I must, in particular, mention Sydney Branch in my praise, for their progress and foresight in making this film ... I should say that all who see this film will praise it to the upmost. It is a pity that all Branches have not some of your fighting ideas instead of being complacent.
(Russell)

Within the wider union movement, workers in other trade unions borrowed, bought and distributed the Unit's films; like their counterparts in the WWF, they realised that such work was a continuation of their struggles for better conditions. Thousands of workers, often with their friends and families, saw the Unit's films in this way throughout Australia. Many sorts of venues doubled as screening facilities, most often union halls, town halls, RSL clubs, and locations around worksites. Through the Australian Railways Union (ARU) (with a leadership dominated by CPA men), for instance, films were screened to railway workers at sites like the Clyde works, through the union's Concert Committee (Roach, Letter to Fulton). On another occasion, a lunchtime screening was held outside a Bankstown hotel which workers patronised; they brought their beers outside and watched the film (R Clarke).

An assessment of the distribution and exhibition of one work shows the efforts invested in having the films seen as widely as possible. In 1945 the BWIU sponsored the production of *Bones of Building*, a safety film. The BWIU screened it extensively at members', delegates' and training meetings, and on building sites. Executives of union branches in all states borrowed and bought prints, and screened them to apprentices at technical colleges. The film also screened to workers in other unions including the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) and the WWF, at worksites including the Chullora rail yards, and at other venues such as the Concord

Repatriation Hospital. It was one of the first works seen in the Kodak building in George Street Sydney, even before the building's completion, with the partly built theatrette blacked out for the lunchtime event. It was reported that

as usual with these screenings, the film was popularly received with applause as it ended. Organiser [Ernie] Boatswain then said a few words to emphasise the importance of the film. The message of safety found a particularly receptive audience that day because an apprentice had been badly injured during the morning by a steel girder which was being unloaded. ('Films Shown')

McDonald remembered that

we always got everyone to turn up, because it was a new feature. The employers were quite good about it. A lot of employers would agree to allow an extension of the lunch time break for it to be shown; on some locations we had to push them along a bit to agree. (Interview)

Some did not agree, however. Concrete Constructions refused the union's request for the film to be screened on the Qantas building site. After an accident in which a worker fell from the seventh floor and narrowly escaped death, the company still refused a screening ('Star'). Despite such disagreements between employers and unionists the film enjoyed a relatively large audience. One estimate was that a month after its release in 1956, ten thousand people had seen *Bones of Building* ('Star'). The BWIU's publication *The Building Worker* reviewed its distribution:

The film, which was viewed with great interest by Members of Parliament and others when it was shown at the NSW State Parliament also caused interest in Federal circles and a copy was purchased by the National Film Library at Canberra. *Bones of Building* has been shown thousands of times. The Combined Building Unions in Victoria recently had a safety month and the film was the central feature of that movement. It is being shown almost every day in Sydney. It was praised by the Federal Building workers' conference in Sydney early in the year and also by the Soviet Union and Chinese Trade Union leaders who visited Australia for May Day celebrations, and who took copies of the film respectively to their homelands on their return to show Unions and others there. The picture is notable for the fact that it features only the workers, who were filmed in building jobs in Sydney, where it was produced. ('International')

Unionists often approached film distribution personally. One BWIU organiser, Keith Goodworth, took films and a projector from Newcastle to the towns of the NSW north coast on

his recruitment drives. *The Building Worker* reported that he 'found a widespread demand from country members to see these trade union films and he intends to co-operate with other unions in making them available to as many country unionists as possible' ('Union Films'). In this way, not only did the films reach a wide audience while allowing rank and file unionists to expand their range of skills and experience, but they also helped to strengthen contacts between unions.

In accordance with the aims of the WWF filmmakers, their productions were not only screened within the union movement. They screened at CPA and ACTU conferences and alongside some performances at Sydney's New Theatre. A WWF Film Group member recalls how, in his own time, he took the Unit's films and a projector for screenings to cancer and tuberculosis wards in hospitals, and at old men's homes (Parker). During the 1956 maritime strike, the Melbourne WWF Film Group screened Unit films in public halls and private homes throughout urban and rural Victoria. At one of the country screenings

a group of fourteen young mothers, mostly wives of businessmen, after hearing a wharfie's wife on the strike, donated to strike funds, took leaflets to distribute, and made plans to show the film *Hungry Miles* at one of their homes. ('Wharfie Film Unit')

Members of the RFA and the CPA screened WWFFU films in cottage meetings.¹² They also screened at public housing complexes, migrant camps, hostels and emergency housing settlements. More common distribution methods were also used; the National Library of Australia and other film companies distributed WWFFU films nationally. From these outlets individuals, companies, government departments, and film societies could borrow or buy copies.¹³ One occasion when the films screened in more unusual circumstances was in 1956 when the Japanese crew of the ship *Yukikawa Maru* was invited on shore by the Melbourne RFA. These film enthusiasts used the screening of *Pensions for Veterans* as a basis for a meeting of the ship's crew, wharfies and other members of the Melbourne labour movement. 'This was the first occasion on which Australian workers were formally introduced to Japanese workers', reported the *Maritime Worker*, which hoped that 'similar meetings will be held in all Australian ports for the benefit of seamen from all countries' ('Japan'). In ways like this, a screening functioned as an

initial attraction for a meeting, and also enabled the films to be seen by non-Australian audiences.

Through this activity in the WWF and other organisations, the films enjoyed a wide distribution throughout the labour movement. The Unit members themselves did not have a prescriptive distribution strategy; Disher recalls that 'we weren't able to do a great deal about the distribution ourselves, because we were usually making another film, and there was only three of us' (Interview). She believed that 'we needed another person to look after that' (Hughes interview). But they contributed to the widespread screening of the films with their Kombi. At the beginning of their work the trio used Keith Gow's Indian motorcycle and sidecar for production transport.¹⁴ In 1955 the Federal office bought the Unit a Volkswagen Kombi van for a production vehicle, which doubled as a screening platform using back projection. In that way they could show films outdoors and in daylight, thus liberating themselves from conventional exhibition restrictions. By travelling around and taking the films to the people, instead of the other way around, the Unit was able to have direct contact with a large audience. By this flexible practice they engaged the interest of thousands of people who might never have otherwise had access to their point of view.

The WWFFU Kombi saw a lot of action.¹⁵ Around Sydney the Volkswagen picture theatre operated on the wharves, at street corners and factory and building site locations. The Kombi went to Newcastle, Port Kembla and Melbourne to show films to Federation members and other workers. There was a tour to the Hunter Valley region, during a fifteen week lockout, when the Unit members screened their films and talked with miners and their families. The Kombi doubled as accommodation for the crew: when Levy and Gow worked in the coal mines at Nebo prior to production of *Hewers of Coal*, they lived in the van (Hughes interview). The Unit members believed that the Kombi helped them tremendously. They reported that 'we believe that by far the most important and significant development has been taking out films with the mobile screening apparatus' ('Report June 1956'). They took *The Housing Problem and You* into the streets of the (then) slum areas of Paddington, Redfern, Woolloomooloo and Surry Hills, for

the benefit of the people directly affected by the problems confronted in the film. Disher spoke of her reaction to these screenings, and the energy invested in them:

it was great fun: as soon as you turned up with the van and started getting the generator going, you'd have all the kids in the neighbourhood around you, and everyone would come out and watch the films. I think I had leaflets that I used to take around, and it would be a summer evening—we could do two or three screenings in one night. We also went to places like Chullora, the big railway workshops, and the big abattoirs. (*Sixty* 33)

WWFFU productions were not only used as starting points for union meetings or community events, but were also seen within the non-commercial screen culture of Australia. A report written by the Unit members noted that they believed that their productions 'have played a powerful part in bringing the union's point of view to the public' (Paper). Film societies throughout the country were eager for local productions, and programmed many screenings of WWFFU work. The University of Sydney Film Group was a particularly enthusiastic patron. Along with exhibitions it held discussion groups and special nights on the Unit's work, introducing film enthusiasts to the labour movement productions in this way. The Film Unit also found an outlet for their work at film festivals.¹⁶ And they produced Australia's first trade union film ever programmed for television, through the national non-commercial broadcaster.¹⁷

The Film Unit's depiction of Australian workers' problems was publicised to an international audience in sporadic overseas screenings. These came about, as in Australia, through an organic distribution method. Union executives often presented prints as gifts to overseas delegates of fellow unionists whilst they were in Australia, and in this way unionists overseas saw WWFFU works. *The Hungry Miles* and *November Victory* screened in New Zealand through the Modern Film Society. Through connections with the CPA and Quality Films, film festivals and youth festival in Eastern bloc nations presented a number of WWFFU films, and some were awarded prizes.¹⁸ The international recognition of *The Hungry Miles* in Warsaw in 1957 encouraged a change of heart in WWF executives. Disher recalled that

what brought it into acceptance I think more than anything else, was that ... it won the Gold medal and when it was known in the Federation that the film had won a Gold

medal ... they realised it was a film that should have been made, that had its place, was a significant film. (Hughes interview)

Reports like this, from overseas as well as from local shows, illustrate the power of the motivated and organic screening of WWFFU films. Implementation of the Unit's aims was not just through production of films, but through their distribution and exhibition, and the recognition that their work was appreciated by people outside the Federation. Screenings played an important role in publicising issues of the labour movement to a wide and varied audience. Although there was no centralised management of their screenings, they did work to change the nature of union meetings as well as film society and festival screenings. The Unit's exhibition network employed any possibility that presented itself, and the results of screenings were, in a large part, up to the persuasive and imaginative powers of the worker-exhibitor. The lack of a single distribution company was a possible factor in the demise of the Unit, however; statistics from such an organisation would certainly have assisted the argument for a co-operative venture.

The reception of WWFFU films is hard to assess when very few records were kept on audience statistics, and without further research it is hazardous to speculate as to viewers' reactions. Unlike commercially distributed films no statistics exist for the vast majority of WWFFU film screenings, and therefore a conventional reception analysis is not possible. Some films had estimated audiences of 100, whilst others were seen by more than 16,000 people.¹⁹ As I argue below, the only existing reports of audience response are those published by labour organisations who used these as publicity articles, and were, therefore, all extremely positive.

The viewers of WWFFU films were predominantly workers. Many were men, as the films often screened in a blue-collar workplace, but wives and children of workers also saw the films. There was no average patron; an audience could consist of a group of miners and their families in the community hall at Cessnock, or residents of the Herne Bay Housing Project. Some were more tightly structured than others, such as a gang of workers on a building site, as compared to an

audience gathered at a street corner. The wharfies films' audiences shared bonds often defined by occupation (wharfies, miners, builders' labourers) or by location (a mining town like Austinmer or a maritime community in Tasmania). Private screenings were not intentionally so, but because they had a predefined audience: wharfies on a dock, or the workers on a building site, for instance. The experiences of such screenings may not filter into a wider public sphere to a great extent, and so whilst the political and social experiences of the screening are not without usefulness, they have limited relevance within a wider public sphere.²⁰

Practices outside screen culture shaped the audiences' understanding of the films. As Tom O'Regan reminds us, 'filmmaking in Australia always has had an important relation to *local* orders of information, literature, theatre, poetry and the visual arts, news and journalism' (*Australian National* 190). [original emphasis] As in any other communications practice, we have to recognise the literacy of WWFFU audiences as being composed of many factors. They saw these films with all of their other cultural experiences behind and around them. They acquired their viewing skills by years of attending picture theatres. An audience member who was active within the labour movement gained further processes of social and political training through workplace and union meetings, and organisations such as the New Theatre and the Workers Educational Association (WEA). The film's institutional basis was another factor: it would be known before a film's screening that it was made for a certain union or organisation. A further component of viewer literacy was representation of the films' topics in other media: newspapers, newsreels, films, and labour movement publications. News items, previews and information already circulating about the film contributed to pre-filmic knowledge.

Films were not usually supplied to screening sites unaccompanied, but were supported by the services of a projectionist, projection equipment and training ('Safety Week'). Talks also regularly accompanied these screenings, in support of the arguments presented in the film. The workers themselves usually facilitated the film screening and discussion events, further allowing political consciousness to be mobilised. Like the production of the films, the distribution and exhibition strategies resulted through personal and organisational

relationships. WWFFU exhibition organisers, if they were Film Unit members, unionists or CPA operatives, had a close connection with the subject matter of the film; they may well have known the filmmakers personally, and on occasion they themselves, or their mates or their union executives, would appear in the film. Such a practice, representing themselves to themselves, may have encouraged them to feel pride in their identity.

Film societies and film festivals comprised different practices, audience constituents and viewing skills. In these groups the films were likely to be understood primarily for their aesthetic properties rather than for their political and industrial arguments. WWFFU films were seen as products of the small but active Sydney filmmaking population, and as part of an *oeuvre* of work from the one group. The Sydney University Film Society, for instance, screened a session of WWFFU productions, alongside DOI and other works, as part of a program devoted to Australian films. They gave the reason that 'the films to be shown have not been chosen necessarily for intrinsic merit, but to show the type of film at present being made in Australia ... they illustrate well the channels into which Australian film-making has been forced' ('RJM'). But the members of the WWFFU were not forced into this sort of production; it was of their own accord.

The films were instrumental as well as expressive, exhorting the audience to action as well as describing a situation or problem. They not only represented industrial and political debates, they intervened in them.²¹ A screening could lead to further action and a stronger definition of the community, whether it was heightened support for a union campaign, a more concerted effort to create a safer working environment, or a deeper awareness of the political background to a group's action. The production of *The Hungry Miles*, for instance, brought into existence a representation of the union's history that gave militant unionists more strength in their day-to-day struggles: one waterside worker has recalled that 'the union took great pains to tell us about the history of the past struggles, and then there was that film they made, *The Hungry Miles*, that got shown around as well' (Roberts). In another case, the production of *Hewers of Coal* prompted many Miners' Federation groups to buy projectors and learn their operation, thus beginning a

practice that advanced film screenings in mining communities. With the production of these two films which offered histories of their industries from a worker's point of view, the WWFFU members realised that history was not a formation that could only be viewed from one perspective, but was a multi-faceted one.

Further removed from the films' production, distribution and exhibition, two more components of a history of the WWFFU's are the reviews and re-uses of its filmwork.

Reviews

The mainstream press almost totally ignored the Unit and its films. This was a common experience for anything associated with a militant union. Norma Disher said of this aspect of the Unit's work: 'I can't think of any time where we ever got publicity. We were the *Waterside Workers' Federation* Film Unit, and that was a hurdle, as far as newspapers were concerned. Because we were actually exposing the treatment that wharfies had been given by newspapers' (Interview). [original emphasis] In the polarised Cold War times, these films were either not mentioned at all by the mainstream press, or glowingly reported as part of publicity campaigns of the labour movement. Journals of the labour movement published articles and reviews, most notably the CPA's *Tribune*, *Guardian* and *Communist Review*, and union publications, especially the *Maritime Worker*, the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation's (ACSEF) *Common Cause* and *The Building Worker*. All of these are positive and supportive of the work of the unit, in reviews that double as promotions. In his role as editor of *Common Cause*, CPA executive Edgar Ross was most attentive to WWFFU work. As well as reviews, he wrote longer articles on

work being done towards production, and the aims and achievements of the Unit. In 1957 he was of the opinion that the Unit's work 'has helped immensely to create an understanding of the struggles of the labour movement among very wide sections of the people' ('Film-Making'). The BWIU was similarly active and positive in promoting WWFFU work, alongside organisation of screenings. *Bones of Building* was generously reviewed in *The Building Worker*, which also reported that at some screenings, audience members spontaneously donated money for the production of more films of its kind ('Star').

Many more reviews of WWFFU films exist in labour movement publications than those from screen culture circles. The Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals listed the Unit's films as 'social documentaries', leaving their militant nature unremarked. Film society reviews were often more critical than the overwhelmingly acclamatory reports of the labour movement publications. The Sydney University Film Group printed a number of critical reviews in its *Bulletin*, and organised discussion and screening nights of the Unit's works on a few occasions. Some of these discussions were led by Richard Keys, a film enthusiast who went on to work as an executive of the NFSA. He described the Unit as

one of the most active and successful film making groups in Australia today. It is only a small group, but its members are now working for the Unit full time ... the progress of the unit has been fairly constant, and their latest effort, *Think Twice*, has commendable assurance and style. Above all, their films bear the stamp of enthusiasm and conviction, all too rare among the films made in Australia today.

David Donaldson, another of the Unit's supporters within this group, submitted more critical reviews on occasion. In a 1957 review of *Bones of Building* he wrote that

possibly because the makers are personally interested in their subject, possibly because they are newcomers to film-making, *Bones of Building* is remarkably interesting. Its flamboyant directorial technique stresses photographic effect. However, the interest lies more in the intention than in the accomplishment. The still-amateurish conception and technical ability are all too evident, and the actors are not sufficiently convincing to a general audience (to a union audience, they do not have to be) ... Although the story-line will be the subject of political dispute, and although the technical deficiencies are glaring,

the film is a promising effort. One certainly wishes that more public bodies would employ Australian film-makers to state their case for them.

Donaldson was more approving of the intention than the aesthetic achievements of *Bones of Building*. He described it as 'flamboyant' perhaps in contrast to earlier works of the Unit, which were influenced less by classical Hollywood filmwork than later works. The recognition of amateur actors is an interesting point. Donaldson differentiated between the union and a wider audience, and saw the probability of different expectations and responses from the two groups. Despite his criticisms of style his summary was encouraging of similar work from the Unit in the future, and he saw the potential of an 'Australian' filmmaking community.

Federation News, the journal of the Federation of Victorian Film Societies, was similarly critical but encouraging. Of *A Question of Health*, the film made by the Unit members for a local government election campaign, the reviewer stated:

It performs its task of showing foul conditions quite well, though it is a pity it is not a better piece of film-craft. Its importance lies in the fact that it is one of the rare films of community protest. It may lead to more and better films on similar subjects. ('General')

The Sydney University Film Group reviewed the film along the same lines: 'despite its cinematic weaknesses, it leaves one in no doubt that the sewerage arrangements of the Bankstown area are outdated, and a menace to public health, and that is perhaps sufficient in a film of this kind' ('RJM'). These reviews, unlike those from union publications, adopted the aesthetic criteria of capitalist film production. They are judgmental of the form and style of the film, but they generally recognised that, for the Unit members, as for their primary target audience, these were relatively subordinate to their purpose.

Another organisation that was interested in the activity of the Film Unit was ASIO. Its operatives' actions and reports reveal that they both reviewed and reused the Unit's work. It was presumed that this group, working within a union constantly targeted for its militant stance, would warrant suspicion, as well as the CPA membership of the three filmmakers which ASIO had noted. Disher had the impression that ASIO operatives were 'always around' (Interview). She recalled that during one shoot, 'there were security blokes everywhere. I'll

never forget it! And Keith [Gow] was pushed up into a doorway, and told by this plain-clothes security bloke that if he saw him again he would confiscate his camera' (Interview). Despite these efforts, the security blokes did not always get things right: one report noted that Disher's role within the group was 'librarian' (ASIO, Report n.d.).

Not only did ASIO agents follow, threaten and photograph Film Unit members but they investigated events that they filmed, and attended events at which WWFFU films screened, including CPA conferences (ASIO, File on Clarke). In May 1956 WWF executive Ted Roach, without the knowledge of the Film Unit members, negotiated with diplomats at the Czechoslovakian Consulate about two of the Unit's films being sent to Prague for submission to its film festival. This meeting proved to be of interest to ASIO; a detailed report indicates that the operative was either present at the meeting or had been listening to it ('Trade Union'); the recording equipment was not functioning correctly, however, because *The Hungry Miles* was reported as *Three Hungry Mouths*. At least one agent had viewed the Unit's filmwork and explained that 'this film unit, with permanent paid employees, is devoted solely to propaganda. It made a scandalously untrue and distorted film version of the November 1954 waterfront strike, including a faked scene of a Federal Cabinet meeting' ('Some Notes').²²

The Australian Archives' ASIO files contain visual surveillance records of the WWF, still photographs and sixteen millimetre film that date from 1953 to 1957. They depict meetings, demonstrations and events, including shots of Gow at a demonstration at the 1955 Royal Commission on Espionage (also known as the Petrov Inquiry). One ASIO cine film contains footage of Levy and others from the WWF during a 1953 deputation to Canberra. What is most intriguing is that many of the scenes in this ASIO footage appear in the WWFFU films *Pensions for Veterans* and *The Hungry Miles*. The organisation was apparently more than happy to use the union's own production work, as WWFFU footage, both edited scenes and outtakes, now appear within the archives of ASIO. More research needs to be undertaken to ascertain how this has occurred.

Re-uses

The adoption of WWFFU footage as ASIO's own was one unforeseen consequence of the Unit's work. Others are the re-uses of their footage by other filmmakers, subsequent to their initial screenings throughout the labour movement and screen culture circles of 1950s Australia. The impact of WWFFU films did reach beyond the immediate goals of supporting a one-time campaign, and this is evident in their re-circulation in more recent works, such as *The True Believers*. Such re-working of footage is an increasing phenomenon in contemporary filmwork. Some of these representations of the past can work to further marginalise voices of resistance, such as that of the Unit; re-use also performs a political reconstruction. David Bordwell writes that one part of the analysis of a film is to assess 'what forces have mobilised it for various purposes' (*Making* 265). It is useful to examine the ways in which the WWFFU films were mobilised in their uses by other filmmakers in documentaries and dramas.²³ Disher takes a special interest in such recirculations of the Unit's efforts, and she believes that the Unit members

were amazed at the fact that the films had an ongoing life over and beyond the reasons and the times that we made them in. It seems that they are used continuously as archival footage, because we managed somehow to create material that had an authentic feel to it ... so our material has certainly been useful to many other people. I feel quite proud of the fact that they have got this ongoing integrity, and that they continue to be a useful product. That, for me, is the most interesting aspect of the work that we did. (Interview)

Producers of documentaries and current affairs shows, notably from the ABC and the DOI, have re-used WWFFU footage since the 1970s. Many of these programs focus on industrial relations and housing, while some are on the history of Australian cinema. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Sydney production company Summer Hill Films was involved in production for trade unions, and within these training and educational works they used WWFFU footage as archival stock. In many of these productions the WWFFU footage was used without its soundtrack,

treated as archival footage (in the same way that the Unit used Cinesound archival footage in *Hewers of Coal*). Disher commented that 'mostly, it's been used in a positive way'. Sometimes, though, the commentary laid over the footage was, in her opinion, 'used totally negatively' (Interview).

I noted earlier my investigation of some footage of protesting miners, originally a part of *Hewers of Coal*, as it was re-used in *The True Believers*. This re-use of the WWFFU clip, which masqueraded as newsreel footage in the recent production, focused on the visual content of the footage, and directed attention away from the social conditions and political impetus of *Hewers of Coal*. The original footage was in colour; the re-working involved altering it to monochrome. The original footage was shot in July 1957; the re-working used it to portray the 1949 coal strike. The makers of *The True Believers* overlaid a new voice-over to the clip, implying that it was the narration to a newsreel—'victory after victory is won by these hard-faced fanatics'—which, while perhaps ideologically attuned to the commercial newsreel footage of its time, entirely altered the original intention of the film. Leonard Teale's original voice-over spoke of 'another side to the story of coal, a not so pretty one', and presented the union members' protest marches to nationalise the mines, along with their struggles for better conditions. Others have expressed their dissatisfaction of this production's interpretation of the past: in 1988 Edgar Ross, an ACSEF leader and one of the young miners captured in the rally footage of 1957, accused the producers of *The True Believers* of 'misrepresenting himself and history' (qtd. in Stephens).

In considering the predilection for 1970s and 1980s producers to incorporate archival material, Stuart Cunningham writes that 'most uses of archival material in mini-series merely work to secure the "recognition-effect", to authorise the fiction' ('Kennedy' 191-192). But a closer examination than Cunningham's shows that its employment in *The True Believers* goes beyond a simple audience identification. One reviewer wrote that in this mini-series 'the marriage of archival and reconstructed material to provide "newsreel" commentary on events as they unfold and to convey the "mentality" of the times is superb' (Walter 37). In his article on the 1957

miners' strike, Tom Sheridan disagrees with this view, and contends that the mini-series fails to properly represent the legitimacy of the miners' protest action:

It is important to understand that the miners were striking quite legally on genuine industrial issues about which they had shown a greater readiness to compromise than either the coal owners, the industry's administrative authority or the federal and NSW governments. Anti-strike propaganda of the day obscured this very successfully and posterity has been left with the nation's most prominent example of our old friend, the agitator thesis. The recent television series, *The True Believers*, has further embedded it in our national psyche and I fear it will take much more than my account of reality ... to alter this particular myth. (51)

The original material was re-worked in *The True Believers* to oppose the spirit in which it was originally screened. It erased the original producers' context and intention for the film. It did convey one way of considering the atmosphere of the times, with the new voice-over and its revised political quality. But it obliterated evidence of such oppositional groups as the WWFFU to these overall Cold War conditions.

Not all re-circulations of WWFFU footage change its political intent in such a radical way. Two are *Wharfies* and *Film Work*. *Wharfies*, a 1988 film, presents a history of the WWF. It was produced and directed by Elisabeth Knight, and written by Knight together with Keith Gow just before his death. It combines WWFFU production sequences with still photographs, interviews, newsreel footage and re-created scenes. As a concluding title states, the film is dedicated to the 'original Waterside Workers' Film Unit [*sic*]—Norma Disher, Keith Gow, and Jock Levy—and to Federation members past and present'. Another substantial re-use of Film Unit footage is *Film Work*, John Hughes' 1981 history of the Unit. This production uses lengthy excerpts of twelve WWFFU works along with voice-overs and interviews of the three Unit members (who are *Film Work*'s executive producers). Whilst he unfortunately got his dates wrong, one reviewer noted that *Film Work*, 'performs the important function of showing us that there was an active, forceful and vibrant alternative point of view in Australian society that we just do not see in the regular documentary footage of the 1940's [*sic*]' (Humphrey). These last two productions re-use the original WWFFU film footage in a different way to others mentioned earlier. Both use footage with much of its soundtrack intact, and, what is more important, they focus on both the subject

and object of WWFFU films in a way that others do not. They reflect the way that the filmmakers saw themselves, as representing—and being representative of—the marginalised voice of the working class. The Unit members' contributions to these two documentaries indicate that they employed footage in ways that the original filmmakers approved of, with, as Disher believes, an 'ongoing integrity'.

This chapter has argued that the three members of this Unit used a dominant mode of expression to create alternative perceptions of their world. They employed cinema as a form of direct action, an intervention in the industrial and political campaigns that were the subject of their films. They have left portrayals of working-class Australia during the Cold War, and have offered audiences a rare opportunity to see major social problems and specific industrial issues from the viewpoint of workers themselves. As Gow said of the WWFFU productions, 'yes, they're biased, but biased from a working-class point of view ... but of course any film is propaganda of one sort or another' (*Film Work*). They have also shown us an alternative way that Australian filmmakers have organised themselves. Here was an early instance of working people mustering their own power, not just to consume but to create. The cultural resistance they practiced was quite remarkable: they mobilised their skills, energies and aspirations, and organised themselves into production, in a democratic way that reflected their political and industrial context. They relied on the voluntary efforts of workers themselves to distribute and show their work. They created their own site of dialogue, another way of expressing their views, of giving themselves a public voice, in a way that would be accessible and relevant to the subjects of their films, the working class.

¹ see Appendix B for brief biographies of the Unit members.

² see Appendix A for details of each WWFFU production.

³ The Realist Film Association was an independent Australian film organisation; for details see Chapter Three.

⁴ The WWFFU's film stock was usually processed by the Sound Service Company in Melbourne, which also did the fades and optical effects. Later when this company went out of business, some processed stock—including completed films—was lost.

⁵ Butcher's music for *November Victory*, a piece for four hands on one piano, was named 'Hungry Mile'. For the performance which is heard in the film, it was played by Butcher and John Fink. It was subsequently orchestrated by him, and later recorded (*Hungry Mile*).

⁶ Teale also narrated other non-commercial films, *They Chose Peace* and *Words for Freedom*, as well as a large body of commercial works and DOI documentaries, including *Introduction to Australian Art* (1949) and *North to the Sun* (1951).

⁷ These features included British director Anthony Kibbins' *Smiley* (1956), and *Smiley Gets a Gun* (1958), both part-funded by USA's Fox studios, as well as Cecil Holmes' *Three in One* (1957).

⁸ This was different not only to other film units, but also the mainstream press. Gow commented on 'the difference between our reception when we arrived there with a camera on the job and a *Daily Telegraph* reporter, who arrived on the waterfront with a camera, which would probably finish up in the water. Both of them'. Levy added: 'Precisely the point to be made, that we were part of them. They recognised us as part of them, working for the same things that they wanted' (Hughes interview).

⁹ Whitchurch's production team did not, eventually, include the WWFFU. However, his film was narrated by Leonard Teale.

¹⁰ The idea of a film co-operative was supported by the WWF, the Seamen's Union of Australia, the NSW Teachers' Federation, Electrical Trades' Union, Australian Timber and Allied Industries' Union, the ACSEF, BWIU, AEU and the ARU (Roach, Letter. 15 January 1957).

¹¹ Beasley reports that Nelson, 'although much loved in [the] Sydney [Branch] was not a national figure in the Federation' (*Wharfies* 199).

¹² Cottage meetings, fairly widespread in the first part of the 20th century, especially in the left-wing community, were small gatherings in private homes, usually for the purposes of political discussion and organisation.

¹³ A wide range of organisations purchased or borrowed prints of WWFFU films. The Australian Gas Light Company screened *Hewers of Coal* to their employees, for instance, as did the Australian Coal Association. Prints of the safety film *Think Twice* were bought by the Division of Occupational Safety, the Department of Labour and Industry, the Metal Trades Employers' Federation and BHP.

¹⁴ Gow's motorcycle is used in a scene of *Bones of Building*.

¹⁵ The Kombi can be seen in *Four's A Crowd* and *The Housing Problem and You*.

¹⁶ *The Hungry Miles* was the first WWFFU work to be screened at the Sydney Film Festival (SFF) in 1955 when it was commended for its standard of production. *Bones of Building* was screened at the 1956 Melbourne Film Festival. Along with *Hewers of Coal*, *Aboriginal Culture* was screened at the 1957 SFF to an estimated audience of 1500 people. *Think Twice* was exhibited in the SFF in 1958, and the following year at the Melbourne Festival, where it won the first prize for a 'teaching' film in the Australian Film Awards.

¹⁷ *The Housing Problem and You* was included in ABC Television's *Sunday News Magazine* in Sydney on Sunday 29 September 1957 and in Melbourne on Saturday 28 December 1957. It was not credited to the WWFFU, but billed as 'newsreel filmed by overseas cameramen from many parts of the world, as well as ABC cameramen in Australia' (33).

¹⁸ WWFFU films were entered into the 1955 Karlovy Vary Film Festival, where they were 'very well received by the large international audience' ('Film Front'). *November Victory* was screened in workers' clubs in Prague, from the distribution afforded it by the World Federation of Trade Unions (Berezine). *The Hungry Miles* was awarded first prize and gold medal at the 1957 Warsaw Youth Festival, where renowned Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens was one of the judges. *Aboriginal Culture* was shown in 1957 at the Tenth Jubilee International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia (Falbr). It also screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival that year. *Hewers of Coal* screened in the Belgian Experimental Film Festival of 1958.

¹⁹ It was estimated that from its release on 27 May 1958 until 12 November that year, 16,000 people had seen *Not Only the Need* (McDonald, 'Housing Conference').

²⁰ More research needs to be conducted on the social and cultural dynamics of non-commercial exhibition spaces.

²¹ Rabinowitz writes that 'in shifting the site of documentary from the object of vision to the subject of action by insisting on the dynamic relationship of viewer to view, documentary forms invoke performance within their audiences as much as within their objects' (9).

²² This was indeed a faked or reconstructed scene, which took advantage of wharfie Jack 'Lair' Smith's resemblance to Menzies.

²³ Footage from the Unit's film made for the BWIU, *Not Only the Need*, for instance, has been re-used in a number of documentary works which focus on home ownership in the Australian suburbs. One instance was *Lost in Space: Australians in their Cities*. Another was 'The Great Aussie Dream'.

Fig 2. The members of the WWFFU: Norma Disher, Keith Gow and Jock Levy. Still from *Film Work* (John Hughes, 1981)

Chapter Two

Blurred Boundaries: Theoretical Approaches

The previous chapter has provided a detailed history of the operations and output of the WWFFU. The Unit can be identified as a product of its industrial, political and cultural affiliations. The Unit members were part of their union (the WWF), and their political party (the CPA). They may also be included in a group which I term 'left cultural activists' to describe cultural producers who worked from a left-wing perspective.¹

This dissertation recovers a history of the WWFFU; however, it is by no means a simple corrective. There are a number of ways to approach such a work. Many theses start with a primary assumption: that they can be situated within a given discipline. This does not. This thesis overtly analyses the operation of the Unit, wherein it could be deemed a work of cinema studies. As it is a trade union organisation, a labour history might be appropriate. As my enquiry of the WWFFU concerns its cultural identity, perhaps a cultural studies approach may suit. This chapter confronts some of the methodological questions raised by an interdisciplinary study of the WWFFU. It discusses relevant issues within the disciplinary areas of cinema studies, labour history and cultural studies, and argues for a hybrid approach.

Cinema Studies

Cinema studies is a comparatively young discipline in Australia. Whereas in the United States the first film history appeared in 1914, it was not until 1969 that the first postgraduate work on Australian cinema was written (R Cooper). Any study of early Australian work was

complicated by the fact that although the government's film archive began operation in 1937, concerted efforts to preserve existing early films did not begin until well into the 1950s (Rowe 8). Joan Long reminds us that 'less than ten per cent of the Australian feature films of the silent era survive, and probably an even lower percentage of the actuality films' (3). Consequently, many studies of these had only secondary sources to work with: production and screening documentation, contemporary reviews, company records, anecdotes, myth, and sometimes oral histories.

An ever-expanding set of theoretical, methodological and descriptive approaches are employed in cinema studies. Bill Nichols lists 'semiotics, poststructuralism, linguistics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, Marxism, feminism, formal analysis, cognitive and perceptual psychology, anthropology, literary and rhetorical criticism, and cultural history' (*Movies and Methods* 2) as commonplace pathways. Any film is a sum of its parts, whether narrative, mythical, imaginative, social, cultural, political, economic or legislative. Correspondingly, Australian screen culture must be viewed as an aggregate of discourses which occupy a series of different sites. For filmmaker Ken Hall, however, there was only one way:

Film making, shorn of all the hooah and utter balderdash with which some people seek to surround it, is basically like any other form of production. You make something which will sell to the public. If the public does not want to buy then you are quickly out of business. It's as simple as that. There really aren't any ifs or buts. (Preface 8)

Such a commercial approach is not unusual. A critical report in 1979 also stood firmly in favour of emphasising the economic, when it advised the Australian Film Commission to 'encourage Australian film production to move from production values to market values' (Peat Marwick Mitchell Services 329). The development of cinema studies adopted this approach dominated by economic considerations: publications were devoted to the best ten feature films of a year, or the *oeuvre* of a feature film director. It must be remembered that these early works were written under the political impetus of campaigning for a revitalised feature film industry. These works were often approached primarily from an industrial view, proceeding—although not so single-

mindedly, perhaps—from Hall's opinion of film as a market commodity. Stuart Cunningham challenges this predominant understanding of Australian cinema. He writes that 'by focusing exclusively on feature production, it displaces from consideration the complex interrelationships amongst feature, documentary, newsreel production and adjacent practices such as theatre, vaudeville and television' ('Australian Film History' 123). I argue that cinema history has not responded sufficiently to Cunningham's perception, although the efforts of many cinema historians have helped to unsettle the privileged position of the feature film within Australian cinema studies, and that histories of previously marginalised groups like the WWFFU perform an important task in expanding the boundaries of the area.

We have begun to see Australian film histories that move outside the prevailing currents. But there is little work on individuals other than directors and actors. There have been studies of the screen culture of women and other marginalised groups, but not on films from, or of, the working class, or from the technician's viewpoint (or, indeed, one that treats technical developments in any depth). Neither have there been many studies of a temporally or geographically specific screen culture. 'Also barely mentioned', Martha Ansara reminds us, 'is the nature of work in the industry—from the point of view of those who made and exhibited films—and including their industrial and craft organisations' ('Australian Film History' 23). There is no history of Australian animation, no history of advertising films, or newsreels, only a little work on early 'actualities' such as scenics and topicals, and nothing on industrial, instructional and educational films. Most surprisingly, and most importantly for my project, there is no well-researched, comprehensive history of Australian documentary, outside government works. This is despite the fact that the majority of filmwork in Australia has always been, and still is, non-drama production. This is also despite the factor that, as Tom O'Regan has remarked, 'there is hardly any aspect of Australian filmmaking—fictional or experimental—which has not been touched in some way by the documentary' (*Australian National Cinema* 170). So great is the Australian obsession with seeing ourselves as some sort of mini-Hollywood that comparatively little research has been done on any type of film production other than drama.

The fact that our cinema history has been narrated primarily from the vantage point of the dramatic feature film has devalued the 1950s in particular as a period of film production. Graham Shirley, co-author of *Australian Cinema: the First Eighty Years*, observes that 'with the fifties, there's still a lot more research to be done ... I was aware that I didn't know enough about documentary in the 1950s and 60s. I was particularly frustrated that I didn't know enough about sponsored film-making at that time, beyond what was being done by Film Australia' (Interview). The 1950s has been described as a 'void' (Shirley and Adams 185), and one of 'stagnation' (Lawson, 'Towards' 21). Andrew Pike describes it as a 'period of inactivity' (11). Albert Moran claims that film then was 'usually seen to have offered the public of its day fairly lean pickings, and, by extension, to hold little promise for film historians in the present' ('Australian Documentary' 83). This thesis argues against such claims. Although feature filmmaking was at an all-time low in the 1950s, a great deal of production of other works went on, including the work of the WWFFU. Deep research accounts of such groups provide histories that expand the boundaries of Australian screen culture.

One instance of the need for detailed research on documentary, especially of the 1950s, is my discovery of the protest footage in *The True Believers*. Another concerns a 1953 DOI film. Originally titled *Warriors for the Working-Day*, this short work depicts the life of a worker at Broken Hill Proprietary Company's (BHP) Port Kembla steel works.² It was directed by Hugh McInnes, who described it as a 'working class' film (Interview). It was made for theatrical release, to be shown as a short alongside features in Australia and overseas, as well as for non-commercial screenings, such as shipboard exhibitions to incoming migrants. As McInnes wrote in his synopsis, the film was intended to point out that 'the Steelworker has the same interests, responsibilities, and hopes as the rest of his community'.³ To this end, the production included a scene on the relationship between management and organised labour, with shots of Wollongong Trades Hall meetings overlaid with the narration that 'conflict of interests and claims between the unions and the companies is almost continuous' ('Warriors for the Working Day'). BHP officials complained that the film 'projected the industry in a very poor light' (Secretary), and, according to a member of the commercial film community, was 'anti-

Australian and pro-Communist' (qtd. in Cooper). After these and other complaints were made (B Hudson; Temple), the DOI withdrew the film from international circulation.⁴ McInnes, who was seen by his contemporaries as 'a real newsreel type in some ways' (Adamson interview), left the DOI in 1954.

The film was remade three years later and retitled *The Steelworker*. The revised version expurgates any representation of conflict of which McInnes had originally written, and offers a discrete, fairly narrow way of experiencing work and citizenship. It promotes the impression that the natural state of society is one of consensus, with an optimistic view of life in Port Kembla: unproblematic, with citizens unquestioningly assuming their place within the nation as workers and consumers. In this version strikes, workplace accidents and problems do not exist. The Trades Hall scene is replaced by one which depicts a pleasant, relaxed conversation between union representatives and management in an office. As the shot darkens, the viewer's attention is drawn through the now centrally framed window to the background and the ubiquitous steelworks. Harry Hambridge reads the scene's new narration, written by Immigration Department workers: 'back at the mills, the union representatives and the work's executives talk. It's a big job running steel smoothly. But steel keeps growing bigger every year'.⁵ The worker is one who helps to contribute to the destiny of the nation, and to BHP, through his acquiescent labour. Conflicts and differences are not shown, and the idea of a united but multifarious, multi-ethnic but 'all Australian' workplace is promoted. Moran has written about depictions of work in DOI films such as *The Steelworker* that 'labour ... is glorious ... It is sufficient reward unto itself ... each worker contributes to the national effort' (*Projecting* 37 and 38). He asserts that some of the DOI's filmmakers of the Cold War period, including McInnes, were 'uninterested in the larger social purpose of their films' (*Projecting* 33). McInnes' original depiction of workers in *Warriors for the Working Day* contradicts such contentions.⁶

My research on *The Steelworker* that uncovered this early version was similar to my research on the footage comprising *The True Believers*, both instances where a surface grasp of the material of our screen culture does not necessarily provide enough answers for a fully informed reading.

The same lesson can be learnt with a history of the WWFFU, which cannot be comprehensive just by stating the empirical data of the Unit's operation. This thesis is not only about the films of the WWFFU. It encompasses a more expansive topic than this, and is, moreover, concerned with broadening film studies to make it more inclusive. This is not a unique aspiration. Some works of cinema studies have dealt with this (Bertrand, 'Goodbye'). Sylvia Lawson has been involved with Australian screen culture since the 1950s. She observes the need for cinema studies to examine what 'social groupings linked and divided filmmakers with and from their audiences, with and from the prototypes of those who peopled their narratives' ('Towards' 26). I agree with her that 'one central task of film history is to remedy our collective amnesia' ('Towards' 31), and argue that a solution lies in a broader interpretation of film history, in the work of locating the films' topics and the filmmakers' working practices in the wider realms of society and culture.

Labour History

Although the topic of this thesis is a film production unit, it focuses on a union organisation and can, therefore, be seen to constitute a labour history. Labour history as a discrete academic practice in Australia has existed since the 1960s, in the formative work of Eric Fry, Brian Fitzpatrick, Ian Turner and Robin Gollan. Many works before the 1970s tended towards the celebration of the working class and its organisations (notably trade unions), or studies of their leaders. Few were particularly self-reflexive, instead content to amass factual information to construct a story (much like many early Australian cinema histories). But as Gollan recognises,

'the institutional history of the labour movement was not enough to lead to an understanding of the life experience and ideas and actions of working people' ('Looking Back' 8). Bob Connell and Terry Irving were of the opinion that labour history was 'theoretically limited' (*Class Structure* 13) without the benefit of broader insights gleaned from other disciplines. Labour historians began to move away from earlier preoccupations with institutional and biographical works, to more complex – and more theoretically informed – social and cultural histories.

Often such works have been deliberate political interventions in specific issues; many labour historians have begun their interest in the subject from a political engagement, sometimes of a radical nature. Whether of the old type or the new, however, labour history most usually comes from a desire to tell stories about those people, institutions and movements that have not been in positions of power in society. Especially since the late 1980s, some strands of labour history have been increasingly difficult to disentangle from other approaches, and have expanded the terrain considerably. There has been a fragmentation of the original purposes of labour history, although studies of unions and labour movements are just as necessary now as in the past; even more so, with the increasingly dramatic changes in work and work practices. Many new and previously ignored topics have been opened up for enquiry, and have blurred the boundaries of labour history with other fields that include social history, Australian studies and industrial relations. Important issues of gender and ethnicity, often dismissed altogether in early labour histories, have been brought into examination, and the areas of indigenous and women's history in particular have flourished.⁷

What of studies on the cultural output of the Australian labour movement? These do exist, but there are few instances of labour historians connecting such films with their work.⁸ While there has been work on the history of Australian film, there is less about film which confronts historical issues. Most participants of Australian Film and History Conferences are film academics, not historians, and their papers are about histories of film.⁹ The collection of papers from the 1995 conference identified itself as a 'series of writings about cinema culture' (Doyle et. al. 396), thus showing the broadening of the concept of film studies, and how it was by then

merging with other disciplines. As a part of Australian labour history, then, this thesis expands the study of images of labour, and of radical movements. As the controversy which followed the screening of *The True Believers* shows (Santamaria, 'Don't'; McGarrity; Cottle; Sheridan, 'Mind'; James), film and television are amongst the most important sites where identity and history are constructed and reproduced; it is imperative to interrogate their representations of labour.

Class has been the central dynamic of investigations in many Australian labour histories, a number of which have based their analyses on a Marxist interpretation of class. This thesis accepts such a formulation, refined in Gramsci's paradigm of hegemony and resistance. His work explains how dominant ruling class factions exercise power over subordinate groups in 'historical blocs' in a process of hegemony, while those subordinated can form 'historical blocs' of resistance. Gramsci recognised that while class contradictions are at the basis of social formations, open class struggle will not always be in existence. Such contradictions find their outlet in strikes, disputes and other articulations of class consciousness, as well as day-to-day negotiations over culture. The work of Gramsci and other European Marxists, while providing powerful models, does not always translate smoothly into Australian contexts, however. Australian labour history has been often criticised for being overly influenced by European models of class: in 1967 Irving reminded labour historians that they deal with the broad ideological concerns of economics, history and politics 'as if their manifestations in Australia were no different to those in other parts of the world' (Irving in Nairn et. al. 78). His corrective was his 1980 work with Bob Connell, *Class Structure in Australian History*, an important historical study through the theoretical eyeglass of a specifically Australian interpretation of class relations. Connell and Irving note that 'the main subject of class analysis is power, its institutionalisation, use and effects ... how it is organised, on the largest possible scale, how it is won and used, stabilised and overthrown; what its effects are in everyday life' (17 and 1). With this approach, the authors take a Gramscian position on hegemony, and their study of Australian conditions is predicated on this theoretical understanding. They point out, however, that it is not only economic relations that simplistically determine class: political and ideological

relations are just as important, and their text outlines the specifically Australian conditions of these. This concept of class is drawn from the British historian Edward Palmer Thompson, whose work emphasises the importance of agency, and which is contingent on historical change and real-life experiences.

In an approach that evolves from the work of these and other Australian labour historians, this thesis proposes that the WWFFU may be viewed as a mobilisation of counter-hegemonic strategies. Connell has considered the production of counter-hegemonic 'historical blocs':

The process of constructing ruling-class hegemony—that is, the process of cultural domination which has been a vital part of the conservative predominance in Australian politics since the 1950s—is not a matter of putting a set of conservative, capitalist ideas into people's heads. It has principally been a matter of driving divisions among working people, and indeed within working-class consciousness. But where there is division there is also the possibility of change. I would also argue that working-class consciousness can always produce radicalisation, and does so more often than most of our social scientists are prepared to recognise. There are constantly moments of radicalisation, often short-lived but no less real for that, in everyday life on the shop floor, in the office, in the home, in leisure. ('Towards' 178)

The WWFFU was a product of one of these moments of radicalisation. As detailed in this thesis, their films were made by the working class, about the working class, and for the working class. The provision of a history of the WWFFU extends the labour history project to the culture of the Australian working class. *Class Structure in Australian History* noted that the working class 'is part of an historically determined class structure, with a range of interconnected process: industrial, urban, cultural, political' (358), but the cultural was not a prominent feature of Connell and Irving's analysis. Although this text was notable as one of the first theoretically rigorous attempts at an Australian history—which Rick Kuhn considered was 'the culmination of the New Left revival of class analysis' ('Class Analysis' 158)—it did not fully consider cultural aspects, or marginalised groups other than the working class, and so overlooked crucial considerations in the construction of social identity. *Class Structure in Australian History* is not alone in this category. Stephen Garton argues that 'the history of work and working class culture central to British and North American labour history has been sadly neglected in the

Australian tradition' (19), and other texts have been criticised for not confronting 'the class character of culture and the cultural character of class' (Curthoys, Review 209).

It is a question of balance. On the other hand, some social histories which focus on the culture of the working class have been examined for a lack of engagement with theory and politics, and denigrated as works of 'history with the politics left out' (Magarey 224). In 1994 Ann Curthoys pointed out that 'compared with the 1970s and early 1980s, there is relatively little academic historical writing today within a Marxist tradition' ('Labour History' 14). It is evident that class as an overt defining and structuring category has all but disappeared from debate within the humanities. 'What has occurred in the last quarter century is that, on the assumption that the working class shares in the general level of material culture, class has been removed ideologically and politically from the politics of subalternity', writes Stanley Aronowitz, 'and has been replaced by new identities' (ix).

Cultural Studies

A critical history of the WWFFU is incomplete without an examination of the Unit's context, and of broader issues of the relationship between its films and their production and circulation of knowledge. The concerns of cultural studies respond to this need. EP Thompson's 1963 work *The Making of the English Working Class* provided an important early model for the historical study of a culture. Graeme Turner felt that this formative text 'opened the way for a new "history from below" which recovers the stories of social formations, of popular cultural movements, of non-institutional and subordinated groups' ('It Works for Me' 326). Like Gramsci, Thompson emphasised that popular culture was a key to understanding the social life of the time. A number of Australian academics, including Curthoys, celebrated the revival of Marxist historical methodology that Thompson returned to historical endeavour whilst emphasising the cultural specificity of class ('Labour History' 15). Others, however, claim that

he failed to connect the actions of the working class strongly enough to economic relations. Graeme Davison, for instance, warned that 'it would be unfortunate if a new study of "class consciousness" and "class language" were falsely opposed to the study of the social structures from which they emerged' ('Explanations' 82), and it is indeed important to keep structural considerations in mind.

The works of Raymond Williams, Paul Willis, Richard Johnson and others have examined the politics of representation of working-class cultures within broader social structures, and outlined moral and aesthetic characteristics of these formations. Williams, in particular, developed the Gramscian paradigm of hegemony, emphasising the ability of subaltern groups to resist a hegemonic stance and to formulate oppositional environments; and stressed the importance of a collective ideal to the subjects of his study, the British working class of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Others in the British cultural studies community explored similar ideological formations. Stuart Hall's work follows a neo-Gramscian trend, continuing to emphasise the importance of popular culture as a site for struggle over meaning. In his pioneering work *Learning to Labour*, Paul Willis provided a type of ethnography which emphasised the 'lived experiences' of people within localised counter-hegemonic blocs. He showed, through day-to-day instances of action and reaction, how resistance to cultural hegemony is active whilst never completely successful. An approach like Willis', in which an examination of the broader social and cultural *milieux* is used to contextualise the object of the study, is particularly useful to my history of the WWFFU, as the following chapter illustrates.

In Australia, cultural studies still suffers a precarious position as a separate discipline in the humanities. Andrew Milner noted in 1984 that cultural studies had 'emerged as one of the more significant academic growth industries over the past quarter of a century' (*Contemporary* 1). But in 1996, Meaghan Morris wrote that 'as a constituted discipline, it has a fragile to non-existent academic status. It isn't really a subject area' ('Banality' 148). Although many of the foundations of Australian cultural studies practices are to be found in the British cultural studies zone, many others have originated from the works of French structuralists and post-structuralists,

beginning with those of Althusser and Foucault, and members of the Frankfurt School. In an introductory essay in one of the first Australian cultural studies readers, Frow and Morris argued that the concern of 'Australian work in cultural studies has generally been to examine the *political* conflicts at stake, in concrete contexts and for particular groups of people, between differing stories of community or nations, and to articulate the *historical* struggles occurring in the gaps between competing narrative programs' (xii). [original emphases]

Cultural studies has been labelled as an intrinsically interdisciplinary area, even 'superdisciplinary' (Kellner 103). It is a space which Morris has described as one 'where disciplines talk to each other, question each other, tread on each others' toes, with a view to redefining a shared, if not common, sense of purpose' (Morris, 'Question' 143). Since its inception cultural studies has resisted any single set of methodologies, practices, or even aims; its 'foundational anti-disciplinarity' (Turner, 'Moving the Margins' 1) has always been one of its strengths. Moreover, it is a self-reflexive area of work, in which origins of analyses are themselves questioned.

A truly diverse range of topics and methodologies are found in cultural studies projects, but relationships of power—how they are produced, negotiated and understood—are very often at the heart of these. Many of its topics of investigation are aspects of everyday life and representation; projects within the discipline critically examine the products and practices produced in, through and by a culture. Many of these are situated within the technologically-mediated communications industries: the production, circulation and reception of ideals, symbols, and points of cultural reference in the mass media are fundamental to most peoples' understanding of modern life. In Australia as in other countries, studies of culture and mass media are closely connected, and these two areas have blurred boundaries indeed.

One area in which cultural studies has expanded its discursive boundaries is towards labour history, where the object of attention, as Peter Beilharz succinctly puts it, 'is interpreted symbolically rather than parochially' ('Socialism' 49). The self-criticism that has always been

viewed as an intrinsic component of cultural studies has been apparent in recent Australian labour history. In a 1994 article on this confluence of disciplines, Curthoys notes that 'labour historians *need* the insights of Cultural Studies', with its 'self-reflexivity about history itself as a cultural practice, putting forward a way of extending our access to the past through a wider, broader, more attentive and more informed reading of its traces' ('Labour History' 19 and 20).

[original emphasis] She comments on the two areas' strengths and weaknesses:

Many historians see Cultural Studies as concerned only with the present, the ephemeral, the fleeting expressions of popular culture. Many in Cultural Studies see historians as empiricist, immune to theory of any kind, and heavy-handed, literal-minded, and 'external' in their treatment of texts. Where practitioners of Cultural Studies elegantly and protractedly wring the last drop of meaning from a small number of texts, historians draw far too little from their massive and carefully amassed documents. History and Cultural Studies have drifted too far apart, to the detriment of both. It is time to resume the intellectual conversation they once enjoyed. ('Labour History' 18)¹⁰

This thesis offers a space for such a conversation, by presenting information gathered from 'carefully amassed' union documents as well as other sources, within a consideration of the specific local conditions of the WWFFU, in a critical cultural study.

An area of concern in the examination of a historically contingent formation such as the WWFFU is the tools that can be employed to construct its history, and what their use predicates. Developments in various areas of the humanities have allowed non-traditional academic sources such as oral history, with all their opportunities and contradictions, to be incorporated. The work of Wendy Lowenstein, in recording the experiences of ordinary Australian workers, exemplifies the material that can be brought to bear on the development of Australian history-making. Martha Ansara similarly employs oral histories of Australian film workers to question and expand Australian cinema history, and to make it more accessible. This is an important breakthrough for the discipline, as, Ansara writes, 'these stories challenge some of the grandiosity, some of the illusions, which have become embedded in the nationalist discourse about Australian cinema' ('Telling' 2). The distance between history, as the official, codified version of the past, and memory as inscribed in oral histories, personal and communal versions

of the past, often appears huge, and it is, indeed, a contested landscape. The connection between memory and oral history is by nature a problematic one. Oral histories, like written histories, are always mediated in one form or another and are filtered through their present, so it is never really possible to truly know the past, only various subjective interpretations of it. For a cultural history such as this thesis, nevertheless, oral histories provide a useful resource, as they bring the experiences of ordinary workers and non-commercial filmmakers (people who might not otherwise have their stories recorded) to a history. These include a 1979 interview of the three members of the WWFFU (which was commissioned by the Film Pioneers Oral History Project) as well as my own interviews with the surviving members. It is important to keep in mind, however, that like the films, such oral reminiscences must be seen for their provisional nature.

The notion that all history is provisional was an area of interest for Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault, especially in the realm of history's relationship to the media. Both highlighted film as an important representational tool. In his work 'The Storyteller' Benjamin laments the changing nature of remembrance. He argues that a collective, organic memory of the past was being replaced by a type of history which was far more factual and individualised in style: it was being metamorphosed by the *technik*, the technological industrial oeuvre of the twentieth century. Sanders remarks that 'we would not be wrong to construe Benjamin's *technik* as being not much different to the panoply of the mass media and the communication industries' (116). Foucault echoed Benjamin's preoccupation with the loss of a collective or popular memory, with the death of older storytelling traditions and their replacement with mass media. He claimed that with the dominance in the public sphere of newspapers, television and cinema, alongside the loss of influence of trade unions and other working class organisations, 'the historical knowledge the working class has of itself is continually shrinking' ('Film and Popular Memory' 539). He comments on the ability of media institutions

to obstruct the flow of this popular memory ... since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles. ('Film and Popular Memory' 539)

The Czech novelist Milan Kundera shared this awareness when he wrote that 'man's [sic] struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting' (3). Historians of many kinds are working to supply new perspectives on the past. The Birmingham Popular Memory Group focuses on popular memory and the ways in which it can construct a sense of the past. A similar redefinition of history occurs in Australia in journals such as *Public History*, *Labour History* and the *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*. The work of Chris Healy, Lucy Taksa, Graeme Davison, Paula Hamilton and many others has underlined the important connections between concrete lives and broader situations that collective memory and oral history studies can bring to bear, especially in work on localised working-class communities, which were often essentially oral cultures. They reflect on the dialectical relationship of history and memory, and highlight the use of oral history as a mediating factor in that association.

The concept of popular memory can be applied to the examination of the *True Believers*. This televisual version of the 1950s, and the assumptions that have been made about its investment into popular memory, raise questions on the apprehension of history. Drew Cottle's assessment of this program argues that

what went to air had little to do with the complexities, ignominities [sic] and silences of Cold War Australia ... Although *The True Believers* is a drama, through television, it is seen and understood as a representation of Cold War political history. Where political documentaries may attempt to explore the difficulties of the past, *The True Believers* as info-tainment [sic] simplifies, flattens, fragments and colonises the Cold War to sell it as soap opera in the manner of *Neighbours* or *Home and Away*. An imagined past is reinvented in *The True Believers* as a costume drama, a morality play ... what the series may have achieved as an unreliable, fictionalised and influential source for what purports to be a dramatic representation of Australian history is the obliteration of a critical awareness and response to the past. (142, 145)

Another critic wrote that for a broader explication of the program's central issue—the Australian Labour Party split—the period 'must be more faithfully rendered ... what the series presents here is a stock melodramatic type designed to evoke a knee-jerk response from an audience, and this runs directly counter to later claims to be faithful to the broad historical record' (Walter 39).

This type of criticism is not uncommon in reviews of historical documentaries. Such productions 'whose avowed aim is to re-write history are not isolated occurrences', Foucault perceived. 'They are themselves part of history, a history in the making; they have ... a context' ('Film and Popular Memory' 536). Going beyond this type of criticism to encounter other aspects of the program, such as the phenomenon of the appropriated footage, impels the historian further into yet other investigations (such as the history of the WWFFU), and thereby extends the historical project by questioning everything she encounters in the constructions and reconstructions of the past which are a 'landscape of paradox'.¹¹

Foucault would have appreciated an interdisciplinary approach to a film history, one that refuses set theories or established methods of analysis. Historical poetics is informed by a tradition in literary and artistic criticism which has evolved from Formalist principles. Within the area of cinema study, this approach can be seen most clearly in the work of David Bordwell. 'The poetician aims to analyse the conceptual and empirical factors – norms, traditions, habits – that govern a practice and its products', writes Bordwell; 'poetics thus offers explanations, of an intentionalist, functionalist, or causal sort' (*Making* 269). He conceives historical poetics 'as the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects' (*Making* 266-267). This method involves not only a study of textual features, but of the film's relation to its significance on other levels, and in this sense draws upon the work of Williams and Hoggart. It refuses a universal formula and insists on interpretation through discrete historical characteristics. Historical poetics begins from a problem to be solved, and shares this characteristic with cultural studies, which, Morris observes, is 'a question-driven, not a doctrine or answer-driven, practice' ('Question' 145). Bordwell states that there are two questions which a historical poetics of film endeavours to answer: 'What are the principles according to which films are constructed and by means of which they achieve particular effects? How and why have these principles arisen and changes in particular empirical circumstances?' ('Historical Poetics' 371).

Historical poetics provides a way of understanding films that necessarily goes beyond the explicit and implicit meanings of the films; 'nothing prevents the poetician', writes Bordwell, 'from arguing that economics, ideology, the class struggle, or inherent social or psychological dispositions operate as causes of constructional devices or effects' ('Historical Poetics' 374). This speaks of the need, as Michael Renov reminds us, for poetics to 'confront the problematics of power' (19), which makes the technique of historical poetics an apt model for my project. Historical poetics not only asks questions about the composition and context of a film, but its effects, and this approach to examining films will be seen in Chapter Four of this thesis, which analyses the texts of three key films from the WWFFU's *oeuvre*, as well as their background and their effects. 'If historical scholarship can disclose referential and explicit meanings', Bordwell writes, 'a historical poetics can study the principles whereby viewers construct such meanings' (*Making* 271). The following chapter illustrates how a history of a filmmaking organisation like the WWFFU can become more informed within such an approach.

¹ The use of such a term is controversial, and echoes Althusser's naturalising of the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses through his continued use of the term. The left cultural activists of the 1950s include, but are not restricted to, members of the WWFFU, the Maritime Industries Theatre, the New Theatre, the School of Realist Art, the Margaret Barr Dance Group, the Realist Writers, the Realist Film Association, the Unity Singers, the Sydney Civic Orchestra, the Communist Party of Australia Peoples' Chorus, the Australasian Book Society and the WWF artistic groups. The work of left cultural activists will be outlined in the following chapter.

² The title was taken from a line in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 3: 'Tell the constable/We are but warriors for the working day;/Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirch'd/With rainy marching in the painful field'.

³ The gender-specific language McInnes employs here was historically accurate.

⁴ There was, in the early version, scenes which were to have been shot at South Coast pubs and racetracks; they were cut after the Director of the South Australian Government Publicity and Tourist Bureau wrote that 'I know that this is a true representation of the life in a city like Wollongong, but I feel very strongly that the marked increase in drinking and gambling in Australia during recent years presents a very serious national problem, and that the Film Board would not be doing its duty to the Commonwealth by giving prominence to these activities' (Baker).

⁵ Quentin Turnour writes of the 'grim Stoicism' of the narrator of *The Steelworker* (110).

⁶ This tale also contradicts the effective use of the auteur theory as a tool of analysis. Whose film is *The Steelworker*? Which film is authentic?

⁷ I acknowledge that issues of gender and ethnicity are extremely important issues for exploration of Australia in the 1950s, but are not within the scope of this thesis.

⁸ The Dutch film historian Bert Hogenkamp, for instance, examines Joris Iven's 1946 Australian film *Indonesia Calling* as inhabiting at least four discursive formations: as a representation of events, as part of a trade union's history, as an example of the role of documentary in society, and as a cultural symbol since its production. He notes that 'whether as

records or representations films are an integral part of labour history and thus deserve the labour historian's consideration' (*Indonesia Calling* 231).

⁹ Only one of the 26 contributors to the 1995 conference, for instance, acknowledged themselves as a historian, rather than a practitioner of film studies, film history or cultural studies.

¹⁰ The article from which this quote is taken was the point of departure for this chapter.

¹¹ I am indebted to Kate Bowles for this term.

Fig 3. Still from *The Hungry Miles* (WWFFU, 1955)

Chapter Three

Context: Sydney in the 1950s

The 1950s are often popularly remembered as the years when Australia stood still, bathing in the warm light of economic prosperity and political stability. This type of generalisation has often led to the assumption that the 1950s was a predictable time.¹ And in many ways, there was stability: the Federal governance of one political party through many years, steady economic growth, almost full employment, and low inflation. One economist described the years from 1940 to 1970 as 'clearly one of the outstanding epochs in the history of the country' (Maddock 1). Yet, as many recent assessments of the 1950s point out, what is often portrayed as certainty and predictability was, on closer examination, a vibrant and turbulent period in Australia's history, one of rapid change.² One comments on the 'apparent harmony and the underlying discontents which characterised this period' (Alomes, Dober and Hellier 2).

The formation of the WWFFU was not a surprise, but, through the continuities and disjunctions of the period, a logical development. Its achievements from 1953 to 1958 reflected the contradictions of the period, ostensibly unchanging, but also receptive to the formation of a film unit which was devoted to challenging the *status quo*. A history of the Unit's formation and production, as outlined in Chapter One, becomes more informed when seen against conditions of Sydney life in the 1950s, amid what many have argued were all the preconditions for stability and predictability. This chapter examines the background to the formation of the WWFFU. It seeks answers to the two questions: 'why did the WWF establish a film unit?' and 'why was it in 1953?' Answers to these questions challenge the view that social, political, cultural and industrial life during the Menzies years was characterised by 'consensus and conformity' (Waterhouse 199), and instead show how the 1950s was 'a decade of complexity, frustration and transition' (Brown 1).

In the previous chapter I cited an argument that a blurring of labour history and cultural studies can provide a 'wider, broader, more attentive and more informed reading' of the legacies of Australia's past (Curthoys, 'Labour History' 20). This chapter provides the evidence to support this argument. The material in this chapter is necessary to construct a more informed history. This contextual material is to be seen as a backdrop for the history of the WWFFU outlined in Chapter One, which was constructed through documents, films and interviews.

Further, this chapter argues that a history of the WWFFU is embedded in two particular areas of activity: industrial (the activity of militant unionists) and cultural (the work of left cultural activists). In this chapter I map these two areas, and briefly outline the material conditions and the concepts and practices which informed them. This will provide a context in which to understand the work of the WWFFU. Many of the important issues in Australian society during the period of the WWFFU's operation have been surveyed in the two-volume collection, *Australia's First Cold War*, and it must be acknowledged that the aims of this chapter were directed by those two volumes.³ It can be argued that this thesis sits alongside these essays, as another part of Australian cultural life which was fundamentally influenced by local manifestations of the Cold War.

While conservative writers of this period and their contemporary acolytes John Howard and Peter Reith attempt to provide a picture of Australia in the 1950s as a nation comfortable in its conservatism, appreciative of modest and predictable economic growth and willing to return conservative governments to Federal government for an uninterrupted course from 1949 to 1972, these interpretations obscure another Australia. And it is this Australia, one which reacted against the so-called conservative certainties, which influenced the work of the WWFFU. Without an understanding of this other Australia, the WWFFU cannot be understood.

General Conditions

The formation of the WWFFU and the production and distribution of its films must be seen against the social, economic and political development of the 1950s. This, the anti-communist stance of the Menzies government, the economic development of this decade, the challenges to and modification of the 'national identity' and the political and industrial reactions of opponents to Menzies and other conservative agencies, impacted on and influenced the work of the WWFFU. This section looks briefly at each and attempts to show why these matters were important to the WWFFU.

The ideological formations that divided the world after Churchill's 1946 'Iron Curtain' speech had their effects in Australia, both in official policy and internal life.⁴ RG Menzies' Liberal Party, in coalition with the Country Party, won the 1949 Federal election on an anti-communist platform, which he used to political and electoral advantage for many years.⁵ The early years of this Government were notable for a sharp increase in Australia's involvement in international issues, most notably through foreign policy and increases in the defence budget.⁶ Until the mid-1950s, these issues were]to touch Australians most closely, as newly emerging national forces in south-east Asia began to redefine themselves against old colonial powers. Members of the Federal Government interpreted this process as the spread of communism, with communist hordes moving inexorably southward to Australia, and the 'domino theory' justifying western intervention in Korea.⁷ The popular press held the same perception, and reinforced these interpretations.⁸

Three incidents within Australia supported the Government's belief in the communist menace. The first was Menzies' introduction of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, and the resulting 1951 referendum, in which the proposal was narrowly defeated (Webb). Similarly stemming from anti-communist sentiments, the Australian Labor Party split advantaged the electoral prospects of the Federal Government (R Murray; Freudenberg; Short). And in 1954 the Petrov affair heightened general anti-communist feelings even more sharply. The arrest of a Russian embassy official on suspicions of espionage, and the subsequent defection of his wife,

contributed to many peoples' perceptions that Australia was in the grip of communist insurgents (Manne; Petrov; Whitlam and Stubbs).⁹

Although the actions of the US House Un-American Activities Committee headed by Joseph McCarthy were seen as too extreme by at least two popular publications,¹⁰ the use of anti-communism to gain political advantages had local parallels. ASIO carried out extensive surveillance of the CPA and its practices, as well as the public service, trade unions, political and community groups, including the WWFFU.¹¹ This heightened governmental focus on communist activity was paralleled by the actions of some influential organisations; the Returned Servicemen's League, the Catholic Social Studies Movement and the 'Association' were among many active agents of anti-communism.¹² From all these areas, Australia's political atmosphere of the post-war decade was characterised by a discernible amount of suspicion, distrust and anxiety.

Along with Cold War anti-communism, economic growth and a developing material consumer culture are represented as significant markers of the 1950s (N Brown, *Governing*; Maddock; Prasser Nethercote and Warhurst). Certainly one of the most immediate features of the period was rising living standards for the vast majority of the population. But for many people life was not all consumer paradise and suburban bliss: many Australians experienced food and housing shortages, whilst tuberculosis, poliomyelitis and diphtheria outbreaks continued to affect the populace. However, modernity and progress stood out as major themes of the period.¹³ To this end, the Federal Government established the Ministry for National Development and encouraged other steps to move the Australian economy and society forward, with major investments in projects like the Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme and the Port Kembla steelworks.¹⁴ The push to prosperity was not purely from Canberra, however; as the government's role shifted gradually from production of wealth to management of infrastructure, monopoly and oligarchy capital accounted for much of the post-war prosperity in Australia (Butlin). The mainstream press supported the discourse of progress and eagerly

reported innovations and new industries, counselling that the country 'must push on with development' (Moat).

The immigration program was fundamental to economic development. Australia took more displaced people per head of population than any other nation in the post-war decade, providing a plentiful source of manual labour: Maddock reports that 'migrants comprised 70% of the workforce growth in the fifties' (29). Although the immigration program's contribution to population and workforce growth was in accordance with policies of development, there were other consequences (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan). Some critics contended that the high level of immigration served monopoly capital rather than enhancing the facilities available to the Australian working-class.¹⁵ Connell and Irving argue, for instance, that another impact of the immigration scheme was 'an increased segmentation of the working class' (293).

An effect of the benefits of the period was an increasing emphasis on the role of the individual—politically, economically and socially—and a decreasing emphasis on the collective body or the group action.¹⁶ Many aspects of life now centred more on the individual than the group, at home and at work. With the increasing affordability of household and leisure goods came a corresponding increase of the perception of citizens as consumers. Workplace management initiatives increased productivity through strategies such as personal achievement incentives and individual accountability, rather than co-operative techniques; as Stuart Macintyre describes it, the 'tribal solidarity of the manual workers' (*Concise* 202) was an increasingly obsolete concept.

As outlined above, then, the general mood of the 1950s was simultaneously antagonistic and celebratory, and various concepts of national identity serve to reflect and refract the dominant ideas of the period.¹⁷ Some people (including the members of the WWFFU, as can be seen in the following chapter) were enthusiastic about the concept of the 'Australian legend'. This was born in the 1890s and was crystallised by Russel Ward in his 1958 book *The Australian Legend*. This located the ideal Australian qualities in traditional images of the digger and the rural worker,

their values often expressed in folk songs and pioneer legends. Graeme Turner has noted the less than ideal qualities of *The Australian Legend*: 'Ward's work of cultural definition revives and confirms, by and large, regressive attributes: sexism, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism, a populist nationalism, a simple identification between urban and rural working classes, and a sentimental egalitarianism that never quite extends to a commitment to democratic principles' ('It Works' 327).

However, an increasingly popular configuration of Australian nationalism of the 1950s turned away from this image of the 'Australian legend' towards the 'Australian way of life'. This concept of national identity highlighted progress for individuals and for the nation, and defended the ideals of conservative stability and accord. In his study of the term, Richard White observes that it 'provided a mental bulwark against communism, against change, against cultural diversity' (*Inventing* 161). Older qualities of communal consciousness, strengthened during the 1890s, the Depression and then World War II, were giving way to the right of individuals to seek prosperity and happiness in the country of 'a fair go'. Stephen Alomes describes this as 'part of the modernisation of Australian images through which a layer of suburban motifs overlaid or even replaced the drover and the swagmen ... unlike the ... Australian Legend with its dreams of a better society, it suggested a fixed static reality, which encouraged complacency and conservative acceptance of the status quo' (150-151). This newer ideal of national identity, then, suited the anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War, and of Menzies' use of nationalism for political advantage.¹⁸

The social changes that came with the mass immigration program, and Australia's changing position within international economic and political spheres, contributed to this new self-consciousness. This change was apparent in the move away from traditional British loyalties towards American influences, in Menzies' juggling of his two 'great and powerful friends', as he called them (qtd. in R. Murray 9). The main thrust of national allegiances, however, was that Australia was still a part of the British Empire, a position reinforced by the importance attached to the 1954 Royal tour.¹⁹

With the increasing material prosperity and economic stability of the nation, even the most radical of communists were likely to agree with some of the ideas of the dominant nationalism. Although critics of the 'Australian way of life' saw it as insular and parochial, intolerant of diversity and intent on obscuring class distinctions and silencing the voices of oppressed groups in its endorsement of a homogeneous Australian citizen, one of the major contradictions of Australian communist philosophy during this period was the endorsement of the 'Australian legend' within the progressive rhetoric of the 1950s.²⁰

Although the 1950s has often been portrayed as a period of political stability, organised forms of opposition did exist alongside the prosperity of the nation.²¹ In the 1950s there was a degree of protest and industrial action, albeit a small one, from so-called 'anti-Australian' voices that would not be silenced. Actions occurred which surrounded a range of political and industrial issues, from the improvement of living standards and the overthrow of the Federal government to anti-war rallies.²² Some Australians saw that their rights and responsibilities as citizens entailed speaking out against perceived wrongs, and observed that challenges to the social order could be effective in achieving their aims. Organisations were formed to protest against the threat of nuclear war, Australian involvement in overseas conflicts and the violation of civil liberties.²³ Pacifists, socialists, communists and labour activists took part, along with members of church groups (but not often churches as institutions). A mark of protest of this period, as in earlier times, was the use of public spaces: in Sydney, the Domain and the stadiums at Rushcutters Bay and Leichhardt were popular meeting places for protest actions, as were factory gates, street corners, parks and beaches. Such protest groups did attract people from a range of social and political backgrounds; it must be recognised, however, that as they were relatively small it is difficult to evaluate their political influence. These groups were often viewed as threats to the nation's stability, and were often dismissed as mere CPA front organisations, without real examination of their actual membership, the beliefs they espoused, or the work in which they were engaged.²⁴

In the 1950s one of the most organised and militant groups of protest was the CPA, of which the three WWFFU filmmakers were members.²⁵ They recognised that class difference still existed and that the rights of many were suppressed, and they believed that a different system could better serve the whole country. The Party's policies highlighted a strong sense of social justice, and world peace was the aim of many its activities. During the 1950s as in other periods, many non-members shared the concerns of Party members; many, also, held doubts about the ideals and practices of the CPA.²⁶ It had never been a serious menace to the major political parties,²⁷ but during these tense times the NSW Liberal Party declared it to be 'a conspiracy against Australia', an 'anti-Australian organisation working in the interests of a foreign power' ('Smash Communism'). These years were damaging for the Party. Membership had been falling since the mid-1940s, when it had reached its height of around 23,000. The 1949 banning and the averted dissolution of the Party, the Petrov affair, the assiduous activity of politically assertive Catholics through the Movement and the Industrial Groups, and then Krushchev's revelations of 1956 and the slaughter in Hungary, all worked to severely weaken the strength of the CPA, along with considerable internal sectarianism.²⁸

The effects of the Cold War upon the Party and its members have been well documented elsewhere.²⁹ One member recounts the atmosphere of intimidation: 'some comrades spoke of fearing to come out openly as a Communist for fear of being "branded" and suffering the social stigma associated with being a Communist in the eyes of many today, thus ruining their chances of "becoming something" socially' (qtd. in O'Lincoln 86).³⁰ However, the personal effects of Party membership have also been remembered more positively. WWF Executive Tas Bull joined the Party in 1951, and observed that 'nearly any skill that a communist or an ex-communist may have today would have been considerably encouraged, or developed, by their membership of the Communist Party ... I was taught to think and analyse, and get a much broader view of the world' (Interview). The solidarity engendered by Party membership was manifest in many ways, and even in this dark period the Party accomplished a great deal.

One area of involvement for comrades was that of local politics, and a number of members participated in municipal and state electoral campaigns. CPA member and WWF executive Ted Roach was a candidate in the 1956 Bankstown Council election. Public health was of great concern: a general housing shortage severely affected this working-class suburb, the area was not provided with sewerage or garbage disposal services, infectious diseases were regularly reported (*Chief*), and the local hospital was incomplete. Roach focused on this important issue: the provision of adequate health resources was the key issue in his election campaign. If just sixteen days' worth of Federal defence spending were diverted to Bankstown, he argued, the facilities could be installed. The WWFFU produced *A Question of Health* for Roach. Although he was not elected, his use of the film to supplement his political campaign is notable.³¹ The contrasting of public health against military funding was just one instance of the CPA's priorities, which claimed that its guardianship of the needs of the local community made for a relevant argument against ruling class power in the postwar era.

Industrial Context

Although the polarised political and social atmosphere of the 1950s, as outlined above, provides the overall background to the establishment of the WWFFU, an area of greater contextual relevance is the position of the Australian labour movement during that time. The period sustained a high level of employment, and even during economic recessions in 1952 and 1956, unemployment was never higher than 3%.³² This situation, along with peak levels of unionisation, placed workers in an advantageous position to achieve many of the gains they had been refused throughout the war years.³³ After prohibitions on industrial action were lifted, the number of strikes and disputes was high; through the 1950s, a range of issues (which included the improved economic climate) resulted in a decrease in this number.³⁴ On the surface, then, the general industrial scene was quieter through the WWFFU's years than it had been in the late 1940s.³⁵

However, many aspects of the general political context made for a highly charged atmosphere within the labour movement. A feature of industrial relations in this period was the introduction and strengthening of parliamentary bills and amendments affecting organised labour, including penal powers.³⁶ Government arbitration systems now adjudicated many disputes, whereas previously, consensus and rank-and-file action was more common, and these arbitration systems engendered much criticism. Another issue affecting the nature of the labour movement was its diversifying constitution. The proportionate increase in the workforce of migrants and women, the rise in white-collar employment, and the effects of mechanisation and automation, transformed and reorganised union perspective and tactics.³⁷

As at other times in their history, Australian trade unions operated within a range of political persuasions and strengths; many union leaderships, especially in the blue-collar industries, tended towards the dogmatic and sectarian. Many were also proactive and worked in the interests of their members. Communist activists were often most recognised and influential in a proportion of these unions during this period, another feature which contributed to the highly charged atmosphere.³⁸ The CPA's aims of developing the labour movement and uniting workers naturally drew the Party's energies to the unions, the mass organisations of the working class. As in many other areas of life, charges of communist bullying tactics were directed at militant unions, their members perceived as being stirred up by a few communist agitators. Workers on the wharves and the coal mines, two areas steeped in traditions of militancy, had CPA members as their officials. These, also, were the industries most affected by strikes in the period 1953 to 1958 and most of these strikes were in NSW.³⁹

The effects of the ALP's Industrial Groups' activities in contesting Communist union leadership were keenly felt. Editorials of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) in 1953 commented that 'the seemingly unshakable Red grip on a number of unions has been broken; nearly everywhere on the industrial front the Communists are in retreat' ('Labour Factions'); 'Australian trade-unionism is struggling back to sanity and health' ('Blow'). This last assessment was symptomatic

of the widespread opinion that communism was a sickness. By 1958 the *Bulletin* happily reported that 'a welcome change is coming over Australian unionism and labour. It is evident in the industrial peace, prosperity and employment which are at a peak in unions which have shed the Communist leadership' ('Changing'). Many of the conservatising aspects of the blue-collar union movement of the 1950s may be attributed to rising wages and living standards, as well as the anti-communist mood. Partly as a move against the force of the Industrial Groups, many left-wing unions—including the WWF—endorsed a 'unity ticket', a combination of communist and left Labor candidates. This strategy was part of the CPA's more general trend to enlist wider support from the working class.⁴⁰ Ray Clarke, a union activist and Party member, recalls that 'the leading unions with any sort of strength were led by communists, and that was one of the reasons why Menzies was able to say, "bloody Commos start the strikes". But it was the proper thing to do, because the wage rates and conditions established then have carried on ever since' (Interview).

In the period leading to the WWFFU's establishment, the successes of the struggles of the labour movement had provided evidence of its strength, and the relatively expansive industrial climate allowed for a space within which non-essential activities could be supported. The labour movement was marked in the post-war era by a prolific publishing activity: newspapers, circulars, journals and magazines. Australia had always boasted a highly unionised workforce, but unionism of workers and industrial concentration were particularly high in this period, especially in blue-collar industries, and so there were the physical numbers—and therefore union dues—to support such concerns. These activities were not purely industrial, but more widely political, thus stepping outside the boundary of traditional union functions and transforming unionists into 'social levers in their own right', as Ian Turner has described them (*Industrial Labour* xvii).

The WWF was founded in 1902 from a number of separate port unions. The 1928 maritime strike sapped the union of much of its vigour. However, with the election of Jim Healy as General Secretary from 1937, the WWF grew in strength. The Federation's Executive had its

offices in Sydney, and because of the large amount of cargo handled through the Sydney wharves, that Branch was particularly influential. Within the labour movement of the 1950s, the WWF stood out amongst the most militant and active, building upon a long history of activism and industrial assertiveness.

Wharfies, the 'men on the margins' (Brett, *Robert Menzies* 88), have always been crucial to the life and development of island nations, and Australia has been no exception. According to author Frank Broeze, 'Australia was an integral part of the whole Asian and Pacific shipping world that the British Empire and a lot of countries had been creating since the mid-eighteenth century ... Australia fitted very well, and very neatly and very positively and profitably into established networks of trade' (Interview). Most configurations of Australian national identity have emphasised the land and the landscape. But as Broeze points out,

the role of the sea as an integral and vital part of our national experience has remained largely unexplored ... maritime facilities and workers, though visible to all, have often been repressed in Australia's historiography, not least because the militant wharfies and seamen who helped tame distance were living proof that Australia was not the country of conflict-free consensus that conservative orthodoxy preached for so long. (*Island Nation* 1, 6)

The Cold War was a time in which wharfies were especially perceived as marginal to the ideal of a socially cohesive Australia. They could hold the country to ransom by engaging in disputes and tying up the ports. They were often the butt of anti-communist attacks from the government and the mainstream press; in 1951, the SMH asserted that 'Moscow has long concentrated on the wharves of the world as the most convenient and effective points from which to strike at the economic lifelines of democracy' ('Communist Retreat'). Such narratives attributed discord to an outside influence: dissent did not originate within Australian hearts, but through an invasion of subversive ideas from outside our shores. It was not just 'the Australian way of life' that was to be protected in the sanctuary of the island nation: in foreign policy Australians looked to the coastline as the security of the country was being threatened by south-east Asian conflicts.

Images of the coastline from this period highlight its tactical importance in a variety of ways. The phenomenon of immigration is perhaps the best remembered of these, with the wharves being the site of entrance for many thousands of migrants.⁴¹ Newsreels showing these 'New Australians' entering the country to aid in the nation's development ('Still They Come') present a striking contrast to other footage of deserted strikebound docks ('Twenty-Six Thousand Idle'). The 1952 DOI film *Menace* presents the Australian coastline as particularly vulnerable to communist infiltration. Its narration makes an urgent claim in which defence is again linked to development in a glib justification:

Australia has thirteen thousand miles of coastline to defend. That's why we need increased defence forces. Communism everywhere seeks to give a fighting edge to hunger and misery. That's why we need increased production, and economic and social development.

Another source of representations of the Australian wharves is the surveillance footage in the files of ASIO. For many years the international militant dockside tradition had interested security organisations.⁴² As illustrated by the instance of WWFFU footage finding its way into its files, not all of ASIO's footage was collected by its operatives. Because they already possessed the technology and personnel, and were often on the scene of many events that would interest ASIO, commercial newsreel companies were also persuaded to film for the organisation. In his autobiography Australian newsreel producer Ken Hall describes his willing involvement in this type of work:

The newsreels were respected and sought out by many unexpected bodies. In the early fifties there was a lot of social awakening, unrest, turmoil, street demonstrations, near-riots. Security, with whom we had good relations, were very interested in the footage covering these events. They wanted to know who was on the guest-list, so to speak, invited or uninvited. Faces, picking out faces, so many, to them, old 'friends'. They did a lot of that. (*Australian Film* 165)

The WWFFU worked to counter such representations of the wharves of Australia by producing images of the Sydney waterside through the wharfies' perspective. As a wharfie-filmmaker, Jock Levy perceives that 'what we were trying to do was show to the outside world just what type of

people the waterside workers were' (Hughes interview). The first words of narration for their first film describe a scene at Sydney Harbour from a wharfie's point of view, progressing from the Harbour's natural to its social aspects, and reminding the viewer of the role of the wharfies:

The gateway to a great city, a peaceful city, shining in the sun. Its waters splash and sparkle like hard glass: a peaceful scene. But behind the quiet facade is the stir of power, and the turbulence of motion. This is a seaport, a throbbing artery through which flows the lifeblood of the nation. Here, ships from the seven seas and the four corners of the earth discharge their silks and steel. Here, men labour and sweat to feed the hunger of the city.

In the 1950s Sydney's harbourside precinct experienced many changes. The shipping industry was being transformed as automation and mechanisation of port operations started; upgrading of wharves and containerisation were only a few years away. The old wharves had been congested for many years, and as construction began of the Port Botany docking facilities next to the Kurnell oil refinery, the work of the wharfies became a little less apparent. The traditional waterside worker community was changing too: in this time of rising wages and heightened suburbanisation, it became more desirable to live outside the inner-city area. The traditional waterfront community still existed, however, and even by 1958, at the end of the Film Unit's work, the majority of Sydney wharfies still lived in and around the port area. WWF Sydney Branch President Jim 'Dutchy' Young grew up and lived in the Rocks. He considers that 'there's a kinship among the working class, especially in that area. There's two groups stands out for working class solidarity, just like a beacon: the miners, and seamen and dockers. This seems to arise from the tendency to live next door to their employment'.

The Sydney waterfront constituted, then, a geographically concentrated force of power: solidarity, while never comprehensive, was heightened by the fact that workers in the one industry lived together near their work. The wharfies lived around Port Jackson from Woolloomooloo Bay west to Balmain, working the ships and handling a myriad of goods. The stretch of docks from Darling Harbour east to Woolloomooloo was known as the 'Hungry Mile'; every man who wanted work would have to walk the length of the wharves. Ernest Antony,

who worked the Hungry Mile in the 1920s, described the extreme working conditions wharfies experienced as well as the class consciousness of the times:

They tramps there in their legions on the morning dark and cold.
To beg the right to slave for bread from Sydney's lords of gold;
They toil and sweat in slavery, 'twould make the devil smile,
To see the face of the Sydney wharfies tramping down the hungry mile.

Another account of the industry comes from WWF executive Norm Docker. In *Wharfies*, the documentary history of the Federation, he describes the human consequences of the workplace: 'it started off as a most primitive industry with absolutely no amenities and no security for the men, either while in the industry or after they had left it. Most men who left it, left it because they had become broken physically'. Waterside workers all over the world have suffered poor working conditions (Mers; Kimeldorf; Sekula). In her history of the WWF, Margo Beasley reports that for Australian wharfies in the first half of the twentieth century,

sudden death and crippling injury were common, the incidence no doubt exacerbated by shifts of 24 and even 48 hours, made dangerously attractive by overtime rates. Reflexes slowed from exhaustion, and drinking on the job was another contributing factor to the cutting and crushing of feet, legs, hands and fingers. There were also multiple fractures, amputations, eye wounds, and chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, angina, apoplexy, ulcers, lung injuries and hernias. (77)

The struggles to improve conditions were important parts of the union's history, and were vital to the constitution of its militant, radical nationalist outlook. At the time of the Film Unit's establishment in 1953, working conditions were still physically much the same as they had been for many decades. As in other industries, mechanisation was beginning to affect the waterfront; however, this was not until the end of the fifties.⁴³

Work on the wharves was not only physically gruelling, it was also impermanent, seasonal and highly casualised. Largely through the efforts of long-term General Secretary Jim Healy, the replacement of the corrupt and exploitative 'bull' system of employment with the gang, or roster, system was a major breakthrough in improving the industry.⁴⁴ Along with its main advantage of equity, the gang system fostered personal ties between wharfies, and forged closer

links between workers and the community of their union; Beasley identifies the success of the gang system as 'a key factor in intense union loyalty, of which the WWF was a beneficiary' (*Wharfies* 118). Although comradeship was one of the main advantages of the gang system, it was also a result of the endurance of hard working conditions, the struggle for better ones, and a recognition of the international militant tradition of waterside workers. Through such battles the union members took on a greater sense of pride in their identity as wharfies, as unionists and as members of the working class.

By the height of the work of its Film Unit in 1957, the WWF had its largest national membership of 27,000; and with this strength in numbers came a corresponding strength in militancy. 'Big Jim' Healy made no secret of his CPA membership; to the union's cavilers he was an agitator who led on an acquiescent rank and file, and personified the dangerously close ties between the 'reds' and militant workers. Under his leadership the Federation vigorously followed the CPA's position on many issues. The NSW branches of the WWF were not wholly Communist but were led by a 'unity' ticket of ALP and CPA members, and enjoyed a balance of militant strength and a wider mainstream appeal.⁴⁵ The Sydney Branch was particularly militant, with a strong leadership in men like Tom Nelson, Jim 'Dutchy' Young and Stan Moran. The WWF was different to other Australian unions in a number of ways. Waterfront unions around the world were generally more powerful than in other industries, and in Australia as in other nations, waterfront employment was controlled by the union. In the WWF, both voting in union elections and attendance at stop-work meetings was compulsory, and fines were imposed for non-compliance. This suggested that the WWFFU films were often remembered because if they were shown at a stop-work meeting at the Leichhardt stadium for instance, a unionist was compelled to watch them, financially and through the solidarity of his work mates.

There were often political debates at the Branch's offices in Sussex Street as well as on the wharves, involving executives and rank-and-file members.⁴⁶ As with other militant unions there were accusations from parliament and press that the communists among the leadership were working in their own interests more than in the interests of their members.⁴⁷ Beasley writes that

'the actual number of communists within the Federation, especially among the rank and file, was very small ... communists, although well-represented, were also always in a minority at the official level of the WWF' (*Wharfies* 141). Rank-and-file support was strong, however, and in 1957 there were five Sydney waterfront CPA branches (Parkes 7).

As the conditions of post-war reconstruction placed a growing emphasis on the apparatus of production, waterside disputes increasingly became national issues. Menzies claimed that strikes were 'anti-Australian' ('Oust'); another Liberal Party member argued that 'the deliberate policy of the Communist leaders of the WWF is ... to do all they can to cause trouble for Australia as a whole, instead of working in the best interests of their members' (McColm, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 20 March 1958). Commercial newsreels and daily newspapers covered strikes, along with most industrial news, with a general negativity. One of the biggest industrial conflicts in the years of the Film Unit was the November 1954 recruitment dispute.⁴⁸ To support their case, the union embarked upon a vigorous oppositional publicity and propaganda campaign, employing the publication of leaflets, factory and work site talks, and radio broadcasts.⁴⁹ The WWFFU was commissioned to produce *November Victory*, which explained the background for this industrial action. The CPA *Guardian* supported the film as 'a highly dramatic portrayal of the struggle' (*November Victory*). The Unit showed the production in support of other issues, as a report mentioned:

During the Federal and State parliamentary election campaigns the Film Unit used *November Victory* extensively. Because of its strong theme of Unity this film was found to be ideal for street meetings, factory lunch hour screenings, etc. During the week prior to the Federal Election the Film Unit screened the film on twenty-two occasions, in the streets and at factory meetings. It was possible through the use of films to attract large crowds. ('Report' 2)

This was the type of proactive work Dr. John Burton (former Department of External Affairs Head) referred to when he spoke at a 1954 Sydney Town Hall rally and described the WWF as 'the conscience of the Australian nation' (qtd. in Finnimore). In this, he recognised that Federation members stood up and acted for their opinions. With the wharfies' concern with social justice issues, fostered under the unity leadership, there was a more outward-looking

stance than which otherwise might have existed. Disputes took place more often over industrial than political issues. The two areas were equally important, however, and there were strikes over the use of wharf labour for what wharfies saw as destructive or imperialistic purposes.⁵⁰

As a result of their particularly turbulent and militant experiences, the WWF has always remained eager to remember their history. This can be seen in the union's commissioning of Margo Beasley's history, and of Knight and Gow's film *Wharfies*, as well as the sponsorship of WWFFU films. The wharfies' militancy was a result of the conscious reflection on the industry's history, and its effects on the workers. It is this industrial context of the state of the Sydney labour movement, particularly on the waterfront, that sets the scene for the establishment of the WWFFU in 1953.

Cultural Context

As well as the industrial arena, another very important area of context for the Film Unit's work is the cultural one. Unit member Norma Disher offered her opinion of the cultural location of the WWFFU by noting that 'we were part of the whole upward surge in creative work that was going on in the progressive movement of the time' (Hughes interview). Here she identifies her group as part of a definite formation, which I have termed left cultural activists. She also notes the cultural activity of the 1950s, a part of life which is often not included in popular appraisals of the time. As Raymond Williams reminds us, 'we have to recognise the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture' (*Problems* 39), and so it is important to provide some information on the left cultural activists to properly situate a history of the WWFFU.

In a discussion of working class identity and crowd behaviour, EP Thompson employed the concept of 'moral economy' to justify or explain activism ('Moral'). I suggest that there was a shared moral economy amongst the left cultural activists. All the left cultural activists, and their groups, had some commonalities. They had strongly-held opinions on the nature of social justice, and faith in the utility of collective action. They mobilised their creative resources to establish and sustain their groups. They relied for a great part on informal networks of communication and association. They aimed to provide not just artistic but political training. In the following section I outline the cultural context of the WWFFU within the left cultural activists, highlighting formations which enjoyed close connections to the Unit.

An area of interrogation in Gramsci's work, intrinsically connected to his theory of hegemony, was the role of the intellectual in society. He postulated that as every class develops, it creates a group of people who act as leaders in social, cultural and political arenas. Organic intellectuals provide a leadership function for the counter-hegemonic 'historical bloc', furnishing individuals and groups with skills and discourses that will help in their work of struggle. This group, observed Gramsci, are the 'elites of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset ... [and this] is what really modifies the "ideological panorama" of the age' (*Selections* 340). I suggest that some leaders of the labour and cultural organisations of the 1950s acted as organic intellectuals, the whalebones for these small counter-hegemonic corsets.

As two forms of protest, political activism and artistic activism fed into each other most notably in Australia through the CPA.⁵¹ From its earliest times the organisation had attracted and encouraged the energies of creative people, and culture in its broadest sense was a topic which engendered much debate. Its vitality is evident in the ways that it supported a wide range of cultural activities.⁵² One of the earliest manifestations of the CPA's involvement in artistic work was the establishment of the Workers' Arts Club (WAC) in Sydney in 1931, especially through the work of Jean Devanny (Ferrier, *Point*; J Beasley 173; Macintyre, *Reds* 276-278; A Johnson). From 1935, the WAC was replaced by other organisations including the Writers' League, the

Contemporary Art Society and the New Theatre (Macintyre, *Reds* 279). Along with the WWFFU, these groups used to report their activities to the CPA's Cultural Council and Arts Committee, where they received advice, direction, criticism, and censorship.

Since the early days of the WAC, Australian communists had adopted Lenin's advice. He had said, 'we must not put our hands in our pockets and let chaos ferment as it pleases. We must consciously try to guide its development, to form and determine its results ... for art is a weapon' (qtd. in E Ross, *Storm* 123). This was his exhortation to use creativity as a political tool, to harness the fruits of artistic production with the intention of mobilising the audience to act. He believed that for socialists, the cinema was the 'most important' of the arts (qtd. in Eisenstein 23). The WWFFU was one group to take up this challenge. One of its aims in this direction was to help trade unionists to 'consolidate the understanding of the use of film as a powerful propaganda weapon in their struggles for justice and social progress' ('Wharfie Film Unit').

Other sources of inspiration for comrade-artists were the theories of Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov, Secretary to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and cultural critic of the 1930s, who urged writers and painters to draw their subjects from the working class. His work led to the refinement of the official Communist Party directive on cultural production, the tenets of which became known as socialist realism. Its basic ideal was a development of Lenin's 'art is a weapon' urge, in which art had a directly political purpose: the propelling of society towards communism. Socialist realist work emphasised ideological correctness over the individual freedom of the artist in the creative process. Zhdanov's definition, taken up by the Russian Communist Party and then transmitted to communists internationally, was that

socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism. (qtd. in Tertz 148)

Zhdanov believed that artists should be propagandists. 'Create works of high attainment, of high ideological and artistic content,' he advocated. 'Actively help to remould the mentality of

people in the spirit of socialism. Be in the front ranks of those who are fighting for a classless socialist society' (qtd. in O'Brien 36). While its basis was in literature it soon spread to other practices, such as drama, painting and cinema.

Although the ideals of the philosophy had been in common use, the term 'socialist realism' was not specifically employed in Australia until the mid-1940s. CPA executives and comrades, notably those on the Arts Committee, pursued and debated the expression of the theory. One document from this group expressed the foremost aim of the Party's movement towards communism, in which artist-comrades were urged to ask themselves:

to what extent is our work in artistic fields part and parcel of this movement? The struggle, the correct presentation of Marxist-Leninist views, whilst simultaneously finding a basis for common action on the demands of creative workers, is an urgent task for all communists, both personally and through the collectives. (qtd. in E Ross, *Storm* 127)

After World War II there was a heightened level of support for artistic production, according to the tenets of socialist realism, within the Party. In a policy speech at the 1945 National Congress, CPA leader Harry Gould claimed that 'art, in its origins and functions, can be understood only by relating it to the labour process' (7). An important goal was, he argued, to 'unite art and science with the labour movement' (11). With these sentiments he expressed the aim of the Party leadership to harness all areas of culture towards the attainment of a socialist state. Like the Party's relationships with the union community, those with artists were important, and the realm of culture was not to develop on its own, but under the guidance of the Party. Edgar Ross was the embodiment of the Party line in this aspect. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he was an executive of the CPA Arts Committee, and was convinced that 'the arts constitute one of the most important spheres of activity in the deep-going ideological struggle between decadent capitalism and the forces making for human liberation' (*Storm* 128). As mentioned earlier, his work as editor of the Miners' Federation publication *Common Cause* gave him another opportunity to publicise and criticise work of the left cultural activists, including the WWFFU. I suggest he can be seen as an organic intellectual (along with Healy and Nelson of the WWF, amongst others).

In this Australian exposition of socialist realism, there was a contradiction between the CPA's nationalism and a wholesale adoption of the Moscow line. The paradox was a reflection of many of the Party's ideologies: there was an intriguing relationship between the explicit internationalist basis of communism and its manifestation in the Party as an Australian structure. Robin Gollan claims that 'Communists were internationalists but this was held in tension with an Australian nationalism which grew out of opposition to imperialism but settled into a nationalism which took its colour equally from specifically Australian experience and Russian chauvinism' (*Revolutionaries* 288). This contradictory dialogue is reflected in one of the party's aims in 1951, which was to 'take steps to develop our own specific Australian culture, while at the same time accepting all that is best in world culture' ('Develop' 24). The notion of 'our own' culture was an assumption, on the part of the CPA, that there was a single, united culture, a debatable idea at any time in any country's history. And the interpretation of 'all that is best' is a most subjective one. Nevertheless, this ongoing and intricate dialogue between nationalism and internationalism occurred in many aspects of radical politics and culture.

An instance of this can be seen in a 1956 report, in which WWF leader Ted Roach explained his plans for the Unit's continuation of the Link series of Aboriginal-inspired films:

We believe that this type of work is completely new and could provide income to help establish the apparatus that is desired; and in addition these projects could fill a long-felt want in this country to popularise real Australian history, to help develop an appreciation of Australian culture, and assist in the recognition of the art and culture of the Aboriginal. (Report on Films)

Such comments reflect a growing awareness of indigenous culture, whilst the understanding implicit in 'real Australian history' echoes the radical nationalist idiom of many left cultural activists and Communist Party members. Like all forms of nationalist rhetoric in Australia in the 1950s, it assumed the existence of a unified 'real Australian history'. However this was a selective view of the nation, just as in other films and media. Roach perceived a 'long-felt' gap in Australian history because he, like other communists and members of the New Left, thought that up to that point Australian history had not been sufficiently inclusive.

The working class viewpoint was central to socialist realism. One aspect of the work of socialist realist artists (such as George Finey, Noel Counihan and Herbert McClintock) was that they used the working class Australian as a subject, whether it was the miner and his lamp, the wharfie heaving a sack of wheat, or the Surry Hills child playing in the slum lane. For these people the worker and his life were important subjects for exploration.⁵³ Another socialist realist activist was Gavin Casey, who wrote a screenplay for the WWFFU. He was a Western Australian writer who published work through the Australasian Book Society. Like Finey, Counihan and others, his creations often featured the lives of workers. In his important critical history of Australian art, *Place, Taste and Tradition*, Bernard Smith defends the work of socialist realist artists:

The fundamental issues for these painters, both as artists and as 'men-in-the-street' [*sic*] have been social and political questions. They have felt these issues, not as abstractions for the purpose of discussion, but as material forces at the threshold of existence, moulding their lives. They have realised that Australia is a part, and not an insignificant part, of world movements; that it cannot be separated from these movements. But they have reacted no less vigorously to the social and political environment of their own country. Both of these aspects of their work have arisen from their preparedness to record the urgencies of contemporary life, both at home and abroad. (255-257)

Here Smith recognises the nationalist-internationalist conflict that was a feature of communist cultural and political practice.

Dissent from canon is not uncommon in any organisation, and not everyone shared the Party line on socialist realism. Many left cultural activists, including the members of the WWFFU, viewed it as an overly restrictive doctrine, which increasingly narrowed the scope of what was officially possible for communist artists and writers to produce. The viability of socialist realism as an artistic practice was often debated, and it was seen by some as a bureaucratic approach to art. Evelyn Healy was a CPA member and artist, and in her autobiography *Artist of the Left* she writes on the problems of 'working within a party climate which narrowed the role of culture to working class politics' (7).

The establishment of the WWFFU a year after the success of the 1952 Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship, with its championing of communist cultural events—including a film festival—was opportune for the CPA's promotion of film in the encouragement of cultural advancement.⁵⁴ I suggest that some sources for the genesis of the Unit were from the energies of Party life. Levy was certain that 'the Communist Party gave the impetus and the discipline that made it possible for us to work so effectively as a film unit' (*Film Work*); what the WWFFU members gained from this affiliation was a further impetus to articulate their perceptions of social justice and working-class solidarity. However, the Film Unit was not a CPA front organisation, nor should its establishment be credited to the CPA. There was not a close or active connection between the two organisations: no clear directives or funding came directly from the Party to the WWFFU, and the Party only profited from the Unit's activities where and when it could, such as at Cultural Conferences where their work was screened and discussed.

The Unit did report to the Arts Committee from time to time, although Levy recalls that

it was never a decision of the Communist Party that the Film Unit came into being ... on the question of the Party, I can recollect attending a few meetings, and their contribution as far as the actual making of films was negligible ... any sort of co-ordination between the Communist Party and the Film Unit was very vague; they had very little to do with us. (Personal interview)

It was during this period that the WWF Sydney Branch building at Sussex Street became, for the unionists, 'a vital centre of working class activity' (WWF, *Souvenir*). At that time the economic position was favourable to the expansion of union concerns. Membership was high, and, through a compulsory members' levy and a loan from the Commonwealth Bank, funds were available for improvements of facilities for union members. In 1951 and 1952 the union renovated the building to provide, Beasley reports, 'a canteen, art studio, hall, facilities for film production and musical performance, and a reading room' (*Wharfies* 162). The hall was constantly in use at lunchtime and after work with concerts, recitals, dance performances and lectures, thus affording facilities for workers' education and entertainment. Harry Black was the Secretary of the Cultural Committee. When he organised events such as the national opera company's visit, he observed that 'artists are beginning to realise that their best and most

appreciative audiences are trade unionists' ('Cultural'). Sixteen groups were organised, including a wharfies' choir, art classes and children's groups. Sports carnivals were regularly held, and workers formed athletics, cricket, football and other teams. One wharfie commented that 'in the 1950s the Sydney waterfront was a worker's cultural heaven' (Stein, Introduction).

The success of this extraordinary range of achievements was helped by the fact that the hall was next to the docks and the Hungry Mile. As many unionists and their families lived nearby, it was not far to travel to an after-hours event. The gang system had another advantage here: the relatively flexible shift system made it a little easier for workers to devote time to other pursuits. The busy curriculum was encouraged by the actors, musicians and artists who, returning from World War II, could not find employment in their preferred field of work, and went onto the wharves, where casual employment was the norm.⁵⁵ Gang 364 was composed of cultural activists, musicians, actors, and artists, and so was dubbed 'the Brains Trust' (Jones, *Waterfront*).

An important event on the Australian trade union calendar was May Day, which brought all sections of the labour movement together. For many years wharfies had been involved in the construction and painting of banners for May Day marches, and they formed the Sydney WWF art group in the early 1950s as an extension of these activities. The group was popular, and wharfies as well as their families joined in classes and in the resultant exhibitions. Under the guidance of Rod Shaw from 1953 to 1965, art group devotees, wharfies and non-wharfies, painted a large mural at the branch, depicting the history of the WWF. They took their inspiration from the mural work executed by the members of the San Francisco International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union under their Australian-born leader Harry Bridges, thereby reinforcing the international solidarity of wharfies. 'Brains Trust' gang leader Ralph Sawyer recalled the time as a particularly active and inspirational one, when he saw

a revolutionary spirit that was engendered on the waterfront ... the guys that worked on the mural were all CPA members ... we tried to encapsulate the same revolutionary spirit that the CPA had ... the Communist leadership, and the Labor Party leadership, gave us labour consciousness. (Interview)

A great deal of the impetus for the groups' establishment can be found in the political views of the Branch leaders, as well as the Federal Executive. Tas Bull was the organisation's General Secretary from 1984 to 1992. He assessed the situation of the 1950s, when the consciousness of many wharfies was affected positively by this particular style of leadership: 'I think that a great many peoples' lives have been enriched because of this broader canvas that the leadership of the union at that time cared to work on' (Interview). The benefits of the attitude of the leadership in involving the rank and file can be seen, amongst other things, in the ways in which the films were voluntarily shown by rank and file members in their own time and using their own resources.

Arnold Butcher was such a man. He worked on the Sydney wharves through the 1950s, and was active as a musician in a number of the extra-curricular groups. He sums up the attitude of the leadership in this respect:

The waterfront, compared to most other places, was a unique place. What happened down at the waterfront, because of the sort of culture that grew up there, was mainly through people like—these are all really remarkable people—Tom Nelson, Jim Healy, Matty Monroe, Ivo Barrett. These people had a theory about work and unionism, in that man does not work for bread alone. They stood for the other things, the social activities, that should be a normal part of a person's life, no matter who he [*sic*] is.

The leadership at this time was active and militant. Along with other executives, Sydney Branch Secretary Tom Nelson was a member of the CPA. In his history of the WWF, Nelson commented that the union management was at its best a leadership 'capable of carrying the idea of unity down amongst the members' (*Hungry* 36). His administration recognised that cultural activities could support industrial and political campaigns, and they could also be important in the development of class consciousness, and therefore in a conscious realignment of power relations. The CPA's policy of integration of industrial and cultural achievements was manifest in the Federation leadership's encouragement of the 'cultural heaven'. The leadership also introduced a nation-wide program of education, where unionists studied issues including 'economic and political policy, cargo handling and mechanisation as well as Federation history'

(Reeves 8). With the introduction of these groups and a heightened connection with other cultural organisations, the benefits were to flow to both groups of workers.⁵⁶

Under these circumstances, the Sydney Branch building operated as both a site of work and a site of leisure, in which all unionists could freely participate, as well as a place where family and friends were welcome. This helped to enable the transfusion of the politics of the wharfies into their extra-curricular activities. The wharfie artists, and their wives and children who joined in these groups, recorded many aspects of working-class experience; they created new manifestations of class consciousness and extended the nature of working-class recreation. All the WWF members, ex-members and officials interviewed in the course of this research were supportive of these extra-curricular activities and of their encouragement by the leadership. These interviews have also shown that a sustaining and strengthening of class loyalty was a result of this cultural work, and it provided a heightened sense of community amongst the wharfies. As a response to the accusations of parliament, press and shipping companies, the expansion of cultural activities served to define the workers more strongly in their resistance to the mainstream media's representation of them as 'lazy, drinking, incompetent, strike-prone watersiders' ('Navy').

There were exceptions to this support: the Federation's extra-curricular activities were not universally favoured, and not all the Sydney Branch members agreed with this use of their union dues. A 1956 ALP pamphlet complained that 'the Communist Party, through their domination of the so-called "unity" ticket, has used the branch to their own political advantage. They have taken full control of our union rooms and facilities. Thousands of pounds have been wasted on outside matters such as ... £4,000 for the making of propaganda films' (Kenneally). The author of this claim had a different conception of union business to that of the elected leaders. Sections of the press also disagreed with this employment of union funds. In 1957 the anti-communist Movement publication *News-Weekly* reported that 'since the end of 1955, £7000 of waterside workers' money has been spent on film equipment and on the making of films.

Three men [*sic*] are now a permanent film-making staff, and to date the only returns to watersiders, whose money was used, is £243' ('Communist Front').

These criticisms of the expanding nature of WWF activities show how the cultural policy of the CPA had been fostered in the Sydney Branch of the WWF, among other places. One of the most important aspects of this policy was its encouragement of a collective approach. In 1958 John Pringle rather romantically suggested that Australian cultural workers were doomed to:

lead lonely lives, isolated ... from their fellow writers. There is no Bloomsbury or Left Bank; no life of the cafe or the salon. They rarely meet anyone who has read their work or who can discuss it intelligently. Like the first pioneers who plunged into the wilderness with a bullock-cart, the Australian writer must 'plod on and keep his [*sic*] passion bright' alone. (132)

Pringle did not consider organisations outside the mainstream such as the left cultural activist groups. The collectivist impulse in these groups was as strong as the political impulse in the CPA, or in the militant labour movement. The groups were often established and administered by comrades, but membership was by no means restricted. They extended the Party's aims to interest, entertain and educate a wide spectrum of society, including ALP members, rank and file workers, intellectuals, and artists. Their functions included the constitution of social and political as well as cultural collectives, and in all these groups the solidarity and support of members were important. As artist-workers, left cultural activists often chose to stand up for their politics and resist conservative views. Their efforts thus exposed them to counter-attacks and isolation from other artists and the wider community, and against this, the comradeship of their own circle was an important sustaining element. Their output—literature, prose, drama, painting or cinema—was often imbued with this sense of the collective strength of working-class solidarity. Colin Sparks argues that the most important aspects of such work were not necessarily the textual features of the works themselves, but the consequence that 'the organised, collective efforts of workers rather than the individualised efforts of the professional bourgeois artist' produce a certain type of work ('Debate' 78). This is so in the case of the left cultural activist groups of the 1950s, who often prioritised working-class traditions of collective practices over the modernist individuality of the middle-class.⁵⁷

During the 1950s, such organisations included the New Theatre, the Fellowship of Australian Writers, Current Book Distributors, the Contemporary Art Society, the School of Realist Art (SORA), and the Australasian Book Society (ABS). There were the Unity Singers, the RFA, and a number of film societies. Other organisations were the People's Council for Culture, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, and the Australia Soviet Friendship Society.⁵⁸ One left cultural activist group was the SORA, which operated in the WWF building.⁵⁹ Many individuals were active in a number of areas, and cross-fertilisation of groups was common, as, Andrew Reeves points out, 'activity in one area of cultural life led almost inevitably to initiatives in another' (10).

The form of national identity embraced by left cultural activists often adopted the historicist view exemplified in *The Australian Legend*, in reviving and renewing what were identified as uniquely Australian traditions and themes. According to them, these were more authentic manifestations of Australian identity than those embodied in the 'Australian way of life'. There had been support to investigate local traditions since the times of the WAC in the 1930s, but, as outlined earlier, the post-war decade brought with it a much more energetic invigoration of these ideas; John Docker identifies the Party's moves to establish 'a cultural offensive' in this period ('Culture' 189). The New Theatre performed newly written as well as older Australian plays, on recognisably antipodean themes. The Realist Writers looked to Lawson and Furphy for inspiration, and the WWFFU filmmakers helped to produce the Wattle films. A revival of interest in anti-authoritarian themes contributed to radical nationalism. Convicts, bushrangers, and the rebels of Eureka were in vogue, as were activist workers and unionists who fought bitterly for their rights, militant Australians all. Fox writes of this time:

Writers, musicians, dancers and others created new Australian songs, music, dances and plays in or around the tradition of the pioneers. The early 1950s became for the Communist Party and to some extent for the Left in general a period of exploration of what it means to be an Australian ... it was an exciting period, a time of *Reedy River*, of the early Bushwhackers and the Bush Music Club, of Margaret Walker's dance group, of the

Australasian Book Society, and of many other cultural activities exploring not the Russian or Chinese tradition but our own. (*Australians* 179)

Here, Fox imparts a sense of the enthusiasm and energy within these organisations. As in the CPA's declarations on socialist realism, he assumes a unity of national identity in 'what it means to be an Australian'. This was a selective exploration; while the 'tradition of the pioneers' were seen as the rightful working-class formation of the Australian national heritage, it generally ignored women, migrants, and indigenous Australians. Gollan has noted this proclivity:

it seemed natural to Australian communists that they should be the leading proponents of an aggressive, militant, democratic stance which was believed to be the most characteristic quality of Australian workers. Thus they looked for origins in those who had resisted the authority of the upper classes: convicts, bushrangers, gold-diggers, and the unionists who had fought the bitter battles of the 1890s. In doing so they idealised the past and censored out or muted those parts of it, in particular the xenophobia and racism which were inherent in the Australian working-class outlook, which were in conflict with basic communist ideology. (*Revolutionaries* 196)

In terms of their collectivism, their interest with issues of class justice, their use of historicist themes, their frequent omission of women, immigrants and indigenous Australians and through their relationships with other participants in artistic and political activity, the WWFFU fitted in with this loosely defined collection of left-wing artists of the 1950s. Within the work of the left activists were three areas of culture which held particular interest for the WWFFU: drama, music and film.

Perhaps the most well-known left cultural activist organisation in Sydney during the 1950s was the New Theatre, also the country's oldest continuously performing theatre. It began life as the Workers' Art Club theatre group in 1932, with inspiration from the British Unity Theatre and similar groups in the USA. With branches in Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle and Melbourne, it has had over 400 plays produced, written by Australian and overseas dramatists. Non-professional actors were the mainstay of productions, although many well-known performers were to come out of the New Theatre family. Perhaps more significant were its writers, who constituted an important contribution to Australian literature. The theatre's strong tradition of performing

socially and politically relevant work attracted a predominantly working-class following, both artist and audience. Often current industrial and political situations were the inspiration. Anti-war and anti-oppression themes were the staple, and topical reviews were common. The group's commitment to broadly socialist ideas extended to their performative style. Theatre members would perform at parks and beaches, next to dole queues, and from trucks. They would produce plays or short sketches for unions or other left organisations.⁶⁰

Like the CPA and other militant groups, the New Theatre was an organisation carefully watched by ASIO, especially in the Cold War years. ASIO workers raided theatre premises, arrested thespians and confiscated scripts on more than one occasion (Capp). The CPA also subjected the work of the Theatre to closer examination during this time (O Gray 196). The mainstream press rarely reviewed New Theatre performances because of their political content: the organisation was dismissed as a CPA front whose work was merely propaganda. Reports and reviews were to be found, however, in publications of left-wing unions and organisations.

The Sydney New Theatre and the WWF enjoyed a long-standing alliance. New Theatre member Betty Roland had written *War on the Waterfront* in response to the 1938 pig-iron dispute, which played in Sydney to appreciative audiences—and to police who stopped performances and arrested actors.⁶¹ Artists from WWF art groups worked in the Theatre, and from 1954 to 1968 the Theatre operated within the WWF Federal offices in Phillip Street and performed regularly at the Sussex Street hall, under the auspices of the WWF Cultural Committee.⁶² The highlight of this relationship came with the first season of the Dick Diamond musical *Reedy River* which, through its championing of Australian folk music, became very well known.⁶³ Mona Brand writes:

it was a two way relationship with the WWF and the New—New Theatre [*sic*] giving something of itself whenever possible, from handing out strikers' leaflets to performing daytime fundraising sketches and on one occasion writing the twenty minute operetta, *Butcher's Hook*, for members of the WWF Women's Committee to perform. ('MUA')

There were extremely strong connections between the New Theatre and the WWF Film Unit. Certainly the Unit would not have existed had not its three members been part of the New

Theatre family; the members of the WWFFU initially met at the New Theatre. Levy has spoken of 'the role the Communists played within the Theatre. They gave it vigour, a commitment and undoubtedly played a vital role in the development of the Theatre presenting a working class perspective' (Address). The Brechtian understanding of theatre as a politically educational tool was a feature that the Film Unit took into their film work, as well as the collective approach to production and the social responsibility to the audience that New Theatre artists advocated.

Along with explorations of Australian pioneer traditions in drama, literature and the visual arts, the stature of folk music grew in the 1950s, largely due to the vigour of members of the CPA and the labour movement. This was the period of Ewan MacColl's championing of British folk music and protest songs, bringing them to a newly appreciative audience, as Pete Seeger and his friends were doing in the United States. In Australia, 'it was a period when everyone seemed to be singing, far and wide', Len Fox remembers (*Australians* 101). In 1952, the popularity of the music of *Reedy River* (performed by the Bushwhacker's Band) was the crest of a wave of nationalist interest in folk and bush music. The CPA formed the People's Chorus and the Unity Singers; New Theatre actor and vocalist Cedric McLaughlin co-ordinated the Link Singers for the WWFFU's later films; and there was a Sydney Bush Music Club to which many of these singers and musicians belonged. These were amongst the most lyrical manifestations of a radical nationalist movement.

The idea took hold that a specifically working-class music could have its own credibility, and such works were collected, published and recorded. Bushwhackers founder John Meredith formed the Australian Folklore Society in 1953. Brisbane CPA member, musician, and Realist writer John Manifold made an important contribution to the folk music genre and its rising popularity, culminating in his ABS publication *Who Wrote the Ballads? Notes On Australian Folk Song*. In 1955 Peter Hamilton and Edgar Waters founded Wattle Recordings in Woolloomooloo, with the aim of encouraging and preserving the folk and protest song tradition of Australia. They believed that this type of music, 'with its specifically Australian character' ('Wattle'), could be used for educational and historical purposes as well as entertainment. Wattle produced a

number of records with social, archival and biographical information, and a Folk Music Record Club was formed. One reviewer noted, linking this interest in folk music to some intrinsically autochthonous Australian identity, that as 'a valuable addition to Australiana ... these first recordings have whetted the appetite of Australians for more of their musical heritage' (P Jones 10). After the demise of the WWFFU, Hamilton worked with the three Unit members to produce a number of short films based on folk songs. Like many concerns of the left cultural groups, there was some resistance from mainstream culture to the push to popularise folk music. Hamilton recalls some problems he faced: 'folk songs were seen [in] the McCarthy era as being subversive and that had an effect in Australia; and so the ABC, for example, who I was trying to encourage [to play them] wouldn't play folk songs because they were dangerous' (Bryson interview).

As well as these explorations in drama and folk music, screen culture had a surge of interest from the left, and during the 1950s a number of film organisations in Sydney could be seen alongside these other forms of left cultural activity. They concentrated on distribution and exhibition, and they engaged with issues of class or social struggle, whether to support immediate advances in living or working conditions, to detail the activities of a front organisation or left-wing union, or to comment on a broader agenda for social change. The recent work of Deane Williams has advanced the field of oppositional film research; but he has concentrated on the screen culture of Melbourne, and there has been little equivalent research on the Sydney scene. There were a number of Sydney-based groups that used the technologies and forms of existing screen culture for an oppositional purpose. Like many other left cultural groups, their activities, directly or indirectly, inspired and supported the work of the WWFFU.

Quality Films was one such organisation. Eddie Allison (an actor in theatre, film and radio, CPA member and WAC activist) began importing sixteen millimetre prints of Russian films in the 1930s. In 1952 the Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship needed works for its film festival, and CPA members began to import these films for the carnival: to do this they established Quality Films in 1952. The business was situated in an office in the WWF Phillip Street building.

It was initially managed by filmmaker Rod Adamson, who dealt directly with the filmmakers in the Soviet Union to obtain prints. Eighteen months later, Allison took over, and he and Norma Disher of the WWFFU nominally bought the company for £50 (Allison, Personal interview). Quality Films dealt with sixteen millimetre film prints; most came from the Soviet Union, but there were some from European countries, and others that Cecil Holmes had brought from the USA. This business was the main distributor of WWFFU films to non-union organisations.

New Dawn Films was a sister company to Quality, dealing in the importation and distribution of 35 millimetre prints of the same types of films. New Dawn operated from an adjoining office to Quality, and had been established at the same time. Its market was the commercial exhibition trade, whilst Quality catered more for film societies, embassy, private and trade union screenings. CPA member Bruce Milliss established the business to encourage the screening of foreign films as a counterpoint to American works; Milliss's son recollected that New Dawn was not instituted primarily for monetary gain, but to 'try and break the ring of enmity around the Russians, not in this instance by campaigning on the vulgar economic front but by engaging in the lofty battle of ideas, against the flood of Yankee effluent descending on the nation's movie screens' (Milliss 153-154). Milliss engaged New Zealand left-wing filmmaker Cecil Holmes to manage New Dawn. Its operations consisted mostly of importation, especially Russian and Chinese works, and films on particular topics including opera. It also dealt with locally produced films, such as Holmes' own *Words For Freedom*. Both men travelled overseas extensively, sourcing their products for import. When Holmes resigned from both New Dawn and the CPA in 1957, Eddie Allison took over the management of the company.⁶⁴ Norma Disher worked for both Quality and New Dawn in the 1960s, assisting in the administration and dispatch of the prints; and her activity in these businesses, along with her nominal co-ownership of Quality Films, points to the intricate network of associations within the left and activist communities of Sydney at that time.

Another cinema organisation with similar political aims to Quality and New Dawn was the RFA, which operated in Sydney from around 1945 to 1963. This registered film society was run

mostly by enthusiastic CPA members, including Eddie Allison, who recalls that it 'was practically a party organisation' (Personal interview). Its members included Norma Disher, and throughout the period of its operation there was a screening every Sunday night at a number of venues, including the WWF hall. They would show documentaries and socially significant films, such as *The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford, 1919) or *Kid Stakes* (Tal Ordell, 1927). They obtained prints from Quality Films, from other sixteen millimetre film libraries such as the NSW Film Library, and from diplomatic embassies. Ray Clarke, one of the most active members, attributes the establishment of the group to the CPA:

We set up the Realist Film Association, whose role was to screen sixteen millimetre films to the party and branches. In those days, the Party was accused of having what they called front organisations. The RFA was a front organisation, but there were a number of Party and non-Party people there ... there were only two branches, Victoria and NSW, and we used to organise an annual conference every now and again, and get a number of comrades and non-Party people together, to talk about how we could extend our work, and criticise films.

Clarke recalls one time that he and Disher organised a WWFFU film screening, from the Kombi, outside a Bankstown hotel which many local workers frequented in their lunch-hour: 'I announced that there would be a film showing outside, and a lot of the workers came out and brought their beer and watched it'. Such events illustrate the informal exhibition of the WWFFU films, and the network of activists within Sydney's screen culture, especially in the RFA. One film was produced in Sydney under the auspices of the RFA, which introduced the future members of the WWFFU to camera-work. Deane Williams notes that 'as Director of the 1952 Eureka Youth League Carnival, Holmes asked Bob Matthews [of the Victorian RFA] and Keith Gow to film proceedings. The resulting film *They Chose Peace* saw Matthews hand Gow a sixteen millimetre camera for the first time' ('All' 39). This again shows the informal connections that existed between members of the left cultural activist organisations.

As with other forms of cultural activity within the labour movement, an interest in cinema was fostered on the Sydney waterfront by the co-operation of other groups. The Sydney University

Labor Club held special screening nights for wharfies, for instance ('Films for Wharfies'). Prior to the establishment of the WWFFU, a Film Group operated at the Sussex Street building alongside the union's other extra-curricular groups.⁶⁵ The Film Group scheduled screenings at lunchtime, evenings and weekends, and the programs encompassed a wide variety of works. Feature films were shown alongside short films and cartoons. *The Sentimental Bloke* was a favourite, especially after it was discovered that its director, Raymond Longford, worked as a night watchman on the Hungry Mile. The mainstay of the Film Group's screenings was documentaries, of which the WWFFU's films became the most popular. 'Atrocity films' and other 'anti-Nazi' screenings were common. Often wharfies who had migrated from Europe, or men who had been active in World War II, would give a talk on their experiences after these screenings. In their own time after work and on weekends, Film Group members organised screenings at other venues, including hospitals and old men's homes (Parker). The WWF Sydney Branch News and the *Maritime Worker* publicised Film Group screenings and reviews.⁶⁶

Along with the other extra-curricular activities and the philosophy of the Federation leaders, the Film Group was integral to the encouragement of the Film Unit members to begin their work in 1953. They had the energy and skills to extend the cultural activities of the Sydney WWF Branch to embrace film production. Alongside this was the enthusiasm of the Branch leadership to request and encourage this addition to the 'cultural heaven'. Later, in 1954, Nelson outlined his vision for the Film Unit:

I believe it to be an obligation to the working class movement of the main branches of the Federation to extend the library of independent working class films to satisfy the growing demands of the sixteen millimetre film industry ... our plan of the Film Unit is to place a new and important weapon in the hands of the Australian working class and to aid them in the fight against reaction. Further, it is a correct historical process to break with the ruling class in this cultural propaganda facility as we have had to do in the past with our own independent trade union press, the *Maritime Worker*. ('Report' 2)

Within such a statement, Nelson identified the Unit as 'independent' and 'working-class', presumably in contrast to the capitalist production sector. He was aware of the growing popularity of the sixteen millimetre format, and that it could be added to the stock of tools used

by labour activists in their role as propaganda producers; like the three filmmakers, Nelson was a member of the CPA, and was aware of the potential of propaganda. Moreover he saw support for this to be a natural and even necessary extension of the Federation's responsibilities.

The WWFFU films did not screen in mainstream commercial cinemas in Australia. All of the Unit's works were produced on sixteen millimetre stock, and it was unusual in the 1950s for commercial cinemas to provide 'substandard' projection facilities. This was a period when this format experienced a boom in popularity in the non-commercial sector. Projection was more mobile than for 35 millimetre; and throughout the 1950s as projectors became cheaper and more portable, they also became more widely dispersed throughout the country, thus having an increasingly favourable impact on the screening of films such as the WWFFU's.

There is, however, a more compelling reason why WWFFU films did not screen on commercial circuits. Jock Levy recalled the widespread 'trade' opposition to the screening of their films: 'they weren't shown in commercial cinemas ... if you were branded in those times as a socialist or a communist you were finished in your particular profession' (*Film Work*). Here Levy refers to the political feeling of the times, which made the possibility of the WWFFU works turning up in mainstream commercial cinema chains extremely unlikely. Any film that came from a militant organisation such as the WWF—accused by many of being 'red'—met with great suspicion from the commercial exhibition community. To this end, a valuable contribution the WWFFU made to the nature of cinema in Australia was the use of an alternative and organic exhibition system organised at a grassroots level, a feature that was shared by many other left cultural groups of the 1950s.

There were many forces involved in the work of the left cultural activists. They included the political and social training that came with membership of a political party or a workplace. The processes within these types of institutions were involved in the resistance of the dominant culture, in which, in Raymond Williams' term, 'development and advantage are not individually but commonly interpreted' (*Culture* 326). The operation of informal and formal

networks of groups throughout the Sydney artistic and labour communities helped to sustain the work of all of the artist-workers. These alliances may have been direct or indirect, through official channels, or word of mouth, or through personal friendships and acquaintances; however these occurred, they made for a rich cross-fertilisation of information, ideas and energies. There was an emphasis in this culture on education in its broadest sense. The films, plays, folk songs and other products were developed as instruments of education, rather than for the prime objectives of entertainment and profit-making upon which equivalent commercial operations insisted. Alongside the rank and file training schools of the WWF, the CPA schools and cottage meetings, this objective of the left cultural activists contributed to a Gramscian 'permanent discipline' of education (Gramsci, *Modern* 21).

Sydney Screen Culture

As well as the activity of the WWF and the left cultural activist groups, other formations within Sydney's screen culture, which prospered around the time of the WWFFU's existence, are part of the context for the Unit's establishment. It must be emphasised that neither the objectives nor the members of these were completely separated from those of the organisations examined above. As in other periods, the boundaries were blurred between radical filmmaking culture and other filmmaking culture in Sydney; and many workers within the government filmmaking organisation also contributed to non-government films.

Since the early 1940s, with the institutionalisation of federal and state government film hire bodies, non-cinema screening venues were becoming increasingly popular, and one member of the Sydney screen culture of the 1950s recalls how 'the film had its role in this bright new future' (Gowland). Although the sixteen millimetre format had been used for educational purposes since the mid-1920s, it was in response to the changed social and cultural climate of post-war Australia that it provided a widespread means of access to film screenings outside commercial

circuits. Sixteen millimetre films on many topics screened in schools, municipal buildings, libraries, universities, workplaces, and in cottage meetings, thus reaching a variety of audiences and creating an alternative distribution and exhibition system. Film societies, union cultural groups and workers' study groups were formed. They imported, screened and discussed local and overseas films, and in some cases formed their own small but enthusiastic production facilities. Not only were cineastes and filmmakers involved, but educationalists, poets, political activists, dramatists, unionists, and artists. By 1953 the local film trade journal *The Motion Picture Directory* estimated the non-theatrical audience for films in Australia to be six million a year ('Sixteen Millimetre' 1953). This was a dramatic growth, up two million in two years, a change further expressed through the numbers of borrowing groups registered with the NSW Film Council: in 1950 there were around 600 and by 1955, over 3000, with fifty new borrowing groups being registered with the NSW Film Council every month. The enthusiasm for the new format continued with the rise of public screenings in hotel bars, lounges, and country beer gardens ('Sixteen Millimetre' 1955), such as at the Bankstown hotel. There was, then, a rapidly rising popularity of the format with its smaller and cheaper production and exhibition apparatus, which encouraged would-be producers like the WWFFU.

Many screenings of WWFFU films took place in a public area. In considering the control and use of public spaces, Michael Bommers and Patrick Wright suggest that 'everyday struggles in the factory or work-place—over the use of streets, even over the form of the pub—are a permanent negotiation between the subordinated and the dominant classes over forms of social organisation, public property, political participation, etc' (262). The use of public space in which to circulate political opinion was common in the 1950s. The street-corner orator, the political meeting at the factory gate, the street performances of New Theatre troupes, the use of the Domain and large arenas and amphitheatres for rallies and meetings were regular events. Alongside their fellow participants in the peace and labour movements, the WWF Film Unit adopted this use of public spaces in their screening practice.

As well as these non-commercial venues, mobile screening venues such as the WWFFU's Kombi were not unusual; similar mobile daylight screening procedures had been employed earlier in Australia. When sound came to Australian screen culture and not all cinemas were wired up, Hoyts had mobile trucks showing sound films in rural areas. The practice continued during World War II for army troops. During the 1940s, Ken Coldicutt of the Melbourne RFA had plans to set up such a facility, but it never eventuated, asserts Deane Williams, 'due to a lack of funds' ('Making' 175). And in the 1950s the Shell Oil Company's film production arm used screening vans in each state to supplement its theatrettes (Heyer 121).

Another development in Australian screen culture of the 1950s was the sharp increase in foreign films (both features and shorts) appearing on Australian screens. Local interest in so-called foreign language or 'continental' films reflected not only European migration, but the broader tastes of increasing numbers of English-speaking viewers, with screenings in commercial cinemas as well as through film societies and festivals.⁶⁷ By the end of the 1950s, even the major distributors were offering continental films. Continental cinemas, with their screenings devoted to these works, were springing up; the Savoy, the Paris, the Vogue at Double Bay and the Metro in King's Cross were popular. Along with film societies, film festivals played a role in establishing film—feature and non-feature—as an aesthetic object in its own right. They also opened up opportunities for an increasing number of people to see local, continental, documentary and oppositional works. The efforts of Quality Films and New Dawn, in particular, in bringing foreign films to Sydney did much to bring the work of Russians like Eisenstein and Pudovkin to the attention of Sydney film enthusiasts.

Film societies were important components of the growing non-commercial screen culture of which the WWFFU was a part. Documentaries, especially locally produced ones such as those from the Unit, were popular in film society screenings, as were foreign films. The founders and most active members of these groups were often from universities, unions and workers' groups (such as the Workers' Educational Association). Films screened alongside talks, discussions and filmmakers' visits, and were often accompanied by slide, painting or poster exhibitions. By 1953,

the Sydney Film Society, the Sydney University Film Group, the Independent Film Group, and the WEA Film Study Group were active in Sydney. Many published their own programs and newsletters, with reviews and other information, and helped to promote non-commercial, and often non-feature, screen culture. The members of these groups were from a wide range of backgrounds: the DOI, commercial and non-commercial production organisations, independents, and film enthusiasts of every type.

Sydney's screen culture was not immune from Cold War polarisation of opinion; this is evident in a 1951 *Film Guide* article by Neil Gunther, the Secretary of the Independent Film Group. The article begins 'Have you any Communists in your film society committee? If so my advice is to get rid of them as fast as you can'. The early days of the Sydney Film Festival (SFF) were likewise politically sensitive, and some films were criticised by some festival executives for their militant viewpoint. Cecil Holmes' *Three in One* was rejected, for instance, because of its perceived political slant. John Heyer, filmmaker and Festival Committee member in 1954-55, said 'those were the days when there was a communist under every bed. We had our own McCarthyism here. Quite disgusting. I remember somebody at our film society screening committee saying we shouldn't screen *Ten Days that Shook the World* because it came from a communist country' (SFF, *Oral* 9). Independent filmmaker John Kingsford-Smith, who ran Kingcroft Studios, was also a SFF committee member (1954-68) and its Vice-President (1956-60). Disher alleged that 'all we knew about Kingsford-Smith was of his opposition to the screening [of *The Hungry Miles* at the 1955 SFF]. He was one of the loudest voices against screening it' (Interview). Despite the debate, the film was screened. There were, however, more positive connections with other film enthusiasts. Disher believed that the Unit 'had good relationships with people associated with the Film Festival, like Sylvia Lawson and David Donaldson, who knew what we were doing, and were enthusiastic and supportive of what we were doing' (Interview).⁶⁸

Although distribution and exhibition were healthy areas of Sydney's screen culture, production was another story. The feature film production sector was well and truly shackled by 1951,

when the Menzies Government prohibited the formation of public companies for specified undertakings whose capital exceeded £10,000, and this included the production of films (Shirley and Adams 183). Overseas interests had controlled most sections of mainstream screen culture for decades; Australia was viewed as a steady and stable market for foreign-produced films. In 1954, Holmes complained that 'Australian films make no impact on the Australian people: they have little significance culturally or economically because they are virtually non-existent' ('The Film' 191). Three years later he observed that 'our industry has reached the point of extinction' (*One Man* 47). In terms of feature films, the fifties were, indeed, a nadir of production (to be surpassed only by the early 1960s). From 1953 to 1958 only eight feature films were made in this country by Australians.⁶⁹ Films made in Australia, but with directors and funding from overseas, were also rare: a total of six were made in that five year period.⁷⁰ Although these did little to help improve the profile of the Australian feature film sector, they did provide work for some local cast and crew. Keith Gow and Jock Levy of the WWFFU worked on feature films before, during and after their work in the Unit, gaining valuable technical experience of the feature production processes.

The early impulse of many Australian film historians was to concentrate on features, and this has tended to support the impression that the period was, overall, one of unproductivity. Pike and Cooper consider that 'in the Menzies era, public and governmental preoccupation with material well-being and political security made the absence of an Australian film culture a matter of little general concern; the past achievements of the industry were forgotten ... the film industry had reached an all-time low' (264). In an important omission, such writers disregard the considerable activity that was going on outside features. Although indigenous features were rare, non-feature filmmaking kept production alive in the 1950s. It was a time when documentary and other non-feature film dominated Australian production. The expansion of this sector of our screen culture was quite considerable, partly enabled by the sudden growth in popularity of the sixteen millimetre format. Following the visit of documentary icon John Grierson to Australia, the government established the DOI, and its production facility, the Australian National Film Board, in 1945. Under the leadership of Stanley Hawes at its Burwood

facilities in Sydney, the unit produced 149 short films from 1953 to 1958, along with 47 episodes of the *Australian Diary* and *Australian Colour Diary* series.⁷¹ Non-government industrial and sponsored documentaries (such as those made by the WWFFU) were increasingly common. Kingcroft, run by Jack Kingsford-Smith and Jack Gardiner, made some 200 documentaries in the 1950s (A Buckley 41). Typical Kingcroft titles were *Artificial Insemination of Dairy Cattle*, *Camping for Education*, *The Case of the Premature Baby*, *Coal*, and *Snowy Mountains Scheme*.

As well as the documentary, the newsreel constituted an exception to the domination of Sydney screens by overseas works, allowing Australians to see representations of their own culture. Commercial newsreels were popular during this period; they screened in Sydney in most cinemas accompanying feature films, and at specialist newsreel theatres (such as the Wynyard, the Newsluxe, and the State Theatre and the Gala in Pitt Street) with exhibition time entirely devoted to the newsreel. Newsreel studios also produced short documentary films, which, along with the newsreels, were exported and widely screened. The WWFFU appropriated this powerful and popular format and made an episode of their own newsreel in 1956, on the Federation's industrial action: *WWF Newsreel No. 1* shows strike activity at WWF branches throughout NSW and Victoria. In the same year the Unit produced another newsreel titled *Banners Held High*, a record of the 1955 and 1956 Sydney May Day marches, for the NSW TLC. Disher reflects on the Film Unit's aspirations for continuing the series:

We had this dream that we were going to make regular newsreels, turn them out and get them off to the [WWF] branches on a regular basis, and we were going to use *the style that they were used to*. But we were going to change the content! ... we wouldn't have got them on to theatres, but we would have at least got them onto the waterfront, and on to the places where people were, *in the sort of style that they were used to*. (Interview) [my emphases]

A great deal of the basis for establishing the WWFFU lay in the period's wealth of non-commercial screen culture. The championing of the sixteen millimetre format found a propitious intersection with the aims and energies of the labour movement in the Unit's work.

There were many contradictions in Sydney society of the 1950s, and out of both positive and negative manifestations of these, the work of the WWFFU arose. The oppressively negative atmosphere for the militant labour movement, notably from areas of the government and mainstream press, led to the establishment of the Unit as another form of propaganda to counter such opinions. The small but active protest movement and its emphasis on collective action was a powerful legacy for the WWFFU members. Groups like the New Theatre that, despite Cold War prejudices, gathered left-wing people in a community in which oppositional cultural work could be achieved, set up the preconditions for the establishment of the Unit (and, indeed, a place where the Unit members initially met). And lastly, the popularity of both sixteen millimetre film and the documentary impulse in Australia gave the Unit an affordable medium to take an increasingly accepted film form to its audience.

¹ The opening sentence of a book which claims to help readers to 'understand the way we were' in the fifties is a fitting example of my point: 'If you ask people what they remember of the 1950s their eyes glaze over and either they soon come alive with enthusiastic recollections of the new car and fridge, or they shake their heads, dismissing the time as the most boring years of their lives' (Lees and Senyard 1).

² See, for instance, B Carroll; Curthoys and Merritt; Lees and Senyard; D Lowe, *Menzies*; Murphy; Murphy and Smart; Prasser Nethercote and Warhurst; Sowden.

³ I draw the reader's attention to George Morgan's bibliography, which concludes the collection (ed Curthoys and Merritt).

⁴ For more on the political situation of Australia in the decade after the end of World War II, see Alexander; Aughterson; Barclay and Siracusa; N Brown, *Governing*; B Carroll; Casey; Curthoys and Merritt; Griffiths; Lowe, *Menzies*; Murphy; Webb.

⁵ Menzies defined communism as 'anti-British, anti-Australian, and pro-Russian' ('Oust Communists'). In 1950 he claimed that 'we are not at peace today, except in a technical sense' (*Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 27 April 1950). For a study of Cold War anti-communism in Australia, see Brett, *Robert Menzies*; Warhurst.

⁶ For an account of the Menzies Government's defence and foreign policy objectives, see Lowe, *Menzies*. The defence budget was increased not only for external purposes: the Federal Government also deployed troops in industrial disputes (Louis, 'Operation Alien').

⁷ Richard Casey, the Minister of External Affairs, often referred to the communist threat as an octopus, with its head in Moscow or Peking and its tentacles stretching out through South-East Asia to Australia (80). For Casey's version of Eisenhower's 'domino theory', see *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 27 October 1954.

⁸ For example, the SMH was a widely read local indicator of this view, albeit from an unashamedly right-wing stance, and its editorials often reminded readers of the northern threat, in which it warned that conflicts in South-East Asia 'are not really remote from us. The prospect of an extension of Communist influence through Malaya into Indonesia is one that no Australian could contemplate with an easy mind' ('Australia's').

⁹ The *Bulletin* concluded that 'the Petrov affair has notably changed the whole character of the Australian outlook. It has transformed Communism from a quasi-political into a national issue' ('Petrov').

¹⁰ The editor of the SMH found the 'political terrorism' of McCarthy horrifying, and looked forward to the downfall of this 'bullying accuser' ('Political'). And although it saw McCarthy's task as just, even the *Bulletin* portrayed McCarthy as 'a wild extremist' (Ek Dum).

¹¹ see Cain; Capp.

¹² For two reports of the Movement see Ormonde; Santamaria, *Santamaria*. The 'Association' was an influential right-wing group, active in NSW in 1947 to 1952, formed by former members of the Old Guard.

¹³ This rhetoric of progress had at least one critic. Ernest Mander countered that 'it is, I suppose, an inevitable result of what is usually regarded as the 'progress' of civilisation, of large-scale 'organisation' and of 'mechanisation'—which give us always more and more wonderful things, mass-produced, at the cost of making duller and yet duller men and women' (114).

¹⁴ The argument for progress was also employed politically. As David Lowe explains, the Prime Minister saw the need for rapid development as an effective defence in the Cold War (*Menzies* 127).

¹⁵ Communist writer Bill Brown wrote that 'the mass migration scheme has, of course, been falsely put forward by Liberal and Labor politicians alike as a most patriotic plan designed to protect Australian security and development. In cold reality, it is a callous plan devised to serve the interests of big business with brutal indifference to the hardship it causes either to Australian workers or migrants who are brought here' ('Mass').

¹⁶ Nicholas Brown describes how the Australian worker of the 1950s 'was invited into a new democracy in which individual adjustment and affluence provided a more attractive prospect than class conflict' (*Governing* 122). See also Judith Brett's study of 'conservatism's championing of the individual' ('Menzies' 165).

¹⁷ National identity of this period, like most others before and after it, was an almost exclusively white, Anglocentric, masculinist concern.

¹⁸ In a 1954 article written to celebrate the Royal visit, historian CEW Bean supported this ideal when he asserted that the Australian people's outlook 'is based on Christian ethics; and sober Christian standards, springing in innumerable good homes and church communities, are far more widespread than some may imagine'.

¹⁹ Even by 1957, Australians' support for the British monarchy was still 77% (qtd. in McLachlan 275).

²⁰ As Graeme Turner writes in *National Fictions*, 'within such constructions ... minorities are marginalised; and divisions or conflicts within society are minimised in deference to the overriding, accepted priorities of the nation which unite the people' (108). Within the booming post-war economy, many communists saw monopoly capitalism, the rise in local popularity of American culture, and the corporate, consumer view of citizenship as threats to Australia's independence.

²¹ Anne Coombs recalls that 'the mid-1950s in Australia were years of prosperity and security for many but they were also years of discord, of strong and sharply divided feelings. Menzies' 'forgotten people', the 'silent majority' ... might have been thankful for a safe, harmonious and conventional life, but there was no shortage of political bunfights' (84).

²² For some accounts of Australian protest actions of the 1950s, see A Blake, 'Eureka'; J Blake, 'Youth'; B Carter; Deery; Rasmussen; Summy and Saunders.

²³ These organisations included the Australian Peace Council, the Democratic Rights Council, the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines.

²⁴ When a number of Commonwealth Investigation officers raided Sydney communists' homes and offices in 1953, the *Bulletin* noted that 'the underground proceedings of the party, through satellite 'peace councils', unions, youth councils and other false fronts, continue to advertise how right the Menzies Government was in 1949 when it pledged itself to declare the party illegal. It continues to be a cancer in the heart of the community, the agent of the enemy who is killing Australians in Korea. It is seeking to sow not only distrust, industrial unrest and class-war, but seeds of a third world war' ('Communist Party Raided'). One 1954 SMH editorial described peace and youth conventions as 'spurious' ('The Petrov Affair').

²⁵ For histories of the CPA, see W Brown, *Communist*; A Davidson, *Communist*; Macintyre, *Reds*; O'Lincoln; Sworakowski. For Australian Communists' reminiscences, see J Beasley; A Blake, *Proletarian*; Bull, *Life*; Day; Ferrier, *Point*; Fox, *Australians*; O Gray; Hardy; E Healy; E Hill;

Holmes, *One*; A Johnson; T and A McDonald; Milliss; Moran; Sendy; Sharkey, *Sharkey*; Short; Stein, *Glance*; Throssell; V Williams.

²⁶ In 1957, six years after the failure of the Communist Dissolution Bill Referendum, two-thirds of respondents to an opinion poll were in favour of the prohibition of the CPA (qtd. in Warhurst 54).

²⁷ A possible exception came in 1943 when communists failed to win the Victorian ALP State Conference by 15 votes (Henry 59).

²⁸ The Movement, or the Catholic Social Studies Movement, was an organisation founded by BA Santamaria in 1942. In 1945 the Movement established the Industrial Groups within the ALP to openly rid the labour movement of communists. The actions of the Movement and the Groups led to the ALP split.

²⁹ One member wrote in the early 1950s that 'many people succumbed to public feeling. They considered (not always consciously) that security, advancement, personal relationships with neighbours, friends or relations, would be jeopardised should their CP affiliations be known. As a consequence many remained quiet, stopped attending meetings, slackened in activity, kept their membership secret and slowly drifted out. Had Party policies been impeccably designed to suit Australian conditions no doubt the losses would have been less ... membership ... declined to between 8,000 and 9,000 in 1955, largely as a result of Cold War anti-Communism but helped along by CPA mistakes' (Sendy 61-62).

³⁰ NSW Teachers' Federation Secretary and CPA member Sam Lewis has been remembered as 'a man of great courage, tireless energy and unquestioned integrity' (B Smith, *Boy* 280); another member recalls that 'at that stage, when there was such savage anti-communist attitudes, Sam wouldn't have come out ... if he'd announced himself as a communist it would have made things much more difficult for a large number of very progressive teachers, who were not against the party ... as soon as you were known as a communist you were isolated at once' (J Clarke Interview).

³¹ For the Victorian Federation of Film Societies, the film's 'importance lies in the fact that it is one of the rare films of community protest' ('Question').

³² At the beginning of 1953 (when the Australian population was 8.8 million), the national unemployment figure was 42,033; in NSW it was 25,274, and in Sydney 21,673 people were unemployed ('Jobless').

³³ Australian employees' membership in trade unions reached its highest point in 1954 of 59% (qtd. in Martin 3).

³⁴ In 1953, there were 1,080 industrial disputes in NSW, with 759,391 days lost; by 1958, there were 624 disputes with 231,537 days lost (*Year Book* 41 (1955): 294; 46 (1960): 460).

³⁵ In 1953, there were 1,080 industrial disputes in NSW, with 759,391 days lost; by 1958, there were 624 disputes with 231,537 days lost (*Year Book* 41 (1955): 294; 46 (1960): 460). For an overview of the Australian industrial situation in this period, see Ian Turner. 'Living with the Liberals, 1951-72', *Union*; Sheridan, 'Trade'.

³⁶ The Coal Industry Tribunal and the Stevedoring Industry Review Committee had been established previously; changes in legislation included the Arbitration Act amendments of 1951 and 1956, with the penal clauses and Commonwealth Industrial Court, the Navigation Act amendments of 1952, and the 1956 Stevedoring Industry Act.

³⁷ The mining industry was one sector particularly affected by modernisation. Ian Turner notes that 'mechanisation of mining meant that, through the decade 1950-60, nearly five million tons more coal was produced by five thousand less men; the resulting pressure on the labour market weakened the Miners' Federation and limited its influence in the movement generally' (*Union* 117). The closure of mines and loss of employment resulting, in part, from modernisation, was a matter of concern to unionists; one of the resulting demonstrations, a rally through the streets of Cessnock in September 1958, is depicted in *The True Believers* and the WWFFU's *Hewers of Coal*.

³⁸ From the late 1930s until the late 1950s CPA members were especially prominent in left-wing trade union leadership, most notably in the ACSEF, ARU, AEU, Federated Ironworkers' Association, Sheetmetal Workers' Union, WWF and the Seamen's Union. Communist working-class activists like Jim Healy, Tom Wright, Ernie Thornton and Ray Clarke found their way into

mainly manual trade unions, although the NSW Teachers' Federation and the Actors' and Announcers' Equity were also led from time to time by communists.

³⁹ Coal-mining, the nation's most strike-prone industry, was responsible for 55% of all disputes in the 1950s (Markey, *Case* 355).

⁴⁰ Party executive Lance Sharkey wrote that the CPA 'stands for the broadest united front with the ALP rank and file and also with those ALP leaders who fight for a progressive policy for the labour movement' ('Labour' 231).

⁴¹ Around 150,000 immigrants arrived in Australia every year in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Lowe, *Menzies* 139).

⁴² In 1949, the American Central Intelligence Agency claimed that 'there is some indication that the CPA controls a number of longshoremen and seamen's unions in Southeast Asian countries. It is one of the strongest Communist parties of the region and has extended assistance to various independence movements [such as] Communists in Indonesia, Eire, Latin America, India and Malaya' (qtd. in Cain 4).

⁴³ The advent of bulk loading in the maritime industry led to a loss of approximately 4,500 positions between 1957 and 1961 (V Williams 194).

⁴⁴ The gang system was introduced in 1943, but remnants of the 'bull' system lingered on the Sydney wharves until 1962 (Finnimore). In the 'bull' system of employment, every day men would line up before a foreman, who would choose those lucky enough to work. Those who were physically strongest, or who could bring enough enticements to the foreman, would be chosen. The system encouraged favoritism and was inherently unfair.

⁴⁵ This was not the case in other areas: the anti-communist Industrial Groups had a presence in branches over the country, and they controlled the Melbourne WWF Branch. Just as some NSW unionists championed their left-wing leadership, the Melbourne Grouper publication was proud to see the Groups 'undoubtedly, across Australia, provide their worth in helping members of the trade union movement to retain industrial democracy against the inroads obviously being made by Communism' ('Inroads').

⁴⁶ Wharfie Harry Stein recalled that 'the pubs on the waterfront during lunchtime and after work were filled with wharfies discussing the industrial and political issues of the day'.

⁴⁷ The Federal Government considered that 'a majority of watersiders will repudiate their Communist leaders' (qtd. in 'Government May'). The *Bulletin* wrote that 'the workers in this pampered industry show no sense of responsibility towards the community which keeps them in comfort and half-idleness. Their leaders, concerned only with their work as agents for Communism (which has as its deliberate objective the breakdown of the Western economy and civilisation), encourage them in every tendency likely to produce chaos' ('Lawless').

⁴⁸ In 1954 the Federal Government, in collaboration with shipping interests, attempted to wrest from the Federation the right to recruit waterside labour, in the proposed changes to the Stevedoring Industry Bill. The strike that ensued, supported by the ACTU and many other workers and labour organisations, ended in a victory for the Federation and for the Australian labour movement.

⁴⁹ WWF Sydney Branch Secretary Tom Nelson defended the campaign: 'in the course of the struggle, the Overseas Shipping Combine and the Menzies Government relied greatly on the red bogey, both in their cunning plan and the barrage of red-baiting by the press and political spokesmen. The wharfies answered this and kept the press on its toes by mass demonstrations and deputations to the critics, when they overstepped the mark' (*Hungry* 122).

⁵⁰ In 1954 WWF members in Cairns organised the world's first successful strike over a nuclear issue when they banned the handling of cargo from a ship that had passed near a testing site in the Pacific Ocean, and during the following year Sydney wharfies refused to load guns and bombs which were to be used by the French fighting in Indo-China and Malaya.

⁵¹ No comprehensive history of the CPA's cultural work has yet been written.

⁵² Stuart Macintyre describes how the early period of Party existence 'sustained a whole spectrum of alternative cultural activity' (*Reds* 416). Frank Farrell lyrically explains that 'around the CPA sun rotated a bewildering array of organisations which reflected its light and extended its field of gravity' (231).

⁵³ The gender-specific language is historically accurate; most workers outside the home in this period were men.

⁵⁴ This was a nine-day event, and the main activities were held at Hollywood Park, near Sydney's Bankstown airport. The carnival attracted 2,364 international participants and crowds as large as 30,000. It was organised by members of the Australian Peace Council and the Eureka Youth League, the young people's arm of the CPA. The Carnival's chairperson was communist filmmaker Cecil Holmes; he later produced *They Chose Peace* to document the event. The Carnival was conducted in the face of severe opposition. This was not altogether surprising considering that when the carnival was announced in November 1951, it was only two months after the Commonwealth Referendum on Communists and Communism (A Blake, 'Eureka'; Deery; L Milner, 'Challenge'; Poynting).

⁵⁵ Coombs observed that two Sydney Push members, Roelof Smilde and Darcy Waters, became wharfies in the 1950s because of this flexibility (45).

⁵⁶ One such organisation was the Margaret Barr Dance Group. In 1952 when they performed on the Sydney wharves and the police intervened, the wharfies went on strike for a day as a protest (A Blake, 'Eureka'). Margaret, a member of the New Theatre, was not a CPA member, but lent her support, and would often bring her group to perform at a union or CPA factory gate meeting.

⁵⁷ Ian Burn notes that 'the political culture of mainstream art, including its intellectual supports, has strong middle-class attachments, social and economic dependencies on class institutions' (4).

⁵⁸ More research on each of these groups is necessary to widen the picture of our national cultural identities.

⁵⁹ Artists involved in SORA during the fifties included Rod Shaw, John Oldham, Nan Hortin, Clem Seale, Roy Dalgarno, Herbert McClintock, Bernard Smith and Hal Missingham, who worked alongside wharfie-artists like Clem Millward, Sonny Glynn, Leon Lewis and Ralph Sawyer.

⁶⁰ During the 1949 coal strike, for instance, a concert party travelled from the Sydney New Theatre to the Newcastle area to entertain the strikebound workers and their families. And in 1952 two plays were performed to striking miners inside coal mines (Noakes 21).

⁶¹ *War on the Waterfront* was also presented throughout the Wollongong area by a newly-formed drama group from the Port Kembla wharves (Lockwood 182).

⁶² After this new venue was organised, Jim Healy's influence with some mainstream Sydney newspapers did provide the New Theatre with a small amount of publicity (Disher, interview).

⁶³ An estimated 450,000 Australians saw *Reedy River* (*New Years* 10).

⁶⁴ It has been suggested that Holmes resigned from New Dawn because of an extended period of differences of opinion with Milliss. Co-worker Bryce Higgins remembered Holmes: 'Yes, he was a bit red, but so what? I liked his ideas [but because of his politics] he wouldn't have been offered [a great deal of] work'.

⁶⁵ Such film groups operated at other WWF branches throughout Australia in the 1950s, notably in Melbourne and Brisbane.

⁶⁶ One such article read: 'The WWF Film Group needed projectionists to assist the Group in mobile screenings at waterfront canteens, Jock Levy, one of the leaders of the Group, told the *Maritime Worker*. Projection classes ... would continue each week. Member Levy appealed to watersiders to learn film projection, and thus improve their usefulness to the Federation in its struggles ('Film Operators').

⁶⁷ In terms of 35 millimetre features for theatrical release in 1952 a record 28 films or 7.2% of the 390 features certified by the Censors were noted in the 'Other' category. By the end of the decade the figure was 28% of the total, or 129 35 millimetre features. There was a corresponding growth in listings of Distributors dealing primarily in Continental films. Among 19 distributors listed in the 1950-51 *Motion Picture Directory*, the Hollywood majors dominate but there are already 3 smaller distributors offering foreign films. By 1952-53, the *Directory* is impelled to note the favourable public reaction to these offerings. The 1954-55 *Directory* reports a rise in the

popularity of foreign films, now distributed by 12 specialist companies out of the 29 distributors listed.

⁶⁸ Another filmmaker with an interest in the work of the WWFFU was John Morris, a member of the Sydney University Film Society who worked at the DOI from 1952, and later became the head of the South Australian Film Corporation. Morris would occasionally visit the Unit at Sussex Street and watch them work, or give assistance.

⁶⁹ Through their own production company, Lee Robinson and Chips Rafferty made most of these: *The Phantom Stockman* in 1953, *King of the Coral Sea* (1954), *Walk into Paradise* (1956), shot in New Guinea, *Dust in the Sun* (1956, not released until 1960) and *The Stowaway* (1958), shot in Tahiti. Charles Chauvel made his last film production, the beautiful and haunting *Jedda*, in 1955. Cecil Holmes made *Captain Thunderbolt* (completed in 1953 but not released until 1955) and *Three in One* (1956), which received an Australian theatrical release in its entirety only once.

⁷⁰ An American-Australian co-production, *Long John Silver* (Byron Haskin, 1953), was our first Cinemascope film. British films were Anthony Kibbins' *Smiley* (1956), and *Smiley Gets a Gun* (1958), both part-funded by USA's Fox studios, *The Shiralee* (Leslie Norman, 1957), and Jack Lee's *A Town Like Alice* (1956) and *Robbery Under Arms* (1957).

⁷¹ Figures as listed in Adamson, *A Film Australia Miscellany* 105-111. The work of Judith Adamson, Tom O'Regan and Albert Moran has especially expanded research on this organisation.

Fig 4. Still from *The Hungry Miles* (WWFFU, 1955)

Chapter Four

Three Films: Case Studies

This chapter discusses the filmwork of the WWFFU. The three producers responded to the cinematic conditions of the 1950s by employing commonly circulating genres and discourses. Although Gow once suggested that it could be called 'social realism', the Unit members did not generally subscribe to the pigeonholing of their work in any one cinematic category (*Film Work*). The 1950s was a period in which the international documentary movement flourished; because of its availability, the Unit members saw much of this type of work. In 1989 Stuart Cunningham and William Routt made this observation on Australian postwar film:

In the postwar years the dominant notions of film art arose out of documentary cinema and Italian neorealism, both socially committed types of filmmaking, while Soviet silent films made twenty years before were considered to be classics. Left politics and aesthetics were often hard to separate among film buffs of the period.

As this chapter notes, documentaries of Australia, Britain and USA, and newsreels—situated by many film theorists within the documentary mode—had influences on the work of the WWFFU. Their films also display aspects of non-documentary films, especially the works of the Soviet Montagists, the classical Hollywood feature film, and Italian neorealist productions. Following Cunningham and Routt, then, it appears that the WWFFU films were entirely characteristic of their time.

Although their stylistic characteristics lay within cinematic norms of their time, the treatment of their subject matter was not so usual; this was situated in the filmmakers' industrial and political sphere. As I suggest below, the determination of the Unit to produce films that asserted the rights of workers lay in the political nature of the Unit's sponsors. Levy's opinion on the general aesthetic tendencies of the Unit's work was that:

we created a precedent as the Film Unit was unique to Australia, indeed the whole world, and looking back critics have compared the Unit's work to the Italian Neorealist movement, to de Sica, to the Russian Sergei Eisenstein, that it followed in the tradition of the English documentary makers such as Grierson and others. The plain truth is that it

was no such bloody thing—its uniqueness was it was made by waterside workers for waterside workers and the trade unionists presenting a worker's point of view. (Address)

Here, Levy argues that the Unit's work does not correspond to any one style; he denies any influence from other films. I dispute Levy's claim, and argue in this chapter that the WWFFU films do show influences, not only from cinematic but from other cultural forms. Turner asserts that:

The filmmaker, like the novelist or the story-teller, is a *bricoleur*—a sort of handyman who does the best s/he can with the materials at hand. The film-maker uses the representational conventions and repertoires available within the culture in order to make something fresh but familiar, new but generic, individual but representative. (*Film* 131)

As this chapter will show, the WWFFU films were by no means unique, but in many ways they were very new and individual productions.

A detailed analysis of every WWFFU film is not the purpose of this thesis (see Appendix A). This chapter examines closely only three key productions: *The Hungry Miles* (1955), *Hewers of Coal* (1957) and *Not Only the Need* (1958). These works have been chosen for study as they represent three stages in the progression and development of the Unit's style and goals, and embody significant characteristics of the Unit's work. For each, I provide background information on the film's origin, offer an outline of its content and an analysis of its form, style and aesthetic characteristics, and give an evaluation of the work's exhibition and effects. Examination of these three productions helps to understand how the WWFFU portrayed the Australian labour movement and the working class, and how it constructed and developed images of labour through the progressing concerns of its films. The three works examined encompass almost the whole period of the Unit's operation. *The Hungry Miles* was the second film made for the WWF; and shortly after *Not Only the Need* was completed in May 1958, the Unit was disbanded, after not having produced any filmwork for the WWF for a year.

The Hungry Miles

The members of the WWFFU regarded *The Hungry Miles* (1955) as their most significant film, and 'an important social document' (*The Hungry Miles Pamphlet*). It has been described as 'probably the most impressive of the Unit's surviving work' (Shirley and Adams 196), and 'the most accomplished' film of the WWFFU (Shirley 38); it has also been distinguished as 'a documentary classic' ('Arising'). As detailed below, *The Hungry Miles* represents, in many ways, a classic film within the Griersonian ideal of documentary (Bertrand, 'Theory'; Cunningham, 'Documentary' 41).

In late 1954 WWF General Secretary Jim Healy approached the filmmakers and asked if they could produce a work on the union's industrial conflicts. A source of inspiration came from a pamphlet written by Sydney Branch leader Tom Nelson. Nelson's work, *The Hungry Mile*, presents a history of the struggles for improved working conditions on the Sydney waterfront. The filmmakers drew from Nelson's chronicle, and from the recollections of veteran waterside workers. Their goal was to produce a film that answered the criticism of the waterfront's industrial unrest, in parliament and in some sections of the mainstream press. The film advances the argument that the current disputes are justified by the history of the Australian waterfront industry, as outlined earlier in this thesis.

The film has four loosely defined sections within its 25 minutes of length. The first of these introduces the audience to Australian waterside workers, and asserts their important role in the nation in supplying labour for the waterfront. It begins with its title superimposed over a wide shot of the Sydney harbour area. The title is replaced with a map of Australia (without Tasmania), with the words 'Produced by' above the island mass, 'The WWF' inside the island mass (equating that union with the nation), and 'Sydney' underneath. This is in outline, and still superimposed over the harbour scene. Stirring music is heard over this title section, which then fades to a close-up shot of a ship's steam hooter sounding, a wake-up call for attention to the body of the film.

The next few shots establish a peaceful mood on Sydney harbour, demonstrating how waterside workers, in normal times, keep things going smoothly and play their part in the web of life. Tranquil uplifting music is heard as Leonard Teale's voice-over begins, introducing the viewers to the maritime community. The soundtrack is matched by tranquil scenes: all is as it should be, with tugs plying their trade and ships moving purposefully about the harbour. The narrator argues that 'ships make all men neighbours' as we see physically different merchant seamen working together; a small initial hint that these ships and their workers are part of the internationalist current of socialism, working together co-operatively, contrary to some presumptions of Cold War international tensions. Shots in this sequence are from a number of angles, filmed from the Sydney harbour bridge at a ship going beneath it, as well as from over the harbour. In all of these wide and mid shots that help establish the scene, the viewer can see the men walking about the ships, working them.

Following this peaceful cityscape we move to scenes of rural life. Wool, one of the most important Australian export products of the 1950s, is seen first on the sheep's backs and then in bales going into the holds of ships. We are introduced to the waterside workers for the first time in medium and close-up shots, as they wield the bales into place with their hooks. Another sequence of rural life follows: a farmer drives his tractor to till the soil, as the waving wheat grows high. We next see the grain in dockside silos in Sydney, being loaded into a ship's hold. Here, the film works to connect the labour of wharfies with rural production, as the narration tells us they 'forge a link in a vital chain'. In an inference resonant of the 1950s' radical nationalist folk revival, this organic link invites the audience to see that waterside workers have vital connections with traditional rural Australia, with its important primary industries, even though they work in the city. It demonstrates that wharfies handle all the outward bound wealth of the country, and all the goods Australians need from overseas. This section establishes the authority of the film's argument that the work of wharfies is vital to the ongoing life of Australia, part of the whole process of the life of the nation.

Now the film introduces the harsh working conditions on the waterfront, and the soundtrack changes to a tune with a more sombre feeling. There is a survey of the working conditions of grain handlers, who are almost invisible within their dusty environment in the hold. This continues with shots of the transit of other goods: sulphur, wood and lastly, in a shot that holds a special significance for Australian waterside workers, pig-iron (see Kevins and Mallory; Lockwood; Mallory 'Social'). Over these shots that depict physically arduous working conditions, the narration assures us how efficiently the wharfies are toiling. The music is rousing here, and underlines the wharfies' stoicism by their persistence with this hard work: it must continue because of its importance to the ongoing life of the nation. The section ends with evidence that reinforces the value of these workers' labour: facts and figures of how many wharfies work the nation's waterfront, exactly how much cargo they move in a year, and how that compares with previous years and with other countries.

Through this introductory section there is no usual shot size or style. Most shots indicate the use of a hand-held camera; they range from very wide shots of the harbour to close-ups of wharfies' faces as they work in the ships' holds. Movement from one shot to the next is usually by a straight cut. There are few still shots; many are panning, or following the actions of working men, or the goods they handle. Through this section the wide shots, in which the ships dwarf the workers, gradually disappear. As we are introduced to the harsh working conditions, we are introduced to the men. As they are no longer diminished in stature in comparison to the huge freighters, we can clearly see the faces of the wharfies. There has also been a gradual change from peaceful wide scenes to shots that are closer, rougher and more quickly cut together, which intensify the focus on the men's work, and highlight their severe working conditions.

The first section has, then, introduced the shipping industry, and the work of the wharfies, linking them closely with the vitality and strength of the nation—naturalising this link—whilst showing how they continue to work amid extreme conditions. In the following section, the filmmakers present their opinion of the way in which the mainstream media have represented the current strikes, and the work of the watersiders generally. The pig-iron shot continues as a

segue into this second section, with a medium shot of a gang of wharfies in a hold, loading pig-iron. The narrator's voice becomes more urgent, as he comments that 'industrial storm clouds hover on the waterfront'. His words appear to be replicated in the shot, which is taken from above, the camera looking down onto the men in the hold.

The medium shot cuts to a short but striking close-up of one of those wharfies, looking up at the camera. He watches the pig-iron rise out of the ship's hold. Although the man is probably looking up just to check if his load has cleared the hold, this shot seems to catch him questioning his work (Fig. 3). Over this close-up, the narration again echoes the shot, as it imputes that

the industry, with its reputation of turbulence, seems beset by conflict, and misunderstanding. Harsh and unfounded accusations from the daily newspapers and from the government are common.

The music of the soundtrack changes abruptly to an orchestral piece with a menacing tone, and the scene moves to a special effect of a newspaper spiralling into a close-up. The effect of this is to draw attention to the succeeding shots, that depict these 'unfounded accusations'. There are a number of newspaper articles, headlines, cartoons and photographs, which zoom up at the viewer. This section purports to present evidence of these 'harsh and unfounded accusations'; in one of these shots, however, the film answers with its own invention: superimposed on one of the photographs is newstype reading 'Blame the Wharfies' which did not appear in the original photograph.¹ (This evidence highlights an important concern with representation and reality, which I shall expand upon in the following chapter.) The film's narration tells us who are to blame for these accusations: shipping magnates, who have pressured the government to pass legislation 'regarded by watersiders as repressive'. There are shots of Canberra's Parliament House, leading to recreations of parliamentary bills being passed.

Back on the wharves, there is a reaction to these actions of the shipping bosses: a call to stop work. A series of recreated scenes follows, of men passing the word around, laying down tools, stopping loading and unloading the ships, and walking off the job. There is no argument or

dissent shown here; the men move as one. The narrator tells the audience that this form of resistance is 'a traditional one, a tradition borne from struggles of the past'. With this the film presents the opinion that the wharfies' industrial disputes are justified by a tradition of struggle against hard working conditions and unspecified 'repressive legislation'. After stopping work, the men meet in a large group on the wharf and discuss the action. They put a proposal to a vote, and we see their faces clearly as they raise their hands. There are no recognisable leaders; the scene works to show that it is the rank and file that take the decision to walk off the job, and not the union executives, countering claims that it was a few 'Red' leaders who made these decisions.² It also operates to counter the actions of the mainstream press, which Keith Gow believed depicted these workers as 'powerless rabble' (*Film Work*).

The scene has been set: *The Hungry Miles* argues that wharfies are indispensable to the continuing vitality of the nation. But harsh working conditions, and the 'unfounded accusations' they endure as well as recently enacted regulations which threaten to further diminish their circumstances, have driven the rank and file to strike. Now the film moves backwards in time to explain why waterside workers take such action: 'to understand why, it is essential to understand the background of the industry,' the narration points out. 'It is essential to know something of the bitter memories of the men who worked the waterfront's Hungry Miles, memories of hardship and privation, harsh memories of the thirties'.

The third section of the film presents the extremes of Depression life, and it is within this section that the producers introduce some intriguing issues that dispute the WWFFU's claim of 'filming the facts', as all of the sequences within this section were filmed in the summer of 1954/55. It opens with a superimposed title '1930' over dockside scenes. Next we see the faces of people made hard and bitter by the Depression. The narration follows, with a great deal of sympathy towards the workers. Teale describes recreated scenes of the 'bull' system as 'degrading and inhuman. Lined up like so many cattle, worker was played against worker, unionist against non-unionist, and those who protested didn't get a job'. A sequence depicts shanty town houses and their impoverished occupants—who include indigenous Australians—their rights as

citizens to suitable conditions grossly unfulfilled. In another instance of using recently-shot footage to represent the 1930s, it employs WWFFU footage of actual living conditions in the 1950s (Fig. 4). The filmmakers took a trip to Maroubra and La Perouse, on the southern outskirts of Sydney, to shoot these sequences. The decision of the Unit members to use this to represent Depression times was not an unusual one, as very little or no footage existed on this subject.

In another recreated sequence within this section, men line up outside factories for non-existent work, and protest 'against the injustice of great wealth on one hand and poverty on the other, in the bitter unemployment demonstrations of the thirties'. The music throughout is dramatic, and acts as an emotional cue for the film's viewers, inviting them to sympathise with the Australians who endured such conditions. This section associates waterside workers with other members of the depressed community, implicating the wharfies as another part of the population, just as hard done by as anyone else. It is an emotional, dramatic scene, and again, presents recently recorded film as that from the Depression times.

The Film Unit members recruited hundreds of willing volunteers within the waterfront community to recreate these scenes of mass unemployment, dole queues, and fights for jobs on the wharves, incidents which many of the participants had experienced. Jock Levy admitted that while 'it is not an exact representation', such scenes did work to give the feeling of the times. 'It depicts', he said, 'the kind of strength we tried to convey' (*Film Work*). Although much of this material is re-enacted deliberately for the camera, such as a battle between 'police' and 'protestors' in which all the participants were actually waterside workers, other scenes were filmed just as they happened. This second category, whilst mostly showing men working on the docks and on ships, and scenes of everyday life at La Perouse in 1955, includes footage of a demonstration.

While I was studying this demonstration scene, I became aware that I had seen some of the protestors before; one of them was Stan Moran, a communist, well-known Domain orator and a popular figure in the Sydney WWF Executive, whom Levy has described as an 'indomitable

working class warrior' (Address). Research revealed that this was footage of a demonstration that occurred outside the High Court at Sydney's Taylor Square on 18 January 1955, when Neville Isaacson, a Sydney waterside worker, appeared as a witness at the Royal Commission on Espionage (also known as the Petrov Commission). The SMH reported this incident ('One Thousand') alongside other mainstream media accounts of the Petrov affair ('Dr Evatt'; 'Petrov Sensation'). One of the photographs accompanying this article depicts Moran being pulled from the shoulders of his comrades by police. The newspaper photograph exactly replicates the action in this section of *The Hungry Miles*, as well as footage in a commercial newsreel ('Petrov Inquiry'). It also replicates some film in ASIO's file on the WWF, showing Gow filming the scuffle between Moran and the police. My research had unveiled this evidence that footage of a 1955 demonstration was used to represent a 1930s scene: how does this, and the other 'Depression' footage, sit with the Unit members' assertion that they 'filmed the facts'? This point will be interrogated in the following chapter.

These recreated scenes of Depression poverty and protest are underlined by the narration, which speaks of 'the shame of dole queues in a land of plenty'. This sums up the previous shots, setting them up in opposition to the next sequence which further recreates scenes of life during the Depression, but this time from the perspective of the 'land of plenty'. Firstly a simple animation sequence alludes to the profits made by shipping companies in the 1930s. The shots naming these organisations parallel the newspaper sequence of the previous section, with a spiralling effect. This leads to yet another recreated scene that the Unit members call 'the crab sequence', depicting members of the upper class—presumably the recipients of these great profits—in fancy cars on their way to a great banquet. Over this sequence a poem (a favourite of Gow's) comments:

In the world, you will find
human crabs that eat their kind.
Glutted crabs that devour
all that falls within their power
Crawling in gangs around these capes,
poisonous, bloated crab-like shapes.

And these horrid creatures wet
 with the thick unwholesome sweat,
 have most hideous banquets here
 on a poor drowned mariner. (unknown source)

These shots, of masses of food and champagne being voraciously consumed by men in evening dress and women dripping with jewels, make a strong contrast to the scenes of poverty that have preceded them. The film does not overtly state the causes for such inequality, but just presents the effects, as part of its argument that such disparity is grotesque and iniquitous.

The film now returns to the wharves. Shots of waterfront demonstrations act as a further contrast to the 'crab sequence', another reaction to the existence of great wealth amidst poverty, another reminder of what many people endured through those years. Again, it is a highly emotionally charged section. This time, though, the mood of the film becomes active, militant, aggressive, as we see that some of these unemployed wharfies were prepared to fight for their beliefs—often at the cost of their jobs. The narration again harkens back to 'the great militant labour tradition of Australia', of which, the film argues, these activists are a part. The ship's siren sounds once more, rousing the workers to action. They discuss the issues amongst themselves, on the ships and on the wharves, and again raise their hands to vote.

The chronology of the film then moves to the present day of 1955, and the recreated sequences are left behind. New scenes highlight the importance of unity through the ongoing struggle for better conditions, with shots of mass meetings at the Leichhardt stadium where thousands of workers listen to Federation speakers and vote for their proposals. The film introduces 'one of Australia's greatest trade union leaders', Jim Healy. Although he is the WWF's director, 'it's the rank and file who make the decisions, and make the union policy', the voice-over reminds the audience. A sequence illustrates the Federation's program for its expanding extra-curricular activities. There are scenes of musical concerts, art classes, sports events, and the 1955 WWF picnic; and there is a brief shot of Levy and Gow at a camera, discussing their work. These activities were deemed to figure highly enough within the Federation's program to warrant inclusion.

We are then reminded that not all has progressed: although the union has made great advances, its members still have to work with old wharves and gear. There is a proposal that shipping companies should modernise their equipment, 'in an age of mechanisation and immense profits'. Workers, moreover, are entitled to industrial pensions and improved amenities. 'Surely', the narrator admonishes, 'this is the decent and sensible approach', appealing to the morality of the audience.

In the last sequence of the film we return to scenes of the introduction, men working the ships on Sydney's harbourside. They are industrious, busy, back at work after the struggles for better conditions, listening to Healy and voting for action. The narration apparently voices the thoughts of these men, when it asserts that 'the waterfront workers know that this great and essential industry must be revised to serve the people of Australia, not the lords of the overseas shipping lines', returning to the argument that waterfront work is for the ultimate good of the nation. There are shots of more collective decision-making, groups of men voting and discussing, with close-ups of men in the crowd. They appear dignified within the film's framing, all intensely focused on the issue being discussed. They raise their hands for counting, and they look, upwards and out of the film's frame, to the improved future of the industry – the industry whose benefits they share with all the other citizens of Australia. The following shots show some of these others, factory workers headed homeward at the end of the day. The last visual of the film shows the Eureka Flag proudly flying.

The Hungry Miles premiered in February 1955 at a Leichhardt Stadium stopwork meeting to an audience of approximately five thousand wharfies. The *Maritime Worker* described the film:

The story covers many phases of the maritime industry, and shows the important link between the waterfront, the primary producers and the business community. The cameramen, in many graphic shots, have given the public a telling glimpse of what waterside work really entails. The film is intended as a reply to the slanderous attacks of the shipowners and the corrupt daily press on waterside workers. ('Striking')

Jock Levy believed that 'the rank and file liked it. I think the general public, when it was shown to them, they were sympathetic towards an angle of the waterside workers that they had never, ever seen before' (Hughes interview). There were, however, differences of opinion within the Federation Executive as to the film's worth. Disher explains:

The Hungry Miles wasn't exactly what the Federal office had thought it was going to be. We'd made it a history of the waterfront, and I don't know exactly what they thought they were going to get, but they were none too sure ... we had a feeling that we hadn't exactly delivered what had been expected. (Interview)

The Unit did not have to submit a script before embarking on production of this film, and Disher's comment on its uncertain response indicates the casual proposal that initiated the work; Healy had approached the filmmakers with very little detail in his brief. Gow also remembered that 'it wasn't at all what he [Healy] expected. He'd expected a film, more directly about this particular strike ... it wasn't his expectation to see such a broadly ranging film' (Hughes interview). The WWFFU did go on to produce a film on that particular strike, *November Victory*.

As explained earlier, in the early and mid 1950s debates concerning the actions of waterside workers were common. *The Hungry Miles* is a contribution to these debates from the militant unionist's viewpoint. It works to counter what the Federation believed to be the mainstream media's opinion—to persuade its audience that waterfront disputes are not unjustified. The specific version of history presented through the film supports this argument, both from the factual evidence it chooses to highlight, and from its sympathetic presentation. The voice of Leonard Teale is firm and decisive, and his narration endorses the audience's belief in the authenticity of his claims. Many of the shots are obviously hand-held, and even the recreated scenes do not have a feeling of staginess about them, which also assists in their claim to authenticity. Support for the wharfies is further invited through the rousing of viewers' nationalist sentiments: that this is an indispensable industry to Australia. The film is unashamedly emotive: it operates to guide the emotions of the audience to sympathise with the wharfies and further their cause. It mythologises the history of the WWF as one of unity and righteousness; there are no criticisms of the leadership's tactics or the wharfies' actions. It does

acknowledge, however, that 'the industry, with its reputation of turbulence, seems beset by conflict'.

The Hungry Miles adheres to many of the norms of the classical Griersonian documentary as expressed in DOI productions of the period. Its form takes a fairly standard one: a set of images, arranged loosely into areas by topic, with a soundtrack composed of music and an authoritative 'voice of God' male narration. As in many other cases, both the DOI and the WWFFU had a tendency to mythologise their subjects as united, and correct in their arguments: in *The Hungry Miles*, the WWFFU filmmakers presume that the wharfies they represent are united in their belief in strikes as the correct line of action. They also imply that the 'harsh accusations' in the mainstream press and government are totally unfounded. Like many DOI works of the early 1950s, this film has an ultimate social goal, to improve the fabric of people's lives; as Stanley Hawes, the DOI's Producer-in-Chief, said, to 'improve the human condition' (qtd. in Adamson, 'Stanley Hawes').

The members of the WWFFU believed that DOI films of this period did not give as realistic a picture of Australian life as their own. Gow worked for the DOI from the 1960s to 1986 as a writer, director and cinematographer, where he was often given work on trade union-related films in consideration to his background in the WWFFU; and his work constitutes, Judith Adamson argues, an 'important part' ('Keith') of the history of that organisation. His opinion was that government productions of the 1950s presented 'a sort of sweet and unblemished view of things in Australia ... uncritical' (Moran interview). Gow's criticism of the DOI was not unfounded, but there were reasons for this 'unblemished view'. Like the WWFFU, the work of the government filmmaking body was very much affected by the political constraints of the period. This is manifest in the way in which explorations of class and industrial relations—which form the focus of WWFFU films—are largely absent in DOI films of the 1953-58 period. They were rarely able to tackle themes that could be considered controversial, as can be seen from the withdrawal and remaking of *Warriors for the Working Day*. Like many other producers of culture during the Cold War, these filmmakers were viewed as intellectuals, and therefore

naturally suspect (like the WWFFU members and other left cultural activists). Stanley Hawes admitted that the Menzies Government suspected the DOI of being a mouthpiece for Arthur Calwell (184).

This atmosphere of uncertainty was not only felt by the Producer-in-Chief. Judith Adamson began work at the DOI in 1950 as a cutting room assistant. She writes that DOI films of this decade

are generally admitted to have been the lowest point of postwar government film production. They were part of a bad general situation. Two people separately told us that attacks on the organisation were so frequent that staff members didn't know when you came in on Monday if the place would still be open. (*Film Australia Miscellany* 84)

This 'bad' situation had a concrete basis: there were three Federal Government investigations into the work of the DOI in 1950, 1956 and 1959 (Moran, 'Documentary' 91). The last of these recommended that the unit be shut down, but was rejected the following year (*Film Australia Miscellany* 37). These investigations were hard evidence of the mood of the times, and how the DOI was politically compromised during the era (Bertrand and Collins 115). The films made in this period thus did not concern themselves with politics or unionism overtly. Hawes recalled that 'in the 1950s, we couldn't make very controversial films. In that period when the very existence of the unit was under threat, you couldn't be too experimental, too enterprising' (qtd. in Moran, *Projecting* 79). He complained in 1953 that 'masterly indecision' of the Menzies rule 'has reduced Government film production to mediocrity' (qtd. in Bertrand, 'Theory').

The relationship between the Government and its film production unit was at the heart of this 'bad situation'. Jonathon Dawson reminds us that 'in accepting the central tenet of sponsorship, responsibility to a client, the filmmaker must inevitably do more than compromise. In the case of Australian government film, one lay back and thought of England' (39). Even if the situation was not as dire as Dawson believes, it was certainly the case that for the DOI, as for the WWFFU and most other filmmaking organisations, the sponsor regulated what could be presented, to a greater or lesser degree. It is certain that this was more the case in the 1950s than in other periods. Accordingly, executives and producers of the DOI were constrained in what material

they could approach, and how they could depict it. They were certainly more tightly regulated than the WWFFU members in their production of *The Hungry Miles*; as Moran has commented, 'the WWFFU films help show what was and was not possible for the [DOI] Film Unit at this time' ('Documentary Consensus' 99).

They may show what type of work was unlikely to be completed under the title of the DOI, but not of many filmmakers within the DOI. An associated issue which Gow's quote raises is the work of DOI filmmakers themselves; it was not the case that all DOI workers only produced DOI films. Stanley Hawes' interest and Ted Cranstone's loan of gear and a truck for Eddie Allison to shoot his 1945 work *Coal Dust* (Allison, personal interview); Cranstone, John Heyer and Catherine Duncan's work on *Indonesia Calling* and other non-DOI works such as *Coal Dust* and *Words for Freedom* (Moran, 'Nation' 61); the loan of DOI equipment to the WWFFU for the production of *Hewers of Coal*; and Adamson's interest in the work of the WWFFU, as well as other DOI employees, point to a blurring of boundaries between the activities of the government filmmaking organisation and other (often more radical) areas of Australian screen culture.

Blurred boundaries are also apparent in the aesthetic characteristics of *The Hungry Miles*, which resemble other works as well as Australian documentaries such as those of the DOI. Gow recalled studying Soviet films frame by frame to analyse their composition; he said that 'they were what sparked my interest in film, those stunning Russian films, like *Battleship Potemkin* [and] *Ten Days that Shook the World*' (Moran interview).³ The Unit's early films, notably *Pensions for Veterans* and *The Hungry Miles*, employ Montagist techniques of fast cutting, dynamic editing and the use of extreme camera angles. The rapid editing seemingly matches the speed at which we are to be persuaded these wharfies work, and the speed at which they can also call a halt to work. The most noticeable instance of Montagist editing is a jump-cut sequence in the film's second section. The location is Canberra's Parliament House, and the scene's editing has the effect of rushing the viewer up the steps of the building. The narrative continuity of the scene

has been jarred, but the effect is to cue the following shots, of bills being passed having similarly been rushed through parliament.

Other stylistic and ideological characteristics of Eisenstein's works, especially *Strike* (1925), *Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928), are more strongly reproduced in WWFFU films. Eisenstein wrote on behalf of his group of Soviet filmmakers that 'our class approach introduces a specific purpose for the work—a socially useful emotional and psychological affect on the audience' (17). His films of the post-revolutionary era, conceived broadly within the ideals of socialist realism as described earlier, were produced for the benefit of the proletariat. Their aim was to instil a sense of class consciousness in the audience, by sympathetically representing their living and working conditions, and providing the methods for their improvement. This has a strong resonance in *The Hungry Miles*, in promoting broadly socialist goals and highlighting the potential of the united working class.

Apart from shots of 'Big Jim' Healy, the film rejects an emphasis of the individual over the collective. No single person is the star of this work; instead, the mass hero is the protagonist, and it is rank and file wharfies who generally appear in front of the camera. Such employment of non-actors is promoted most strongly in the early films of Eisenstein, whose theory of typage stems from a desire to de-emphasise individual personalities. An effect of this was the tendency to value ordinary workers more, as a rejection of the celebrity ideal of the star system of classical Hollywood cinema. In *The Hungry Miles* as in almost all the WWFFU productions, such use of ordinary workers serves to construct an aesthetic of ordinariness. This formation highlights the everyday actions of working-class people, and is a device for the telling of a story to counteract antagonistic ones. These films not only depict the worker at action, but depict the action from the worker's point of view. As Eisenstein's work served to 'cinefy the political slogans of the moment' (qtd. in Bordwell, *Cinema of Eisenstein* 142), so the production techniques of the WWFFU operated to give cinematic life to the Federation's policies, the most important being the powerful unity of the rank and file.

The articulation of the union's call to direct action shows an awareness of the work of Eisenstein and other Soviet filmmakers, as does the film's saturation with the socialist critique of capitalism in its references to the collaboration of government and big business, and the awareness of great wealth existing alongside great need. Shots of collective decision-making are evocative of Montagist works, as are the aims of educating the workers to assert their needs and to act in unity. Eisenstein's *Strike* portrays the developments that led to the October Revolution, and the defence of the working class. Its narrative is, as EP Thompson might have described, a 'history from below'. This also acts as the inspiration for *October*, which recreates one of the most important events in Russian history, and which David Bordwell describes as 'a pageant that creates a myth of origins, a past reworked in the light of contemporary interests and imperatives ... [which] also elaborates on already circulating conceptions of those events' (*Cinema* 79, 81). There is a parallel in *The Hungry Miles*, which the Unit made to give waterside workers of the 1950s a history of their industry's struggles from the viewpoint of an assertively socialist union member.

The authenticity of that history was extremely important for these producers, who were conscious of checking the facts and figures that went into the film. This is a point which has been emphasised by the Unit members for many years: in 1979 Disher said that 'we knew that if we didn't tell the truth, that we would undermine whatever it was we were trying to do. I think this is why we still stand by what we did, because we didn't put anything that we couldn't back up with facts' (Hughes interview). However, they recreated a substantial portion of the film. How does this sit with Disher's claim? There was very little archival footage available of life in Sydney in the Depression, perhaps none, and the filmmakers were forced to recreate scenes to depict the history of the industry. Another example of recreation is in the 'crabs sequence', where the filmmakers went to Sydney's salubrious State Theatre to film its chandelier, and edited this in with the banquet scene, for which actors, costumes and props were borrowed from relatives and from the New Theatre. For Levy, this scene presented the filmmakers' 'moral judgement on the capitalist system' (*Film Work*), and as such, was justification enough for their inclusion of it within their history. The filmmakers believed that their own experiences of living

through the Depression, and of those wharfies that they worked with, gave these scenes an 'integrity', as Disher described it: she believed that the re-enactment 'was done with integrity, and so it's assumed it's the real thing' (Interview). In their re-use of this section of WWFFU footage, filmmakers from the ABC have noted its authenticity (qtd. in Disher interview), an issue I will be taking up in the following chapter.

The issue of authenticity is connected to the representation of the collective force of the watersiders. Nichols has referred to the 'voice' of a documentary, which communicates the film's social point of view ('Voice'); the 'voice' of *The Hungry Miles* is that of the entire waterside worker community. There is a strong sense of the force of the collective, of the participation of the citizen within the community. There are many group scenes, of workers on the docks, by the thousands in stop-work meetings, and of unemployed men in the Depression sequences, utilising both wide and close shots. There are scenes of shared feelings and emotions, shared victories and defeats. In one recreated sequence men struggle with 'police', the physical violence being filmed with a hand-held camera on close-up, moving wildly and coming in and out of focus as the camera operator is jostled along with other demonstrators. Each man operates as part of the whole political tableau. The wharfies are active in the union and at work: active participants in their nation, according to the filmmakers.

This collective is composed only of men, who populate the ships and docks seen in *The Hungry Miles*. This was the reality of the situation; women are filmed as participants in the WWF's cultural and sporting activities, and are, within this sense, given all respect (it is a woman who is filmed leading the wharfies' choir). The idea of a 'real' Australian was, in the 1950s, overwhelmingly male.⁴ As in many contemporary depictions of the working class, the film equates the male body with the body of the working class. But the workers of *The Hungry Miles* are not all the half naked, gleaming-muscled, strong and heroic men of films such as *Coalface* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935) or other Griersonian documentaries. There are old men here, aged prematurely by their work and lifestyle. These are ordinary men (Fig. 5), and the film presents them within its aesthetic of ordinariness.

This almost exclusively male political tableau is historicised with the film's two inferences to the Eureka Stockade, in its narration and in its last shot.⁵ They support a nationalistic call to class struggle, justifying the current-day strikes by recalling the values supposedly embodied in this part of our history. The film's narration urges:

Like all other working men who understand the spirit of Eureka, they know they must unite to guard the conditions they have won at such cost, must struggle for better ones, and must meet any attacks with courage and strength.

For many years the Eureka story has been recalled as a symbol of nationalism; Bertrand reminds us that, alongside Federation and the Gallipoli massacre, Eureka takes its place as 'the central image of Australian nationhood' ('National' 179). The CPA had identified itself as 'a working-class party carrying forward the best traditions of Australian democracy [such as] at Eureka the fight for social reforms' (CPA, *Constitution* 4) and other left activists have used the sentiments behind the Eureka Stockade in their struggles against capitalist exploitation since the beginning of the century. However, they have also been embraced by the right: 'both communists and conservative Catholics had been claiming the gold-diggers at Eureka and Ned Kelly for themselves', Richard White argues, 'the communists interpreting the Australian character as rebellious, the Catholics interpreting it as essentially Irish' ('Inventing' 157).

The call to Eureka that closes *The Hungry Miles* must be seen alongside other instances of nationalistic articulation of the period. 1954 was the Eureka centenary year, when the left invested a great deal of energy in remembering the Stockade. The traditional national spirit embodied in the rural story of Eureka had been sustained in the trade union movement, bringing it into urban culture of the east coast of Australia. Its employment in the film can be viewed as a defensive move, arguing against those who claimed that communists and wharfies were 'anti-Australian'. In invoking the Eureka rebels, the film recalled an increasingly outmoded national identity. It emphasised a struggle for democracy and civil rights, and implicitly claimed that the 'true' Australians were of the working class.

This call to a national identity of the 1890s serves to close a film, constructed in a cinematic style highly redolent of classic British and Australian documentaries of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, that fashions a history of the Federation in line with its contemporary needs. The work is underpinned with aesthetic characteristics of Montagist works produced soon after the birth of the WWFFU members, and an impetus that highlighted the strength of the collective working class; the final title card from Eisenstein's *Strike*, 'Remember, Proletarians!', could very well act for this film of the Sydney waterfront. The film dialectically places capital and its servants (government and the mainstream media) in direct opposition to labour, the wharfies and other victims of the Depression.

The Unit members certainly felt that the production of this film was amongst the highlights of their work. It is perhaps, as the WWFFU claimed, their most 'important social document' (*Hungry Miles* Program). Disher felt that making this film 'was really an idea that we all felt very strongly about' (Interview). After the launch of *The Hungry Miles*, eight films were made by the Unit in two years. This work displays a range of topics and styles, and includes two newsreels and two animated works. Throughout this period, Montagist influences became decreasingly apparent, new techniques such as synchronised sound sequences and dramatic scenes were introduced as were the use of colour film and hand-colouring techniques, animation sequences became increasingly sophisticated, and overall cinematography and editing improved. After the success of *The Hungry Miles* and subsequent works for the WWF, the work of the Unit became more widely known throughout the Australian labour movement, and the three filmmakers began receiving commissions for films from other organisations.

Hewers of Coal

The second film to be examined in this chapter is *Hewers of Coal* (1957), which was commissioned by the ACSEF, also known as the Miners' Federation. It represents a development in the work of the WWFFU in a number of ways. As I will detail, it is more advanced stylistically. Being made for an 'outside' organisation, it shows the benefits of the Unit's work being extended to other parts of the labour movement. And at least one of the members of the Film Unit saw it as the highlight of their labours; Disher observed that it was 'the most satisfying film we made' (*Film Work*). She also pointed out that:

for me *Hewers of Coal* was in a way the ultimate experience, the one which I felt it would have been a sort of jumping off place for our future. I felt that film would have led us further into other unions to make more films. (Hughes interview)

and:

The biggest job we had in that period was to make *Hewers of Coal* ... for myself, I always felt that it was a film that would lead us forward, in to doing other work of a similar kind. (Interview)

Like the waterfront, Australia's mining sector celebrates a long history of militancy, and the postwar decade posed many challenges to workers in that industry. In 1946 the NSW Joint Coal Board was formed. Its aim was 'to ensure that the coal resources of the State are conserved, developed, worked and used to the best advantage in the public interest ... [and] to promote the welfare of workers engaged in the coal industry' (qtd. in Gollan, *Coalminers* 227). The ACSEF saw no great benefits coming from this organisation, however; they believed that decades of private ownership of the nation's coal had led to a waste of resources, excessive danger to workers and an instability of the industry, and felt that the public interest was not being served as well as it could. Rationalisation of the mines in the 1950s led to mass retrenchments, even though productivity was high. In the NSW coal industry, production rose from 12.8 million to 17.7 million tons between 1950 and 1960, whilst employment was reduced from 18,338 to 13,315 (Gollan, *Coalminers* 235-236). The introduction of mechanisation to the coalfields had increased output, then, but it had not brought improvements in working conditions. The new competition to coal presented by the importation of oil fuel further threatened the economic viability of

many mines. Although they still had plenty of coal, many pits deemed unprofitable were shut down: a third of the state's mines closed between 1952 and 1959 (Lees and Senyard 16). Along with the mines, whole communities were destroyed. 1952 saw the much-publicised case of Glen Davis, north of Lithgow, in which a town of 3,000 people was violently uprooted, though not without a long and bitter struggle.⁶

The changes of the postwar period were felt by miners and their union; after the crushing defeat of the 1949 coal strike, Edgar Ross describes the turmoil of the 1950s in his history of the ACSEF:

Federation leaders were beginning to realise that old methods of industrial struggle were no longer appropriate. The bitter truth was that the Federation had lost much of its bargaining power. It now had to move more in the direction of public campaigning to win allies in pressuring the Federal and State Governments. (467)

The ACSEF's publication *Common Cause* argued that 'the time is long overdue when the industry should be taken out of the hands of those who have made such a mess of it and vested in the hands of the nation, the State, by nationalisation' ('Award'). The union began a program to overcome the situation, which they termed a 'coal crisis' ('Coal Owner').

Alongside the WWF, the Miners' Federation numbered CPA members amongst its leadership, although Markey comments that in the ACSEF's militant post-war stance 'there was little difference in industrial behaviour under communist and ALP leaders' ('Case' 358). The two militant unions had always had close ties, industrially and politically, and the miners and wharfies often supported each other during disputes. The ACSEF had an active history of publicity and propaganda employment. Like other left-wing unions, it had been supportive of the cultural advancement of its members, and now found a use for the Film Unit's skills. A proposal was put forward in May 1956 that ACSEF executive officers approach the WWFFU with the view of producing a film to support their program. This would be, they hoped, a 'film which will play a major role, from the propaganda point of view, in the achievement of our just demands' (Central Committee Meeting Minutes). They accepted that for miners, as for wharfies and other workers, film could be a useful tool of propaganda to add to their journals, pamphlets, conventions and speeches. The resolution to have the film produced was an issue of

pit-top meetings at all mines in March 1957, when it went to a vote and was passed 2,055 to 342 ('Film Proposal is Endorsed').

Jock Levy recalled that 'we'd been given a lot of information from the Miners' Federation, but it's quite a difference from reading about it to actually going down and working in these pits' (Hughes interview). So before shooting began, he and Gow travelled to the Nebo mine in the Wollongong area. They worked there for three weeks, living in the Kombi. With the help of Peter 'Pincher' Smart and other officials at the ACSEF's Wollongong branch, they worked as wheelers to gain first-hand experience of underground conditions. They decided to shoot most of the mine scenes in the Cessnock area north of Sydney, and Disher joined the men there for the production of the film. (Disher has recalled that the presence of a woman in the mines was considered unlucky. Despite the grumbling of some of the miners, she went down the mines to work with her fellow filmmakers.) The ACSEF's General Secretary George Neilly supervised the overall content of the film. Evan Phillips—who later took over the leadership of the Federation—was president of Aberdare lodge, and was the Film Unit's contact with the union. The Unit based itself at Bellbird, where the Miners' Hall was placed at their disposal (Levy, Letter to Roach). They shot most sequences in May 1957 at the Aberdare Extended and Newstan mines, and at the disused Greta, Minmi and Pelaw Main mines (Levy, Memo).

Hewers of Coal, 26 minutes in length, is one of the few WWFFU films in colour, for the exterior sequences that comprise the majority of the work. These are interspersed with monochrome footage of scenes down the mines. Rod Shaw, a member of the Studio of Realist Art, produced the titles. There are a few synchronised sound scenes down in the mines, as we hear the sounds of the machines and the calls of the miners. Apart from these the soundtrack is composed of narration and music with some sound effects.

This first section presents the nature of work down the mines, filmed from the point of view of a miner. With no introduction, the narration gets straight into the working day, as we follow a group of miners through their daily routine. A great deal of explanation is offered about the

mining work, a combination of manual labour and mechanisation, so that the viewer is introduced to the details as well as the overall view of the work these men do. The voice-over notes that 'the mineworker of today is more than a hewer of coal, a filler of tubs, he's an engineer and technician as well'. Dramatically illuminated, the underground scenes emphasise the hard work of these men, their faces grimy with coal dust and their bodies slimy with sweat.⁷ When their shift finishes the men come out into the light of day again. This section is marked by the change in film stock from monochrome to colour. The narration echoes their thoughts that at the end of the day it's good to 'see the colour of the world again'. This voice-over, again performed by Leonard Teale, is written from the point of view of the miners, with the frequent use of 'we'. This positioning of the narrator here helps to persuade the viewer that this film surveys the work and history of Australian coal mining from the point of view of the miners. It also assumes that there is a single viewpoint of the workers.

The short second section of the film begins with a link from the first, as the miners finish their shift and come out into the daylight to see the results of their work. 'You see the coal that you've won on its way down to the waiting furnace to make heat, light and power', the narration explains, as the film adroitly enumerates the applications of coal. By the listing of its products and associated industries, this section emphasises the worth of miners to Australia, through depictions of the results of their labour. It is reminiscent of Montagist and muralist trends in its scenes of machines working to create movement, action, and electricity, with the effects: a brightly burning light bulb, hot water steaming from a tap, a domestic heater warming chilly feet, and a toaster burning the breakfast bread. The short duration of these shots suggests the brisk activity that has gone into creating the power for the appliances, whilst their smooth and rhythmic editing shows an advance in technical achievement from earlier productions like *The Hungry Miles*. There is a professionally produced animation sequence of a lump of coal, revolving on a dais, and lit from above in an almost saintly fashion. Then a row of liquid chemicals in bottles of fabulous colours marches from the background to the foreground of the shot, towards the future. These represent the chemical by-products of coal—rubber, plastics,

fertilisers, fuels, acids, dyes, drugs, resins, oil – which, the film argues, represent 'a potential yet untapped'.

We move from coal's future to its past, as the beatific representation of its potential is followed by a long third section that outlines a history of the Australian coal mining industry. It begins with a change of mood in the background music and the tone of the narrator's voice, suggesting that there is a hidden history. The narrator tells the viewer that 'there's another side to the story of coal, a not-so-pretty one'. At the start of the history of coal mining, there was a great potential, this history reports—if the resources were managed for more than easy profit. But they weren't, and there was 'little thought of planning for the country as a whole'.

This section alleges the mismanagement of mines. The audience is shown that this leads to a great waste of coal, and also to accidents and deaths. There is a recourse to emotional appeal here, with scenes showing the results of industrial accidents and the overgrown cemeteries of mining communities. A section describes the working methods of earlier days that accounted for many of the losses. As in *The Hungry Miles*, scenes of earlier times are reconstructed, as miners play their forebears, working with picks, oil lamps and pit horses. Here, self-reliance is emphasised, as we are told how miners were forced to provide their own tools. There are sequences depicting the mining communities that 'we' have built up: here, the use of 'we' in the narration now refers to the miners' families as well as miners. The growth and destruction of these towns are described, with scenes of miners protesting for jobs, echoing other WWFFU scenes of men in rallies with banners held high.

Scenes which present the destruction of World War II, depicting explosions on the battlefields and Hitler giving a speech, are overlaid with a reminder that coal was 'a power for victory'. Here the film argues for the patriotism of miners, as Teale says that 'for heavy industry geared up for intense war effort, coal was the power to make the steel to make the guns: a sinew of war'. This section is unusual for a WWFFU work in that it employs archival footage (which is also used to depict a 1946 fire at the Greta mine); Gow recalled that the Unit obtained

Cinesound archival material and hand-painted it (Hughes interview). At the war's end, there are huge piles of coal lying unused: over-production due to lack of planning. The industry of the future is envisaged, with the threat of the 'cheap fuel oil from America challenging coal as a fuel'. Even though mechanisation has provided the means to produce coal faster and more cheaply, the film criticises the management of the new technology, through the phrase 'modernise and sack the workers'. Throughout this historical survey the film repeats its argument that the 'profit-ruled method' of industrial management has resulted in a waste of a national resource as well as a menace to miners' lives and livelihoods. It depicts the abandoned mines and towns, and the cost of human life in cave-ins, fires, explosions and drownings.

After experiencing this simultaneously productive and wasteful history, the mining community faces an uncertain future—will it be similarly mismanaged? There is an emotionally charged sequence of the weary, hardened faces of miners, their wives and their children, shot from below.⁸ Miners, assembled as a group in the main street alongside local businessmen, housewives and schoolchildren, are looking into the distance and seeing a bleak future, faced with the prospect of more lost jobs, more destroyed towns. Again, the narrator's use of 'we' switches from representing the miners to the whole mining community:

What about us? Where do we go from here? We're tired of the road: it's a road to nowhere, with nothing at the end. We've travelled too many roads already, been cavilled out, burnt out and sold out too many times. We're getting tired of moving on, damned tired. Our roots are here, our homes are here. We grew up here, married here. Here's where our kids were born. Here's where we belong.

These people, looking towards more loss of life, loss of community and waste of resources, demand a better deal. This section acts as the culmination to the history of continual mismanagement of the industry, and prepares the audience for the union's solution to these problems.

The narration affirms the 'crisis' on the coal fields, and the film's final section looks idealistically towards a better future as it promotes the ACSEF's solution. The union executives call for action. As well as the improved utilisation of coal and the introduction of shorter working

hours, the film proposes nationalisation of the mines—in order 'to make the best use of coal for us all, put the coal in safer hands'. Sequences show Federation delegates including Evan Phillips addressing miners, as well as members of the rank and file. These are interspersed with shots of a Cessnock miners' march—the shots that appeared in the 1987 mini-series *The True Believers*. Miners march with banners reading 'There is a coal crisis!'; 'Utilise coal to the full!'; 'Shorter hours and share the work'; and 'Nationalise the mines'.⁹ As it has throughout, the film reminds us that there's still plenty of coal to be won from the rich earth of Australia, but it must be managed properly. One of the last shots shows a miner affixing a sign to a mine opening; the sign reads, 'On behalf of the Australian people'. Over triumphal music, the narration ends by asserting that 'coal should belong to the nation, its right and heritage. There's enough to last a thousand years if we make the best use of it, if its future is in the right hands: in the hands of the Australian people'.

This work bears the same name as a play which New Theatre member Oriel Gray had written in 1944 for the ACSEF (the union chose to re-use Gray's title for the film). 'Next to the red flag', Gray wrote, 'the miners' lamp was the symbol of solidarity' (218), and the WWFFU production highlights this aspect of the mining community. The film closely follows the Federation's 1957 program, which was summarised as the nation having no choice between 'more intense rationalisation, with further mine closures, dismissals, and worsened conditions—or a New Deal for Coal, with shorter hours, increased wages, and a new security in the industry' ('Award'). The ACSEF had been fighting for nationalisation of the mining industry since 1946. The Joint Coal Board included no union representatives, and although it was responsible for the overall management of the mines, unionists declared that private mine ownership had a great influence in the Board's decisions. The ACSEF management considered that the production of the film had been 'a very valuable step forward in the progress of the Miners' Federation' to secure better working conditions and improved mine management ('Film Attracts').

The official launch of *Hewers of Coal* was on 8 August 1957 at the Wollongong Workers' Club, at a major public meeting which had been organised to discuss the coal crisis. A review of the film reported that

it gives a very clear picture of the conditions, old and new, performed by our members. It shows the sacrifices made by the mineworker in getting a home together, only to see them [sic] become ruins as a result of the profit-dominated methods of the coal owners. This film will help to bring before the general public the facts about the coal crisis and the Federation's program to solve it. ('Our Film')

It was a providential time for the film to be premiered. That very day there was a large demonstration of Hunter Valley miners and their wives at Sydney's Parliament House, agitating to discuss the coal crisis with members of the government.¹⁰ *Hewers of Coal* was extensively shown throughout NSW coal areas. A great deal of publicity was circulated, both in the *Common Cause* and local papers in the mining towns to the north and south of Sydney. The film had audiences of over 400; retired mineworkers, Miners Women's Auxiliary members and miners' wives attended these screenings alongside miners. In keeping with the new enthusiasm for screening films in a variety of non-commercial sites, it was shown to the general public at a variety of sites including RSL clubs, schools and community halls. It was reported that audience members 'expressed a keen appreciation of the film and commented that it would certainly assist to win support for the Federation's policy and programme among wide sections of the people' ('Film Attracts'). *Hewers of Coal* also went to ACSEF branches in other states. In the four months to December 1957, a screening report from the distributors, Quality Films, shows that the film screened 26 times before audiences totalling 4450: twelve trade unions and labour clubs had seen it, ten film societies and four other groups, and film society screenings had audiences of 30 to 180. Quality also reported that 'reaction to the film has been very good. Audiences in discussion said it was an excellent job technically and the subject matter was well stated' ('Thousands').

The film was also shown at the 1957 SFF to approximately 1400 people. At the Festival, it was reported that 'there were fears that it was Communistic!' ('The Work') It was screened there, but

no further comment on this audience was forthcoming. Trade unions to show the film included the WWF, Boilermakers and BWIU, at union meetings and on job sites. Ted Roach of the WWF told Neilly of the ACSEF that 'it is the best film yet made by our film unit, and I think it should be the means of convincing many other Unions of the need to make films of this character about their own work and problems'.

Edgar Ross was the editor of the Miners' Federation publication *Common Cause*, and a member of the CPA's Central Committee from 1939 to 1970. He was also the leader of the CPA Arts Committee, to which the WWFFU reported. An energetic agitator for the use of cultural production in the socialist struggle, Ross wrote that 'the role of communist artists in Australia's capitalist society is to use their talents to keep alive Australia's democratic tradition in confrontation with capitalism, to participate in the struggle for socialism and to do what they can to win the support of others in their field in that struggle' (*Storm* 128). He was always supportive of the work of the wharfie filmmakers, and gave extensive publicity to its productions, as well as publicising the activities of the New Theatre and other left cultural organisations. Ross praised *Hewers of Coal*:

I had the opportunity last week of seeing a pre-view [*sic*] of the first 'cut' of the film being made for the Federation by the WWFFU. It is a beauty. In my opinion, the best film the Unit has made. Against a background of excellent underground 'shots', pictures of our members at work, and the coalfields towns, it tells the story of the tragic position to which the industry has been brought by 'rip, tear and drag' methods. It shows, graphically, the waste of the coal resources, the undermining of the coalfields communities, and the causes of the present crisis. It simply and clearly presents the answer of our programme, in nationalisation, full utilisation and shorter hours, including pictures of the recent Cessnock demonstration. Subject to rank and file endorsement the Southern District Board of Management has decided to purchase a copy of the film and a projector. Start now to make bookings for the film, not only in the coalfields, but indeed, more importantly, in farming and other communities. The film will be ready for public showing early in August. It can be a winner in extending support for our programme! ('Our Film')

His glowing review shows the energy that went into the promotion of propaganda such as *Hewers of Coal*. Ross here explained to rank and file miners how the film—which their union

levies had paid for—would be able to further the cause of the Federation if they helped in its distribution. It was important, he believed, to screen the film not only for miners but members of the wider community, to gain as much interest and advocacy for the union's program as possible. The WWFFU filmmakers agreed with the significance of this work; Disher believed that 'we produced a film that has worth to it filmically, and certainly from the point of view of its content, and for that we felt quite proud of that film' (Interview).

What lay behind her opinion of this production? Benjamin writes that 'the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight' (*Theses* 259). *Hewers of Coal* has worked within this conception of history, in documenting and exposing the origins of the post-war coal crisis from a unionist's viewpoint. It criticises the management of the modern mining machinery, but not the machinery *per se*, and argues for a more long-term approach to the use of the technology, not one purely motivated by profit. *Hewers of Coal* was made only eight years after the 1949 coal strike, which affected many Australians, alienated mining communities, and resulted in troops being sent to work the mines. It was also a dispute in which the WWF supported the ACSEF to the utmost, with WWF leaders Jim Healy and Ted Roach spending five weeks in jail for concealing union funds in support of the miners.

The film closes with a patriotic appeal. The assertive conclusion reinforces the argument that the ACSEF's solution to the 'crisis' is one that is in the best interests of the nation as a whole, and not just a handful of militant union leaders. Here the film performs a similar oppositional role to *The Hungry Miles*, in answering claims from some in the mainstream press and government that the miners were being misled by a communist leadership ('Blow'; 'Reds'). It works against the idea that it is 'un-Australian' to protest against the way an industry operates. It does this by presenting a history of the coal industry from a worker's point of view, and by exposing what mine owners and mainstream media have not: the waste of resources, the inefficient management of the mines, the destruction of communities and the senseless deaths of hundreds of miners. It also relates the disadvantages of the new machinery, in the way that

mismanagement of the new tools has displaced workers. The film appeals to its audience to support nationalisation of the mines, 'on behalf of the Australian people'. It attempts to justify and legitimate the actions of striking miners, and, like *The Hungry Miles*, is made to overturn the idea that these workers are extremists, trouble-making agitators, misleading the people for their own ends.¹¹ And it works against reports in daily newspapers and newsreels that suggest a blind obedience of rank and filers to extremist trouble-making leaders and rarely focus on the miners' reasons for their action ('Reds'; 'Blow'; 'Miners Protest').¹²

In its subject and approach *Hewers of Coal* can be seen alongside a number of other films on the coal mining industry. These include two British features of 1939, *The Stars Look Down*, which highlights the industry's poor safety record, and *The Proud Valley*, in which Paul Robeson leads striking Welsh miners to victory when their community is threatened with closure. Scenes in this second production, of miners marching with their banners held high, parallel shots in *Hewers of Coal*. There are also correlations with the American documentaries of Pare Lorenz. Deane Williams has written that 'along with Harry Watt's *Night Mail*, *The River* had a tremendous impact on documentary makers throughout the world' ('Commonwealth' 53). Norma Disher noted that *The River* (1937), as well as Lorenz' earlier work *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936), was very important as a source of inspiration for Australian documentary makers, including the WWFFU (Interview). Made for the US Government Farm Security Administration, *The River* overtly promotes the Roosevelt Government's policy on public works.¹³ With its authoritative 'voice of god' narration, and its mixture of newly shot and archival footage, maps, graphs and intertitles, its legacy is evident in *Hewers of Coal* and other work of the WWFFU's middle period, as well as other Australian documentaries. One of these is *Story of a City*, a 1945 travelogue film on Newcastle, which is also one of the few DOI works of the post-war era to articulate the vigour of Australian trade unionism. This film candidly reports that 'the most important objective is the straight-out nationalisation of the coal industry' and sympathetically asserts the strength of the unionised workforce of the northern coalfields.

There is at least one way, however, in which *Hewers of Coal* departs from the approaches of these films. In *The River*, the virtues of modern technology are validated as part of the developmentalist rhetoric of the period; the hydro-electric power systems will tame the river, help to mend the damage that unplanned farming techniques have wrought, that production attests, and will provide 'power to make the river work'. This attitude can be discerned in some DOI films on industrial issues, such as the revised version of *The Steelworker*, *The Power Makers* and *Production Unlimited*.¹⁴ *Hewers of Coal*, however, welcomes the new technology more critically than these films, in suggesting that mechanisation could solve social as well as physical problems. The voice-over explains:

Bring on the machines, we welcome them; about time the back-break was taken out of mining. We'll tame those iron monsters and make them talk—talk a language that means a better deal. Shorter working hours, more leisure time with the kids, less time in the pits: that's what the machines should bring.

As with the earlier film *The Hungry Miles*, the ability of the Unit to articulate this type of criticism is because of the nature of the film's sponsor; indeed, this was one of the ACSEF's aims in the production of the work.

The main objective of that union's campaign, however, was to end the monopoly in the coal industry. In the early 1950s Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd, a subsidiary of BHP, owned a large proportion of Australia's coal mines. BHP, in its development as the 'big Australian', was able to benefit from its monopoly position in many ways; Connell and Irving write that Australia's largest company's general manager, Essington Lewis, was 'arguably the most important figure in twentieth-century Australian history' (271). This influence is evident in the decision to withdraw *Warriors for the Working Day* and remake it as *The Steelworker*.¹⁵ The proportion of monopoly capital in the mining industry was high; however, the call for nationalisation of the coal industry was not an isolated case. In 1957 the CPA declared that monopolies in many areas were 'increasingly predatory' ('Nationalisation') and were threatening standards of living by raising inflation and taking the pecuniary benefits of these industries away from Australians. The mention, in *Hewers of Coal*, of 'cheap fuel oil from

America' unintentionally hinted at a second concern: the anti-American and anti-foreign capital beliefs of some communists and radical nationalists (Wheelwright; Wood 180).

Hewers of Coal marks a middle point in the evolution of the work of the WWFFU. The imaginative use of colour film, the incorporation of outsourced archival footage which has been hand-coloured, the creation of a number of extended and professional animation sequences, and the inclusion of many details of the ACSEF's history, point to the stylistic development in the Unit's filmwork from *The Hungry Miles* (in terms of financial outlay, *Hewers of Coal* was the Unit's most expensive production). The 1957 SFF commended the film as giving 'a comprehensive historical survey of the industry, using a number of ingenious techniques in colour photography'; likewise the Victorian *Federation News* applauded the production which, it believed, was completed 'with a great deal of ingenuity and imagination' (Rev. of *Hewers of Coal*). There are few traces of the Montagist influences that were strongly evident in early productions, notably *Pensions for Veterans* and *The Hungry Miles*; the film evinces more formal characteristics of American, and more recently produced, documentaries than of classical British works. There is still a strong recourse to emotional manipulation of the audience through the depiction of the miners and their depressed communities, but it is achieved through more subtle effects than in earlier films. After the production of *Hewers of Coal*, more films were made for the WWF (a comedy) and other unions (including a safety film commissioned by the Boilermakers' Society). Although the issue of the Unit's position within the WWF had already come into question by this time, as outlined in an earlier chapter, the Unit's filmwork continued to improve in its professionalism and utility to the wider labour movement.

Not Only The Need

The third case study of the work of the WWFFU is of *Not Only the Need* (1958). It was the last film to be completed by the Unit, and displays a progression away from traditional notions of the Australian working class, as seen in *The Hungry Miles*, to attempt to deal with a confrontation of labour with capital. From films of the middle period of the Unit's work, such as *Hewers of Coal*, it further develops an interrogation of the progress and development of the 1950s; in this case, of the Australian population's basic need for housing.

As many studies such as Alastair Greig's note, while the post-war period was one in which the family home in the suburbs was both an aspiration of many and an increasing actuality of Australian life, in contradiction with this was a housing shortage. In 1945 the national housing shortage was more than 300,000 houses (qtd. in Butlin Barnard and Pincus 230). In 1956 NSW still needed 70,000 more homes (*Housing Situation* 3). During the decade following the end of World War II, the shortage forced many families to live in garages, sheds, caravans, shacks, fowl sheds, humpies and other dwellings of similar standards. Even by the end of the decade this had not been substantially reduced: at the 1954 census, there were 134,187 Australians (1.49% of the population) living in 49,148 of these dwellings. Although Greig's study quotes only 45,000 people thus housed by the 1961 census (39), the Commonwealth Government figures state that there were 116,458 people (1.11% of the population) living in 41,997 'sheds, huts, etc' (*Year Book* 350).¹⁶ One editorial believed that 'it is a grave flaw in the otherwise flourishing condition of the nation that so many people should be condemned to wearisome and costly makeshift homes' ('Chronic'). A number of factors contributed to, and complicated, the Sydney housing shortage, which will be briefly outlined.

The sudden addition to the population of migrants and those returning from the war, combined with a high fertility rate, made for crowded conditions in the inner-city environs. Housing there was cramped and substandard after years of neglect. Rent controls did nothing to persuade landlords to maintain their properties, and there was a desperate fight for adequate and reasonably priced rental accommodation. Partly in response to the rhetoric of progress of the period, a number of inner suburbs were designated as slums. However, a large proportion of

migrants settling in Sydney moved into these areas. This was not only by necessity as they provided cheap accommodation, but also by choice, as many of these people were used to the densely communal lifestyles of inner city areas, rather than the more separate and isolationist living conditions of the newer suburbs. In their study of the cultural transformations in Australian society since the post-war immigration program, Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart point to the changing nature of the inner-city due to this preference, and the consequent upward social mobility of former inner-city Anglo-Australian working-class people moving to the suburbs (169-174), a factor of the changing nature of the Australian working class that will be explored in the following chapter. The profile of the city was changing for other reasons, as the lifting of building restrictions in 1952 saw an increase in the number of commercial building projects. Multi-storey buildings began to dominate city skylines and many new industrial facilities were constructed throughout Sydney, thus affecting the availability of materials and labour for domestic needs.

In response to the housing shortage, the Cahill NSW Government embarked on a massive home building drive, and developed the outer area of Sydney, especially on its south and west precincts. This would have been beneficial except that the Menzies Government's decision—made when it came into office in 1949 and then widened in the 1956 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (Grey 222)—to allow the sale of public housing into private hands resulted in not many more homes overall being available for public rental.¹⁷ Despite this extension of the public housing program, most new homes of the time were built by private developers or owner-occupiers; the proportion of Australians who were home owners grew from 52.6% in 1947 to 62.9% in 1954, and 69.9% in 1961 (Greig 97). This was not only a reflection of a desire for a materially better lifestyle and the growing ethic of self-reliance; Greig observes that 'household decisions to commit to owner occupation often had more to do with the hardship and extortion involved in the alternative process of finding a place to rent—such as crowding, lack of privacy and the payment of key money—than it had to do with financial capacity' (109).

Finance was hard to obtain for owner-builders, a factor that did not improve when the Federal Government allowed banks to increase the interest on home loans to building societies in 1952. The 1956 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement further increased the home loan interest rates as well as Housing Commission rents, and it also abolished the rental rebate system for pensioners and other disadvantaged groups. Arrangements such as the Federal Government's Home Savings Grants Scheme used public money to subsidise those people saving for their own homes, and while it encouraged private home ownership, it was condemned as 'a notorious instance of public subsidy to those already well off' (Butlin Barnard and Pincus 232), and resulted in many families putting themselves into long-term debt.

There was a sharp response to this situation from the labour movement, notably from the union that represented the builders themselves. Just as the ACSEF had claimed there was a 'coal crisis', the BWIU labelled this situation a 'crisis' in the housing industry. The union began a campaign of protests against the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, which, they argued,

rather than assisting the acute housing needs of the people, makes their problems much greater. The new Agreement represents a reduction of the number of houses to be built each year, raises the weekly rental, abolishes the rental rebate system and greatly increases the waiting time for people seeking homes to rent. (BWIU, *Notes on Housing Pamphlet*)

Unionists enlisted the support of labour movement, community and religious leaders in their campaign; their aim was to put sufficient pressure on the State and Federal Governments to 'ensure a housing program that will provide homes for all on financial conditions within the reach of all' (BWIU, *Notes on Housing Pamphlet*).

Under the leadership of two committed communists, Pat Clancy and Tom McDonald, the BWIU had grown in strength and influence since the end of World War II.¹⁸ In 1957 the union embarked upon an energetic propaganda drive to support their campaign, and McDonald turned to the WWFFU. He had previously commissioned a safety film from the Unit, and had established a productive working relationship with its members. In 1997 McDonald commented on the film made for the housing campaign:

The Housing Problem and You was to help workers understand what were the hidden factors in the cost of housing ... the union sought to expose the myth that building workers' wages were the main factor in putting housing out of the reach of a lot of working people ... it was a film that was used to promote a union-supported broad community campaign, calling on governments to develop some new policy initiatives in the area of affordable housing, and was directed towards a wider audience, as distinct from the building industry. (Interview)

McDonald was elected Secretary of the ACTU's Building Trades Sub-committee that convened the NSW People's Housing Conference on 2 November 1957. The film was planned 'as an important means of developing interest in organising' (State Executive 16 July 1957) for the Conference and the broader campaign. It was another form of propaganda and education, alongside the campaign's reports, speeches and newspaper publicity. McDonald acknowledged that in commissioning the film,

we sought to put the record straight, and to educate workers, who tended to become victims of the employers' propaganda, and it tended to give them a guilt complex when the argument about wages came up, the reason for housing being unaffordable for a large percentage of workers – it was not the truth. (Interview)

In order to provide their side of the story, the BWIU launched *The Housing Problem and You* on 11 September 1957. BWIU NSW Branch Secretary Pat Clancy wrote that the film 'had a very strong effect' and that it 'received wide public acclaim' (50). The film screened in trade union offices and halls, public meetings, local organisations, technical colleges, town halls and council chambers, migrant camps and hostels, emergency housing settlements, factories, construction and building jobs. Screenings were also held at interstate BWIU, ACTU and TLC meetings. The film's television broadcast through the ABC (in Sydney and Melbourne in September and December 1957) not only gave many people an opportunity to see the work, but also led to other organisations requesting their own showings. Although they had produced it for another union, the WWFFU members took some responsibility for exhibiting this work. In the Kombi, they toured the film to inner-city suburbs and sites such as the Narrabeen and Herne Bay housing and migrant settlements, with BWIU officials attending to speak on the housing

problem and answer questions. McDonald later wrote on the significance of such exhibitions to his union and to the broader community, including new arrivals to the nation:

The housing film made a real impression and we estimated that it was screened to over 300 audiences, some of them from 500 to 1000 people ... the housing film represents a popular means of rallying support for it presents the ideas of the Labour Movement in a clear and easily understandable manner and in particular we found during last year's activity that it is the key to explaining the issue to the migrants, and in this direction we had screenings in migrant hostels attended by audiences of up to 300. ('Housing Report')

The NSW Housing Conference at the Sydney Town Hall on 2 November was a great success; 970 delegates attended representing 413 organisations, and its opening was televised by all Sydney broadcasters ('Lord Mayor'). By 12 November approximately 16,000 people had seen the film (T McDonald, 'Housing Conference'). The union-led campaign had a positive outcome: a couple of months later, in February 1958, the Commonwealth Government released additional finance to all State Governments for housing. But the labour movement's campaign was not over. *The Housing Problem and You* was remade as *Not Only The Need* when the ACTU decided to convene a National People's Housing Conference. Frank Purse, BWIU Federal Secretary and the co-ordinating force of the ACTU Building Sub-Committee (Clancy 38), put the idea to the ACTU for the revision of the film, 'to include aspects on an interstate character which would show conditions in other States as well as NSW' (ACTU, Minutes). By 27 May 1958 the film was completed. This new work adds updated housing statistics and seven minutes of new material to *The Housing Problem and You*.

Not Only the Need is a twenty minute work in black and white. The voice-over, performed by Leonard Teale, was written by WWF member Clem Millward, who also contributed graphics and drawings for animation sequences. The film bases its argument around the defence of a statement in the 1944 Commonwealth Housing Commission Report: 'We consider that a dwelling of good standard and equipment is not only the need but the right of every citizen—whether the dwelling is to be rented or purchased, no tenant or purchaser should be exploited by excessive profit'.

The film begins with a title sequence and the 1944 Housing Report statement superimposed over a rough panning shot of the inner suburbs of Sydney, focusing on the area's poorly kept tenements. It cuts from the title shots of the inner city to the suburbs, and the narration begins as the film explores the benefits of having a good home to grow up and live in. It shows people living peacefully in their suburban homes, and looking after them, being proud of them. Citizens relax on their front step talking, their children playing happily in the back yard. These homes and their contented occupants are usually filmed from eye-level. The soundtrack's music supports these shots with peaceful tones.

Next the problem of the film is established: while everyone would like to live as these people do, that is not the existing situation. There are simply not enough good homes for everyone in Sydney, the film argues: 'despite extensive State Government and private building, a lot of citizens find that rights have not been granted, their housing needs unfulfilled', the narration explains. The next sequence reinforces this argument by presenting the poor living conditions in Sydney's inner city, with slow despondent music over. Viewers are confronted with shots of old, poorly kept terrace buildings, the inferior accommodation there, and children (it could be your children) playing on rubbish dumps and in dark, dirty lanes; one child looks direct to camera, as if accusingly, in a lingering shot. In contrast to the earlier scenes of decent homes—the ones their tenants are proud of—the shots here are taken from above, looking down into the congested back yards, peering over back fences, and likewise looking down on the children, emphasising their unhealthy living conditions. Statistics reinforce this argument: 'in NSW alone, 80,000 families live in sub-standard homes'. This section contrasts with the opening sequence. These are homes that no-one should feel proud of, and the film invites the audience to share in the responsibility for this assessment.

We move inside one of these sub-standard homes and are further confronted with the actual living conditions experienced. There are too many people living in one cramped room, too many children trying to sleep in one bed, and the whole family surviving in a state of tension.

Throughout this section the narration is emotive, and appeals to the viewers' sense of decency. As in *Hewers of Coal*'s later sections, this is a plea to the moral responsibility of the audience, as the film reminds them that all Australians deserve a healthy lifestyle. The narrator uses the word 'we', implicitly invoking the audience to take some responsibility for the way these people have to live. He asks:

How can we measure the destructive physical and psychological effect on families—parents and children—of intolerable living conditions? How much sickness and discomfort compressed in a square mile of tenements? How much hopeless frustration to a dingy room? How much monotonous misery to a square mile of slums?

The problem is exacerbated with the arrival of more home-seekers to Australia. There are shots down on the docks of the migrants arriving, and then in their housing camps, with box-like dwellings in dreary rows, but this, Teale points out, is 'not a very happy way to start life in a new country'. The film does not blame the migrants for exacerbating the housing problem, but situates them as being affected by it just as Anglo-Australians are. This section establishes the film's argument that poor housing conditions exist in 'the lucky country'. It also works to persuade viewers to ask questions about it: why has this situation come about? What can be done about it?

These scenes are contrasted with the film's second section, as it opens with uplifting music and a similarly buoyant tone in the narrator's voice. 'Australia's a land sky-wide in space and sunshine—just the place for a home, the kind of home everyone should have', Teale tells the audience, alluding to the equal rights everyone should have for quality accommodation. Australians, the film argues, should not have to live in poor circumstances. We have many good homes here, of good design, with plenty of building materials available and no shortage of labour. This part begins with a repetition of a strategy used in the first section: shots of houses, one after the other, emphasising the number and quality of dwellings. But these are good homes: detached houses in the suburbs, well maintained, surrounded with light and space. Next, a series of shots demonstrates the wealth of building materials and consumer goods that are now available, and the work of builders who are just waiting to build these sorts of homes for deserving Australians. 'There's a desperate need for homes, but the fact is, fewer and fewer

are being built'. Figures superimposed on the screen, and enumerated in the narration, support this statement.

After showing the contrast between actual and desired housing conditions, the third section of the film takes the form of a case study, which explains the cost of a house, highlighting just how much more affordable it would be with lower interest rates. A dramatised sequence shows a young couple (played by Patsy Robertson and Patrick Barnett from the New Theatre) trying to work out their finance. Despondent, they realise they simply cannot afford to buy a home, so must stay in their small Kings Cross flat (the sequence was filmed in Disher's home). This section outlines their plans, what it would cost for a 'modest enough' home, and employs a series of animated graphs. The argument for the cost highlights the interest paid on the home loan: over half the total repayments. We leave our young couple as they sadly shelve their plans, and perceive that their situation puts them in an equivalent position to those who are living in temporary dwellings, or substandard rental accommodation. Over shots that act as a reminder of the living conditions in the inner city, the narrator concludes that 'lack of finance, no loans for home building, interest rates too high, fewer rental dwellings being built: that's the story behind the housing problem'.

The film has, by now, firmly established the situation, and argued on factual and emotional grounds that something should be done about it. It turns to the people with a solution: the ACTU. Over scenes of an ACTU meeting, Teale reminds the viewer that this organisation 'represents the voice of more than a million workers', establishing a sense of authority for what the film is about to outline. The ACTU's plan involves lobbying the Federal Government for a number of actions. ACTU President Albert Monk features in this section: from his desk he outlines the organisation's proposals, uncomfortably reading his speech from cue cards in the film's only instance of synchronised sound recording. This solution consists of a reduction of the home loan interest rate, the reintroduction of the rental rebate system, and (in a move that echoes Ted Roach's Bankstown election campaign) the release of Commonwealth funds from 'surplus defence funds' to boost the public housing building program. He concludes his speech

with a mention of the People's Housing Conferences. These have been organised to generate public support for the ACTU's proposal that, Monk assures the viewer, 'is in the best interests of the Australian people'.

In a smooth and fluid movement, the scene moves from Monk's office out to those citizens who support the plan. Here are more familiar shots for WWF films: building workers on job sites, listening to labour movement leaders promoting their program. The workers vote to support these executives, and applaud their speeches. We now watch other people throw their weight behind the ACTU's plan at the Sydney Town Hall, where the first of the State Housing Conferences is underway. Delegates arrive at Town Hall, and inside, there are shots both from the audience and the stage. Behind the speakers is strung a banner with the Housing Report quote, further reinforcing the unity of this film with the union program.

The film moves on smoothly to demonstrate what the release of these funds could mean, depicting houses being built in abundance, including a newly completed Housing Commission project, where an elderly couple move in to what is presumably their dream home. Then it is back to our young couple again, but here they are reframed in the 'land sky-wide in space and sunshine'. With the bright sun in their faces, and with stars in their eyes, they have travelled from King's Cross to a new outer Sydney suburb to see their dream house being built, domestic bliss assured. This depiction of the certain success of the ACTU's solution is supported by more figures, explaining how, for these two young homemakers, a lower interest rate means smaller repayments. How they can meet them, though, is left unexplained. The film concludes with shots of people of Sydney, all beneficiaries of the ACTU's solution to the housing crisis. The solution will only prevail with wide support, however: the final words of Leonard Teale exhort the audience that with 'united action and firm demand by every one of us, this will be achieved'. As in other WWFFU productions, only through unity will right prevail.

Not Only The Need premiered at 5pm on 1 July 1958 in Melbourne at the National People's Housing Conference, where it was well received. The planning and promotion of the

Conference was taken on energetically by the ACTU Building Trades Sub-Committee, and in particular by Frank Purse. The Conference attracted over a thousand delegates from many unions as well as government, building, financial, church and social welfare organisations, and a number of respected economists including Sir Douglas Copland, whose speech supported the ACTU's campaign. Purse noted that as a result of the Conference, 'there is today a keener appreciation within the Trade Union movement of the fact that proper housing for the people is a social question and that the Unions have a responsibility to campaign for its achievement'. He wrote of the film:

We feel that not only will this film be a powerful medium in the fight for proper housing, but, also, that by the production of this film the ACTU has given a lead to the Trade Unions generally on the significance and importance of the film medium for winning support for Trade Union policy and ideas. It is our belief that the widespread use of the film and the National Trade Union Petition on housing in the immediate future will do much to consolidate the good already achieved and strengthen still further the demand of public opinion for the use of the building industry in the satisfaction of the people's building needs. (Letter to Monk and Souter)

This was the last production to be completed by the WWFFU. It was a most useful film for the ACTU; and its funding by Australia's peak labour organisation should have been a clear sign that the Unit's work merited continuation. The film had a wider objective, regarding the 1958 Federal election. The BWIU believed that *Not Only the Need* 'should also be used extensively throughout the whole of the election campaign. This film can be shown at Union, job and election meetings as well as in cottages and halls. If used properly it can be a powerful force in the campaign to defeat Menzies and win support for the Unions' housing demands' ('Building Industry Programme'). The campaign was ongoing in 1959, with the added activities of the National Safety Week, to give more public prominence to the problems within the building industry.

There are a number of ways in which the examination of these three films argues for a development in the work of the WWFFU. The most immediately apparent concern the aesthetics of the films. In its style and approach, *The Hungry Miles* points very much to the

position of Australia within an older world, taking many of its formal characteristics from the Griersonian documentary as well as earlier Soviet work. With the last film they produced, these influences are not so obvious. The production values of *Not Only the Need* are considerably higher than for early WWFFU films. In their history of Australian cinema, Shirley and Adams describe this 'impressive' film as 'a well-shot and intricately edited documentary about postwar housing conditions' (196). Most shots are steady through the employment of a tripod, and the editing throughout is more certain than in previous works. The film consists of a wide variety of shots, taken in the city, in the suburbs, on building sites and in offices; and the dramatic sequences work well, and are smoothly integrated into the body of the documentary. The soundtrack is more sophisticated than in earlier productions, with some loosely synchronised sound effects as well as Monk's speech.

Another component of the Unit's development concerns the sponsorship of its production. A profusion of figures support the argument of *Not Only the Need*, which relate to housing and building statistics, government funds, and the case study of the young couple's experience. They appear in the narration as well as through a professional employment of animation techniques. Largely because of this abundance of numbers, the WWFFU filmmakers were somewhat dissatisfied with this film. Gow quipped that it was 'boring as batshit ... it doesn't look like a film we ever made' and said that 'it could have been just as well done in a graph or a pamphlet ... I think it was the wrong idea, to try to do it that way'. Levy observed that 'it wasn't one of our more important films'. Disher found it 'very tedious' and recalled that 'it was terribly difficult to do, it was just loaded with statistics ... I remember at the time we found it very difficult to present all those ideas' (Hughes interview). These observations point to the distance travelled from the Unit's production of *The Hungry Miles*, a film for which they were given an imprecise assignment, and, consequently, were very happy with. Disher referred to the uncertainty of the early film's commissioners as to what they would receive as a finished product, and Levy recalled that 'we had so much freedom to do it' (Personal interview). By the time *Not Only the Need* was made, the sponsors knew exactly what they would receive. So one

aspect of the development of the Unit's output was the increasing accommodation to the client's brief.

A third manifestation of the development of the Unit's work concerns its approach to the changing times, and to progress. In making all their films they looked to an Australia that embraced social justice, but in the early works this is achieved through a great deal of reflection on the past. Ben Chifley's 'No Glittering Promises' 1949 election speech (that preceded his loss of government) had reflected on the legacy of the Depression, arguing that it must never happen again. As Chifley did, *The Hungry Miles* bases its argument on living conditions during the Depression. It reflects on the worst parts of the Australian experience, in its appeal to the morality of its audience. This changes through the work of the Unit: *Hewers of Coal* refers to conditions of the Depression in less detail than earlier films (and in the narration only once); and by the time of *Not Only the Need*, there is little reference to the past, and concerns are only of the present and the future.

The Hungry Miles makes only a small direct reference to progress and modernisation, concerning the upgrading of wharves and facilities. We can see that through the work of the Unit, this call for progress increases markedly: it becomes a greater component of the films' messages. *Hewers of Coal* deals with an industry in which the methods of work were rapidly changing, and as they changed so did the identity of the worker. As a precursor to the environmental activism of later decades, *Hewers of Coal* works within a pro-environment mode, arguing against the wanton rape of the land, and for a managed mining system that does not waste the coal, and provides some hope for the future: the narration shows how 'the hewers of coal are demanding some security for tomorrow'.

Even more than *Hewers of Coal*, *Not Only the Need* engages with the discourse of progress, particularly with its consequences on the working class. This is an unresolved contradiction of this last film, in which it could be argued that socialism and capitalism collide: how could a communist-led union like the BWIU commission a film to support the suburbanisation (and

consequently the demobilisation) of the working class? Labour organisations had always worked to secure a better deal for workers, and progress, if it benefited them, was seen as helpful. The film welcomes the cleaner lifestyle of the suburbs, and the advantages that improved accommodation could bring to working-class Australians. But at the same time it interrogates the benefits of suburban development that were unaffordable for so many people.

Within their varying comments on progress, these three films embrace a Thompsonian 'moral economy'. *The Hungry Miles* argues that 'surely methods unchanged for fifty years must be replaced by efficient ones, in keeping with the times, in the interests of the community'. A line in *Not Only the Need* maintains that 'a dwelling of good standard and equipment is not only the need but the right of every citizen ... surely this is the right and proper thing to do'. And in building up the argument for the nationalisation of the coal industry, *Hewers of Coal* puts forth the opinion that 'coal should belong to the nation—its right and heritage'. This moral economy illustrates the social responsibility of unionists to protest over issues that were not directly connected with their working conditions. Mallory argues for the social responsibility of Australian trade unions, especially of those led by communists. They took a broad understanding of their labour, which they believed should be used in a socially responsible way ('Social'). The campaigns that these films support, notably the attempt at nationalisation of the coal industry to guard against wastage of coal and communities, and the BWIU's attempt to overcome poor housing conditions, are precursors for such later protest movements as the green bans of the 1970s. In their history of the green bans, Burgmann and Burgmann note that

social-movement unionism often includes the formation of a subaltern counterpublic (because its constituencies are wider than its membership) but it directs this agitated and agitating public towards specific goals through actions undertaken primarily by a union.

(7)

This is what occurred in the campaign of which *Not Only the Need* was a part: the BWIU believed that 'perhaps the most important gain from this campaign is the growing recognition by the Trade Union movement that the demand for proper housing is a Trade Union demand' (Report 15 September 1958), and then broadened their campaign with the aim of assisting a much wider group than their own membership.

The three films have interesting correspondences when examining their appraisal of progress. In his classic text *Nationalism* Elie Kedourie observes that 'Liberals measure political progress by the diminution of social and political privileges, and for Socialists the touchstone of progress is the reduction of economic inequality' (85). The three films examined above question the morality of government and monopolies, and so implicitly interrogate the morality of capitalism. They dismiss an uncritical acceptance of progress that disregards social equality, especially in *Hewers of Coal*, with its views on modern mining machinery. Turner writes that 'proponents of an aggressive development capitalism have inserted notions of progress and prosperity into the depiction of the nation by connecting the myths of the pioneers with the signifiers of industrialisation' ('It Works' 329). The WWFFU films reject this, and instead argue for a form of progress not wholly directed by Mammon. Their stance is paralleled by EP Thompson, who was among those on the left to bemoan the death of a traditional working-class culture. In 1951 he wrote of this loss, but also of the contradictions that came with it:

In place of the great proletarian values revealed in class-solidarity and militancy, we now have, even among sections of our own working class movement, the values of private living growing-up—the private fears and neuroses, the self interest and timid individualism fostered by pulp magazines and Hollywood films. ('William' 29)

In commissioning *Not Only the Need*, the ACTU, like Thompson, saw that the rising standards of living in the post-war era were influencing the working class.¹⁹

Interrelated with the films' changing attitude to progress is their gradual departure from traditional working-class notions of solidarity and collectivism. The films proceed from a very black and white view of the world, to one which, when examined closely, is not so straightforward in its identification of the heroes and the villains. Sections of *The Hungry Miles* could have been made in a socialist or communist state. The last film of the Unit assertively takes up the rhetoric of progress, but for the benefit of the working class, and most obviously creates a cinematic site in which the left attempts to come to terms with some aspects of capitalism.

¹ The mocked-up photograph is one accompanying 'Evatt'. Amongst the other newspaper articles is a clip that asserts 'the lazy, drinking, incompetent, strike-prone watersiders have held their jobs solely because the Federation says they must' ('Navy').

² One example of such opposition is the *Bulletin's* claim that it is 'Mr. Healy and his lieutenants' ('Communism') who organise wharf hold-ups and go-slows.

³ Gow was the Unit member probably most responsible for the stylistic and editing decisions of the Unit, and he had a great influence of the overall appearance of the films. He recalled that like many others in his generation, he had gone to the movies every week from a young age (Moran interview). The amount of influence from such a wide-ranging filmic literacy is difficult to assess, but cannot be disregarded. The work of Gow and Levy, both before and during their employment in the WWFFU, on feature films also contributed to this literacy.

⁴ Through an examination of selected literary texts in his study on representation of the 1950s male, Lindsay Barrett suggests that an ideal of the 'self-made man' was employed to represent Australian nationalism, both on the left and the right.

⁵ The Eureka story is also explored in *November Victory*. This presages the 1974 work that Gow directed for the DOI, *Flag of Stars*, to commemorate the 119th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade.

⁶ Glen Davis was a town to which the New Theatre brought a play, *The Candy Store*, which they performed to the 'stay-put' miners. The story of the Glen Davis performance is recounted in a play by Mona Brand which was written to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ACSEF ('Come'). This work contains many folk songs and protest songs; New Theatre actor John Armstrong has a role, as does filmmaker and actor Eddie Allison, who projects a section of his 1945 film *Coal Dust*.

⁷ Special flameproof lighting equipment was loaned from the DOI to shoot the underground sequences of *Hewers of Coal* (Gow, Moran interview).

⁸ Stills from this section are reproduced in the Miners' Federation journal alongside articles on the film's success ('Wide Praise'; 'Film Attracts'; 'Film Used').

⁹ In sharing the labour movement's resources, WWFFU photographs of this march are later reproduced in *Common Cause* ('Aberdare') and the BWIU's newspaper *The Building Worker* ('Sack').

¹⁰ This march was reported by the mainstream media, including the newsreel 'Miners Protest'. See also 'Miners Invade'.

¹¹ Chris Chamberlain writes that in populist hegemony 'unions are presented as a problem because they are disruptive; because they interfere in issues which do not concern them ... because they force workers to go on strike when they do not really want to; because they ignore the 'national interest'; and because they need to be controlled' (24-25).

¹² Lees and Senyard note that 'amongst all the attacks on the miners, the human cost of the industrial changes was overlooked' (17).

¹³ It has been observed that Lorenz's work for this organisation 'succeeded in incurring the wrath of private industry (Hollywood saw it as 'socialism', because it was government-financed) and Roosevelt's political opposition (they saw it as New Deal propaganda, an attempt to justify Roosevelt's farm policies)' (Moses 186). This tendency was paralleled in the Australian commercial industry's resistance to non-commercial film activities, such as the DOI and film societies and festivals. In 1949 DOI filmmaker Malcolm Otton wrote that 'trade opposition to the Film Societies in the past has ranged from violent agitation to splenetic apathy' (5; Bertrand, 'Goodbye').

¹⁴ A 1957 DOI film on the coal industry was Lee Robinson's *The Power Makers*. Shot at Yallourn for the Victorian State Electricity Commission, this took the approach of narrating the industry through the eyes of four employees within different sections of a coal mine and power station. As in the revised version of *The Steelworker*, the physical effects of the work on the men themselves are elided; the working conditions, the repetitious and dangerous elements of the job are omitted. The film concentrates on the exterior look, the surface, the long shot, rather than a deeper analysis of a working community and its members.

¹⁵ On the issue of the remake of *Warriors for the Working Day*, Maslyn Williams of the DOI wrote that 'I am naturally conscious that we should not deliberately offend an important

national organisation such as BHP, especially as we frequently require co-operation from the management of the Company in our productions'.

¹⁶ In NSW at the 1954 census, 24,799 people lived in 'sheds, huts etc'. By the 1961 census, this figure had dropped to 19,250 (*Official* 397).

¹⁷ Only 20% of the dwellings built under the 1956 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement were for rental, with the remaining 80% available for sale.

¹⁸ As with WWF leaders, those of the BWIU were often suspected as radicals: Sir Charles Spry, director-general of ASIO in the fifties, believed that Clancy and the BWIU were typical examples of subversive militants. (Interview with Glenn Mitchell. qtd. in G Mitchell 119).

¹⁹ see Greig, Chapter Six, 'Falling into the Dream: The Growth of Owner Occupation', for a presentation of commonly circulating debates on the increasing post-war phenomenon of owner-occupation.

Fig 5. Still from *The Hungry Miles* (WWFFU, 1955)

Chapter Five

Reflections

This thesis' concluding chapter evaluates the work of the WWFFU. It considers the theoretical implications of the study, revisiting the questions of making history. It examines the changing nature of class and national identity during the time of the Unit's operation, and answers the question 'why did the Unit's work end in 1958?' It also looks at representation in the documentary film.

Thesis Resonances

This study set out to offer a history of the WWFFU, through the provision of textual and contextual information, analysis and reflection. This is not the definitive history of the WWFFU: it is a relative one, which is simultaneously empowered and limited by the primary and secondary sources I have accessed, and by suitable theoretical parameters. It is a history that momentarily privileges some discourses over others, to highlight an instance of cultural production's connection with political activism, and the gaps that still exist in our history.

A history of the group's output and operations showed how important communal and working-class practices were to the Unit in its formations of production, distribution and exhibition. In elaborating on the ways in which to approach a history of the WWFFU, this thesis then questioned how labour history and cultural studies could be relevant disciplines within which to embark on such a project, and how they could be used as discursive formations in a study detailing a subaltern cultural movement. Following on from the work of Thompson and Williams this history bases its approach in a broadly Marxist view, in a project to introduce working-class experience into an understanding of Australian cultural history. Moving on to

contextualise the Unit, its output and its operations, the third chapter argued that the WWFFU was simultaneously part of the communist, labour and left cultural activist *milieux* of its time, and came about because of the particular nature of the industrial and cultural formations existing in the early 1950s. These groupings were not by any means completely unified structures, but there were a number of discourses common to them, which are manifest in the philosophies and practices of the Unit. This led to the analysis of the three key films, to indicate how the Unit produced their work, drawing upon a pool of formal and stylistic characteristics that was fairly characteristic for the period, to create their own portrayals of the labour movement. These analyses illustrated how the Unit's filmwork developed, stylistically and ideologically, over its period of operation, and also showed how the integration of approaches from the areas of cinema studies, labour history and cultural studies can produce a fruitful analysis.

These writings, therefore, constitute an informed investigation of the activity of the filmmakers, and their products, within their environment, delineating the social, aesthetic and political values of the left activist subculture, and how they were reproduced in the work and practices of the WWFFU. One of the most important constituents of this history of the Unit, as a part of working-class culture, has been the Unit's organisation; as Sparks has noted, 'the difference between working class and other culture is not primarily the ideas embedded in it, not the types of activity which are labelled culture, but in the way these are organised' ('Raymond Williams' 142). This follows on from Raymond Williams' understanding of working-class culture, which asserts that

the relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organisation and relationships, and this is radically different from the production and consumption of an object ... we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice. When we find ourselves looking at a particular work, or group of works, often realising, as we do so, their essential community as well as their irreducible individuality, we should find ourselves attending first to the reality of their practice and the conditions of the practice as it was then executed. (*Problems* 47, 48)

This approach points to the necessity for attention to the working and screening practices of the WWFFU. The films themselves would have had much less impact than they did, had they not been surrounded with a vibrant and proactive distribution and exhibition practice that vitally connected them to their subjects and audiences, and enhanced the films' effects. Correspondingly, the methodology of this thesis has highlighted the importance of this active relationship between production and exhibition methods.

I began this work from a biased perspective. I have not, however, intended to view the WWFFU films merely as romantic reflections of class struggle, but in a more fully informed way within their broader social, political and cultural contexts. In a Foucauldian investigation at the WWFFU films, it is relevant to question how the Unit appropriated the 'apparatus of knowledge' (*Power/Knowledge* 98) of cinema from mainstream producers. This led to the necessity of uncovering what very influential sites of power they were discarding (exhibition to commercial cinema audiences, mainstream recognition and reviewing of their films) and what others they were adopting (the technology itself and its increasing cheapness and flexibility, the popular forms of the Griersonian documentary and the newsreel, and the networks of the trade union and left cultural activist sites for the exhibition of their productions). The Unit empowered a new subject for films, that of worker power—a rare regime of opposition in Australian screen culture.

Class and the WWFFU

One of the most valuable aspects of the WWFFU was that it was a group of working-class people creating its own cultural commodities. In producing their films, despite the antagonism towards militant unionists, 'reds' and cultural activists, these people operated against ruling-class blocs. In Australian film, especially in the 1950s, there were few works that foregrounded class difference, and even fewer that focused on the problems of the working class, which were

still in existence despite the increase in the standard of living for many Australians. Explorations of class relations are the backbone of the WWFFU films. In working from the premise that culture is constitutive of class identities, it becomes necessary to examine the Unit's films for their contribution to the constitution of class identities. The Unit aimed to motivate working class identity amongst its audiences, not just through the texts of the films themselves, but through the films' use as part of a working-class communication practice, which was collective, proactive and inclusive. In the case of the WWFFU films, social and political participation occurred in the mining town halls, on building sites, and around migrant camps, when the films screened and discussions ensued. In these ways and others, the working class constructed their own sites of power, alongside the extra-curricular work of the militant trade unions, the strikes, and the everyday actions in the working-class communities of housing settlement, dockside or mine.

The three films examined in the previous chapter represent Australia as a land rich in resources, and rich in potential in its land and its people. But they also mark problems in the attainment of this potential, and identify solutions that can be achieved by the working class. In 1945 the Ministry of Post-War Construction promoted the use of 'film for education aimed at producing a thinking, active, result-getting, democratic community through the production of films revealing the need for, and the means towards progress, in the social organisation of the community' (7). The WWFFU films promote a slightly different use of the film to that of the education and progress that the government promoted. They assert the powerful role that the working class can play in the progress of the nation. Progress is the aim of all these three WWFFU productions – but it is progress to be attained by, and for, the working-class.

It is important to understand the objective of the WWFFU producers in deciding to become filmmakers for the labour movement (the only ones of their time in Sydney). The Unit emerged from a hostile environment for communists, militant unionists, and cultural activists, and rode the wave of rising popularity in non-commercial screen culture. It opened up a representational space in which the official denial of a class structure in Australia was challenged. It was

supported by many people in the labour movement and the left cultural activist community. Some of these organisations and individuals commissioned these films, for which they could see a need. The films thus produced were consciously biased, as tools of opposition to the generally anti-labour mainstream media. The films' registration and reproduction of less than ideal working and living conditions reveal that there were detrimental effects of the progress and modernisation of the 'Australian way of life'. They are images of the working class, expressed in a popular medium, but produced as a resistance to most uses of that mechanism. Dick Hebdige has commented on such uses of a format for radical means:

Style in subculture is ... pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalisation'. As such, they are gestures, movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus. (367)

The WWFFU films challenged many truisms of life in Sydney in the 1950s, and in many ways they contradicted the powerful myth of unanimity of that time. They showed how much Australia was not 'the lucky country': it was not luck, but the capitalist system that created inequality.

The 1950s were years in which conditions were anything but unchanging, as this thesis has observed. In those times the discourse of class was much more apparent in the public sphere than it is at the beginning of the 21st century, but even then, with the rising standards of living along with the rise of the white-collar sector of the workforce, the decline of the organised left and the disintegration of the CPA, the idea of class was becoming less pronounced. Older notions of the strength of the industrial proletariat were waning, and a different concept of class was developing which focused more on income, consumption and living standards, all of which drew attention away from the issues of power and structure that still existed.

A number of texts (notably Davies; Connell, *Ruling*; Connell and Irving; R Wild) point to the general decline of class consciousness in the postwar era. Davies' 1962 study pointed to an 'impression of evaporating proletarian feeling' compared to a 1949 study (Oeser and

Hammond). Connell and Irving have also argued that the debilitated and segmented character of the labour movement led to a change in working-class consciousness:

The political defeats around 1950 were followed by a demobilisation, and the reasons plainly extend far beyond politics into changes in domestic life, new patterns of division in the working class, and changes in the role of the state as well as the cultural ascendancy of the industrial bourgeoisie. (298)

The working class of this period experienced a general reduction in class distinctiveness and class consciousness, as working and living conditions were improving, and as the other outcomes noted above were reshaping the nature of Sydney workers' lives. As stated earlier, the nature of the working class was undergoing massive structural and numerical changes. The percentage of workers in trade unions reached its peak in 1954 and then began a decline, and the number and intensity of industrial disputes similarly experienced a general decrease. The growth in home ownership of the period contributed to this general feeling of changing class consciousness. Working-class owner-occupation had been a characteristic of Australian society since the boom of the 1880s, and, therefore, was always something that the labour movement had been involved with. The WWFFU film *Not Only the Need*, then, was not advocating something new, just something that was experiencing a huge expansion in the 1950s. To counter the post-war trend towards individualism, work of the labour movement and the left cultural activists, such as the WWFFU films, highlighted the importance of collective action to build existing levels of group solidarity, and to reinforce traditional and militant notions of working-class identity in a rapidly changing world.

Although for many years the notion of the classless nature of Australian society had been defended (W Hancock), the rising standards of living and the developing consumer society of the postwar era led to a heightened promotion of an erasure of class differences from some quarters.¹ A 1955 government pamphlet claimed that Australia's people 'are united in customs, character and tradition. Few are so rich that they need not work; none so poor that he [*sic*] cannot enjoy recreation' (qtd. in White, *Inventing* 167). Robert Menzies actively endorsed this idea of a classless society. In his speech *The Forgotten People*, he addressed his 2UE radio audience as middle-class consumers and home owners. He claimed that 'in a country like

Australia the class war must always be a false war', and added that 'we do not have classes here, as in England' (1). And in the 1953 text entitled *The Australian Way of Life*, Eggleston similarly categorises all Australians into the one definition, thus:

the Australian is always critical of State activity and hates bureaucracy ... usually, union officials concentrate on the job in hand and do not think much of the direction which they should take. They have never considered it necessary to think out their economic problems and the way to secure lasting success ... The fact is that the average Australian, having left his [*sic*] interests in the hands of his [*sic*] leaders, does not take a great interest in the way in which they are managed ... Australia is a classless community. (10, 11, 12, 15)

The WWFFU productions examined in the previous chapter work against these beliefs in their representations of the Australian worker. They urge the State to act in one way or another 'in the interests of the Australian people' (to nationalise the shipping industry, to nationalise the coal industry, and to release funds to reduce housing loans). They present union officials as long-term planners, interested not only in immediate gains for their members but wider-ranging benefits for 'the Australian people'. They represent rank and file unionists with a great deal of interest in the way they are managed. Further, and most importantly, these films represent Australia not as a classless community, but as a nation whose clearly defined classes have specific roles, and their own rights and responsibilities – especially the working class.

National Identity and the WWFFU

An associated question which can be asked of the WWFFU concerns the ways in which the Unit's films represented national identity. As with other aspects of the Unit's history, there are contradictions to be found here. Graeme Turner reminds us that 'nationalism can be inscribed into an extraordinary range of political and cultural positions' ('It Works' 328). It also makes this

study relevant at the beginning of the 21st century, as we see a rekindled interest in our national history. Alexander Groth has noted the paradoxical nature of nationalism, which, he argued, has traditionally catered to the human urge for belonging, for group solidarity, for rootedness in an age of social upheaval. It has also served as a cloak and excuse for oppression of those outside one's core group and for the suppression of economic and social conflict within one's own society. (108)

The WWFFU films have similarly highlighted a paradox of ideology within their visualisations of Australia. There are a variety of ways in which these films construct a national identity. They fuse the historically bound figure of Eureka with a contemporary worker in struggle, wrapped in a traditional mantle of working-class solidarity. This worker is represented as simultaneously traditional and radical. He (and it was a 'he' in these films: it must be asserted that in those times, the mines and the docks were almost totally populated by men) was a continuation of a 'essential' Australian figure of rebellion, at the same time a conscious constituent of an international working class. Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as 'an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' is essentially over-restrictive (15-16); at the heart of these films the WWFFU imagined their political community to be both national and international within a class struggle, as did many western communists. This is one of the major contradictions underlying the WWFFU films, that similarly characterised the CPA and left cultural activist community of which the filmmakers were a part.

The human representation of nationalism was, in the WWFFU films, invariably male, nearly always white, and overwhelmingly working-class. In the 1950s the first two characteristics coincided with a common ideal of national identity; progress and Menzies were doing their best to change the third to a middle-class, with the assumptions inherent in the rhetoric of the 'Australian way of life'. The pervasive power of Gramscian 'common sense'—in which older ideals of national identity were being replaced with newer ones—was assisting this move, and so the ideal of the working class as the key indicator of Australian national identity was one that was rapidly losing ground. Even the wharfies were moving to the suburbs and improving their physical circumstances, as *Not Only the Need* shows. Although many of the working-class traditions around which the WWFFU based their films were changing (some disappearing

altogether), alongside others in the labour and left cultural movements, these filmmakers returned to older, more essentialist ideas of the nation to bolster their arguments. As Frow and Morris encapsulate, they held on to 'some of the canonical myths of modern Australian history – egalitarianism, mateship, upward mobility for all' (viii).

The WWFFU's contribution to a radical representation of Australian national identity was a confrontation against hegemonic trends, and it corresponded with the wider project of the left.² The filmmakers took their international perspective not only from the socialist movement, but also from the waterfront *milieux* and the international importance of waterfront labour, which was both a historical and a contemporary phenomenon. The WWFFU accepted that their films could be simultaneously national and international, like the economic and political character of Australia in the 1950s. In those times the importance of the shipping industry, although economically significant, was undergoing a certain forgetting in the mind's eye that continues into the present, as we rarely take notice of the wharves except at times of rupture, such as waterfront disputes, and, more commonly, controversial harbourside redevelopments. Allan Sekula comments on such transformations that 'the old harbour front, its links to a common culture shattered by unemployment, is now reclaimed for a bourgeois reverie on the mercantilist past' (12). As the Sydney waterfront radically changes its face at the *fin de siècle*, the legacy of the waterfront workers is in danger of being forgotten. The films of the WWFFU, and, subsequently, this thesis, may be parts of the disappearing reminders of earlier incarnations of that site.

Why Did the Unit's Work End?

The Unit was supported by the strength of communities in the labour movement and the cultural sphere, and with few resources, it achieved a great deal in the five years of its operation. That it did not exist for a longer period should not be simplistically viewed as a

failure. It took advantage of a certain set of circumstances to operate energetically for those five years, and for that time, transferred the power of the militant labour movement on to film. However, the original intention of the filmmakers—to produce and disseminate their work on a non-profit basis, outside accepted organs of cinema—was challenged by a desire by some union officials for the Unit to become a profit-making, money-returning business concern. When it met with this ultimatum—in keeping with the dominant culture of conservative hegemony, capitalist and progressive—and the ACTU did not subsequently take up the opportunity for the Unit's administration, its work ended.

There are a number of reasons why the WWFFU did not continue its operation after 1958. The lack of funding outlined in the first chapter of this thesis is only one component of the Unit's termination. Within the changing industrial climate of the 1950s, the concurrent effects of modernisation and automation meant a decreasing number of wharfies. This led to a decline in the union rank and file from the middle of the 1950s (when the WWF had its largest membership).³ Correspondingly, the Sydney Branch experienced a downturn in the vitality of its extra-curricular activities. Beasley points to the ageing of the workforce as another factor (*Wharfies* 160, 162). Another change in the Australian labour profile had an impact: young men were less inclined to become wharfies because there were other industries with better working conditions and prospects, notably in the growing white-collar industries, as Hagan notes, of commerce, finance and the public service (69). A number of white-collar unions did not join the ACTU, notably those within the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations, and this also perhaps brought about a change of strength and unity within the ACTU. Within this development in the labour movement the militant strength of the WWF was waning and changing in its nature, and other issues were perceived as more important than the production of propaganda and educational material.

It was also during this time that an increasing number of waterside workers and their families began to move out of the inner city, in the heightened suburbanisation of the period. This change in the inner-city community around the wharves meant that many wharfies no longer

lived so close to the Branch, and it was harder to encourage wharfies and their families to travel longer distances to after-hours events. Workers were finding the collective nature of these events less attractive, especially after the introduction of television in 1956.

Members of the WWFFU and others on the left perceived this increasingly popular tenet of individualism. It was not only remarked upon in Australia; writing in the same year as the demise of the WWFFU, Raymond Williams notes that this type of social relationship embodies an idea of society as a neutral area within which each individual is free to pursue his [*sic*] own development and his [*sic*] own advantage as a natural right ... the individualist idea can be sharply contrasted with the idea that we properly associate with the working class: an idea which, whether it is called communism, socialism or cooperation, regards society neither as neutral nor as protective, but as the positive means for all kinds of development, including the individual development. Development and advantage are not individually but commonly interpreted. (*Culture* 325, 326)

The WWFFU films emphasised this second collective, co-operative approach. With an increase in individualism in many sectors of Australian society, the weakening, in Stuart Macintyre's term, of a 'tribal solidarity' (*Concise* 202) amongst manual workers, along with the Cold War demonisation of militant trade unions, led to a decline of unity in the Sydney labour movement amongst both the leadership and the rank and file. Disher commented in a 1979 interview that if there'd been unity amongst all those possible backers it would have been different. But there wasn't. It was all too hard to bring off. Plus the fact that cultural things always have a struggle in the political scene: I mean, action through culture is very difficult to sell. (*Sixty* 34)

As Disher implied, the demise of the Film Unit was not an isolated illustration of the changing priorities of the Australian labour movement in the 1950s. Another case was the short-lived Sydney Civic Orchestra, which was organised from the energies of left cultural activists and trade unionists. It was promoted by communist Australian Peace Council (APC) member Lili Williams (whose husband Paul had formed the Unity Singers).⁴ Musician and wharfie Arnold Butcher recalls this enterprise that failed to continue for similar reasons as the WWF Film Unit:

The idea was that this orchestra was to be completely subsidised by all the unions. And they reckoned that it could be subsidised by all the unions if every unionist gave tuppence a week. They gave one concert. But it fell through because of the fact that they

didn't get the co-operation of the whole union movement that they would have liked. In other words, they couldn't get the money. I thought it was a great idea, but they just never got the money and support that they needed, which is the fate of a lot of artistic endeavours, unfortunately.

Such a combination of a lack of funding and insufficient institutional support was crucial to the disbandment of the WWFFU. As some members of the leadership examined the group's financial return to the union, the question of its commercial viability grew in importance. Although the ABC had screened one of the Unit's films, and their work had received acclaim overseas, it is unlikely that WWFFU films would have been considered for commercial film or television distribution.

The ACTU's political position and its leadership in Albert Monk were other factors in the Unit's demise. It seemed that the ACTU did not support the militant and expansive stance of the WWF of 1953 so strongly in the changed political and industrial circumstances a few years later. Levy recalled:

We put submissions to them that it would cost the average trade unionist one penny – one penny a year – to maintain the Unit. But we couldn't get to address [the ACTU]. You know this was way down on any agenda that it was ever put on. And if we could have got to address them, I am quite sure that possibly we could have swung it in our favour. But Roach wasn't the best advocate in the world and that's an ... understatement. (Hughes interview)

and:

We knew Monk: he was fairly right-wing. Anything the left wing proposed in those days had very little chance of getting through. Because the whole of the ACTU was very right-wing controlled ... later, when things got tight, economically, there was a downturn, that was basically the end of the Film Unit, mainly because of that. (Personal interview)

Rethinking History

British cultural historian Richard Johnson wrote that 'histories of the working class only get written when the larger part of the population is held to matter enough to be an object of study' ('Culture' 42). This dissertation shows how the discourse of history has matured since this opinion was ventured in 1979. Instead of merely providing an empirical, factual history of the output of the WWFFU, this thesis has been able to supplement this with the various concepts that cultural studies has brought to the humanities. This study invites a return of class to the discourses of history at a time when other concerns threaten to further marginalise it. It also acts as a reminder that as we continue to open up Australian cultural moments, there are always gaps and silences to be explored.

This work stands as a history of the WWFFU that highlights the filmmakers' use of many resources from a wide-ranging cultural capital to produce and disseminate their work. I suggest that the perceptions of cultural studies have helped to more fully understand the work of the filmmakers within their environment, and, moreover, they have shown how various aspects of political, industrial and cultural power were interrelated in 1950s Sydney. In order to produce a 'critical awareness and response to the past' (Cottle 145), I have turned especially to those insights of cultural studies that arose around the same time of the Unit's operation because of a desire to engage in a 'Marxist critical practice', as Hall termed the British cultural studies legacy ('Theoretical' 264). This work shows that, while a concrete analysis is essential to a history of the WWFFU, labour history needs to be more than a dry institutional enterprise of facts and figures. Most importantly, it leads the way to more work on the cultural history of the labour movement, and the wider working class, in Australia. Working-class cultural history is a category that has been often absent in Australia.⁵ In 1988 Curthoys wrote that

if history from below succeeded in relation to the construction of social history, it has so far failed almost entirely in relation to the construction of cultural history, which has continued to be dominated by elitist rejections of working-class cultural pursuits as mere products of commercialism. (Review 210)

This thesis, as a cultural history of a counter-hegemonic part of Australian cultural life, informed by class, is one that fills the gap in our histories that Curthoys notes.

Further, this study demonstrates that within explorations of a phenomenon of the 1950s such as the WWFFU, the most effective means of writing a history is to work from a framework that combines a labour history and a cultural studies approach. A 1999 text, dealing with the cultural tastes of Australians, has noted that the subjects of cultural studies 'often suffer from the lack of an appropriately disciplined engagement with "the real" (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 14). The connection, in this study, of the filmmakers and wharfies themselves—their actions, their reports, their recollections— with the texts of the films, engages 'the real' by examining the subject positions of working-class men through the archival material that represented them in terms of class and socio-economic status.

Another representation of 'the real' has been through oral history, which has been employed in this project to construct a site where there can be a connection between oral recollections, film as a mediating tool of documentation, and official histories. Ansara discusses the place of oral history in the creation of the discourse of Australian cinema history:

In so far as 'we' are what we remember, an important function of oral history is to give a voice to those who are otherwise excluded from written documents. Yet, with some notable exceptions, Australian film history has tended to be written by intellectuals without a great deal of direct experience of the industry themselves. ('Telling' 6)

Oral history has been another tool of research for this dissertation, and it has brought to light the recollections and opinions of many ordinary people: rank and file unionists, wharfies, union and political leaders, left-wing artists and working-class women. Placed in their context within this history, such reflections have underlined how the oral tradition has been persistently omitted from Australian histories, and how this may alter their claim to authenticity. Pat Laughren has commented on 'the democratic impulse of oral history' (105), and this thesis responds to a need to enhance the democratic perspective of history through the use of oral sources. The oral histories employed in this study have not only changed the nature of the discourse of Australian cinema history, but have added to the history of the Australian maritime community and its culture. Their use has also meant that this history is biased; in my interviews I did not encounter any wharfies, unionists or filmmakers who wished to speak against the WWFFU films. In the ageing memories of these activists, their recollections as

participants and audience turn into a biased and supportive discourse. It does not, however, mean that this history is necessarily any more or less genuine than others.

Representation and Documentary

At the beginning of this thesis I cited a slogan used by the WWFFU: 'We film the facts'. To understand this very important aspect of the Unit's work, we must first address this phrase itself. The Unit members were asserting that, for them at least, there was some idea of factuality, and that their films offered this to their audiences. This could only be the case, however, if every person's view of a situation were exactly the same. What does this mean for the Unit's documentaries? The documentary format has, since its inception, been understood (to a greater or lesser degree) as a regulated way of discussing its subjects as true: documentaries, by the use of realist techniques, invoke realism to a higher degree than other types of film. As many film critics have done, Bertrand ventures that 'perhaps films can be identified as documentary if their intent is to seek truth or represent reality' ('Theory').

However, no concept of truth is unmediated; as soon as something is thought about, talked about, written about or filmed, it becomes subjective. Whether they acknowledge it or not, all filmmakers produce their work from a biased position; it is not possible to do otherwise. Paul Rotha observed that 'no documentary can be completely truthful, for there can be no such thing as truth while the changing developments in society continue to contradict each other ... we must remember that most documentary is only truthful in that it represents an attitude of mind' ('Some' 53). I agree with Rotha, and suggest that this is how the work of the WWFFU should be approached: truth, for every documentary filmmaker, as well as every historian, has a subjective aspect.

As all documentaries are mediated constructs, their content and configuration are similar to those of historical writing, as both involve processes of selection of material, construction of patterns and employment of symbols. Like written history, films reach their audiences in a highly edited form, always partial and selective representations of the past. Documentary filmmakers make decisions to select from archival footage, newly shot film, graphics, artwork, voice-over narration and interviews. These decisions can be no less subjective than those made by the conventional historian, or the student of popular memory; documentary filmmakers offer just as provisional a history as these other compilers of the past. As this thesis itself shows, history is an area that can be endlessly changed and reworked. Geoff Eley writes that 'analytically and rhetorically, history will also always be in play—as a site of difference, a context of deconstruction, where our present's specificities may be pinned down, and the naturalising of hegemonies upset' (40); and the work of the WWFFU illustrates how this site of difference can be fruitfully employed.

Did the WWFFU, then, 'film the facts'? The Unit members certainly believed they did; indeed, it was a very important issue with their filmwork. However, they were, of course, aware that certain sections, such as the crabs sequence in *The Hungry Miles*, were recreations. They maintained that they were working 'in the interests of the Australian people' when they were, perhaps, being as sectarian as the ruling class and the mainstream media. It may also be argued that their depictions were no more authentic than any other works of their period. However, the Unit members and many of the films' audiences believed that the films' presentation of 'the other side of the story' made for a valid means of interpreting the situations portrayed.

The wharfie filmmakers believed that they were representing the reality of the situation, and they were doing this not only as filmmakers, but, perhaps more importantly, as committed Left political activists. Film lawyer Michael Frankel has observed that before the 1960s, 'the documentary film was an important part of cultural formation and social information. The roles of the documentary film-maker were multifarious and included author, informer, commentator, narrator, biographer, investigator and polemicist' (Frankel 59). Geoffrey Nowell-Smith argues

that 'it is true that explicitly political films tend to come from the left rather than the right, but this is because the need to be explicitly political is much stronger among those who do not have the automatic support of a prevailing ideology than among those who do' (419). For the Unit members, this meant being morally and politically correct according to their own standards: bringing into focus the social, political and economic injustices perpetrated by a capitalist structure. As the narration in *Hewers of Coal* notes, 'there's another side to the story'.

Rabinowitz reminds us that 'documentary is usually a reconstruction—a re-enactment of another time or place for a different audience, a graphing of history in and through the cinematic image and taped sound onto the present' (16). In employing her delineation, works which have subsequently re-used WWFFU footage have to be viewed with the same scepticism as the original films. All the re-uses claim, like the Unit's films themselves, to be a representation of reality to some degree. The WWFFU's own representations were perhaps no more realistic than any re-uses of their work, they just told their stories in a different way. There is a different objective—a different call to action—in these newer works than in the WWFFU films, with the Film Unit's original reason for recording and screening these scenes. Graeme Turner notes that it

has become increasingly characteristic of Australian documentary cinema that any investigation of history is interrogated and shaped, often through fictionalisation; it also has become increasingly characteristic of Australian feature films and television drama that Australian fictions are rooted and situated in material contexts, historicised and politicised through the deployment of documentary style. ('Mixing' 75)

There is no small irony in the fact that re-uses of the WWFFU work may make the films more well known than through their original screenings. The ideological alteration that may occur in the re-use of archival footage can be viewed in the light of Hayden White's nomination of 'willing backward', which, he wrote, occurs when we rearrange accounts of events in the past that have been emplotted in a given way, in order to endow them with a different meaning or to draw from the new emplotment reasons for acting differently in the future from the ways we have become accustomed to acting in our present (150).

In conclusion, this thesis has presented a small part of Australian history that came out of three peoples' work together in a Sussex Street building over five years. The WWFFU mobilised a set of cultural, political and economic resources to create and appropriate representations of labour, working to interject their viewpoint into Sydney culture in the 1950s. One aspect of the work of the Unit, in their presentation of working-class cinematic histories, was to heed Benjamin's advice and 'brush history against the grain' ('Theses' 259). By bringing back into clearer focus the work of the WWFFU in representing past injustices, this thesis not only performs a corrective function, but locates a site of history and memory where the present and the past intersect. Benjamin attests that 'every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' ('Theses' 257). Appraisals of such under-researched formations expand the province of Australian documentary cinema history, and they may also provide a greater understanding of our contemporary cultural sphere of activity. In the 1950s, activists like the WWFFU members fought for the rights of people who, they believed, were disregarded within a society of relative prosperity. Australian society has patently changed a great deal since then, but these struggles persist. The challenges faced by confronting issues such as ethnicity, gender and Aboriginality may be more crucial than those of class. But 'while class may have lost its privileged position in social theory', observes John Fiske, 'the problems addressed by traditional class analysis have not. Economic inequality, the centre of class theory, has grown greater not less' (8). The gap between rich and poor is, indeed, greater than it has ever been: a 1998 report claims that one in three Australians live in poverty (compared to one in five in 1973).⁶ While this situation exists, there is a need to continue the interrogation of formulations of power and class—fortified with the analytical tools that cultural studies has brought to light—in interpreting and explaining all aspects of our society, including representations of the past.

During the work towards this thesis I observed the mainstream media coverage of the MUA's disputes, and screened *The Hungry Miles* to striking wharfies on the Port Botany picket line. Like today, the 1950s was a time where unions, working conditions and living conditions for the

working-class were under attack from a Liberal government. I believe it is important to give people an alternative point of view to that of the mainstream media owners, and it is useful to look back and see what forms of resistance operated then, where opportunities such as the wharfies' films gave a voice to opposition. There are fewer independent voices in the media, and current circumstances and policies are not moving towards an enhancement of the diversity and critical aspect of the mainstream media. There are, therefore, real reasons to resurrect the wharfie films from the cultural dustbin, and to incorporate them into our history, and, perhaps, to link the struggles of the postwar era to political challenges that arise in the future.

¹ Grey argues that improvements in the 1950s in social policy, health and housing were to benefit the middle classes most (211-227).

² It has been argued by some that the project to reconfigure national identity around a left-wing ideology can be used in more recent times. Robert Gray argues that the 'project of re-defining the essential interests of the nation around the working class could provide a missing centre for the political programme of the Left' (27).

³ Twenty years later in 1975, when containerisation had all but totally replaced older shipping methods, WWF membership had dropped to 13,650 (Eller 61).

⁴ In an instance of the many collaborations between Sydney left cultural activists, Lili Williams was filmmaker Cecil Holmes' secretary for a number of years at New Dawn Films. Communist writer Len Fox recalls Williams and her husband: 'Paul Williams, who contributed so much to the Sydney musical world, and his first wife Lili, who in addition to her hard work in the Peace Movement put in endless hours of behind-the-scenes work to achieve the painting by William Dobell of Dame Mary Gilmore which has now become one of our best-known art treasures' (*Australians* 63).

⁵ We only need to call to mind Geoffrey Serle's well-known and self-acknowledged 'frankly elitist' cultural history of Australia (xi), *From Deserts the Prophets Come*, to see an example of this.

⁶ At the launch of the report—*Australian Poverty, Then and Now*—on 13 March 1998, the Governor-General Sir William Deane said 'the collective plight of disadvantage is an overwhelming national problem. Indeed, the gap between the haves and the have-nots, the advantaged and the disadvantaged, seem to us to be widening rather than narrowing' (qtd. in Poutney).

Appendix A

Filmography

Prints of all extant films are held by the Screen Sound Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive. Some prints are held by Union archives and libraries, including the MUA, the , the NBA and the National Library of Australia. All prints of three films have been lost.

Copyright for each film is held by the commissioning organisation.

Film:	Commissioned by:	First screened:	Print?
<i>'The Travellers' Trailer</i>	MIT	Mar. 1953	No
<i>Pensions for Veterans</i>	WWF	Sept. 1953	Yes
<i>The Forever Living</i>	Rosenberg Committee	1954	Yes
<i>The Hungry Miles</i>	WWF	Feb. 1955	Yes
<i>November Victory</i>	WWF	1955	Yes
<i>Bones of Building</i>	BWU	Mar. 1956	Yes
<i>WWF Newsreel No 1</i>	WWF	Apr. 1956	Yes
<i>Banners Held High</i>	May Day Committee	May 1956	No
<i>Aboriginal Culture</i>	WWF	Oct. 1956	Yes
<i>A Question of Health</i>	Ted Roach (CPA)	Nov. 1956	Yes
<i>Click Go the Shears</i>	WWF	1956	Yes
<i>Spring and Summer in Sydney</i>	WWF	Jan. 1957	No
<i>Hewers of Coal</i>	Miners' Federation	Aug. 1957	Yes
<i>The Housing Problem and You</i>	BWU	Sept. 1957	Yes
<i>Think Twice</i>	Boilermakers Union	Sept. 1957	Yes
<i>Four's a Crowd</i>	WWF	1957	Yes
<i>Not Only the Need</i>	BWU/ACTU	May 1958	Yes

'The Travellers' Trailer

See Chapter One.

Pensions for Veterans

In 1953 one of the WWF's campaigns was to achieve pensions for waterside veterans, many of whom had worked on the wharves for all their lives. The WWF had a long history of campaigns to improve working conditions, and the fight for pensions paralleled struggles in many countries at the time ('Wharfies Demand'). Tom Nelson was the Secretary of the Sydney Branch when the trailer film for *The Travellers* was screened. He received a report on the screening of the trailer, and asked Levy if the filmmakers could make a short work on the pension campaign. At a stop-work meeting on 7 July 1953, a proposal for the film to be made was approved by the rank and file. Levy and Gow received wharfies' wages whilst working on the film, and after the completion of production they returned to their work on the waterfront. Disher (who was then employed at the Trade Union Club) worked on the film on a voluntary basis. As part of the pension campaign, delegates' deputations travelled to Canberra's Parliament House from March to October 1953, where Healy, Nelson, Young and others met the Minister for Labour, Harold Holt, and presented their claims. Some of these trips were recorded by the three filmmakers, and this is amongst the footage which ASIO claims as its own, as mentioned in Chapter One.

The film itself is nearly twenty minutes in length, black and white, with no synchronous sound. The opening titles note that it was 'produced by the Waterside Workers' Film Unit Sydney Branch. This film was made entirely by waterside workers'. The film consists mostly of hand-held shots, cut in a flowing, rhythmical editing style. There is a small amount of animation. The soundtrack consists of a voice-over narration performed by Jock Levy, and recorded symphonic music. The film took about four weeks to make and was made on a shooting ratio of almost one to one. No professional actors are used; the aged, work-worn faces appearing are those of the

veteran wharfies themselves. One wharfie recalled that when Gow and Levy were directing the wharfies who played as extras, the only direction they would give would be to 'play it as it was', or for them to play it as they remembered the situation of the time (Parker). The film explains the situation from the perspective of workers, and concentrates on showing older Federation members at their work—arduous, back-breaking work. We see the 1943 'Report on the Medical Examination of Sydney Waterside Workers with Disability Cards' by Dr Ronald McQueen, pointing to the extremely poor health of long-term waterside workers, the 'price of profit' notes the narration. Sequences depicting the Canberra trips are included, as are shots of a mass rank-and-file meeting at Leichhardt Stadium, with a vote in progress.

The narration is very much in a classic Griersonian documentary style, with poetic sequences throughout. We hear lines such as:

Walk, walk, walk—keep on walking, old man. Leave your job, and where will you walk to? Where will you go? What awaits you in the city you have served so well? Infested tenement rooms to rot out your last days, charity on a sick bed ... the veterans work on, while they have the strength, in preference to a life of poverty.

The film concludes with the statement that 'the right to industrial pensions is the right of every working man ... they only ask for their just rights—a peaceful place in the sun. They have served the community long and well; the nation owes them a debt. It is for you to see that that debt is paid'. The film is dramatic whilst presenting the facts of the campaign clearly.

Pensions for Veterans was first screened at a meeting of the WWF's Federation Council on 13 September 1953 (with an uncompleted and partly unmixed soundtrack). General Secretary 'Big Jim' Healy wrote that

all Federal Councillors were enthusiastic as to its value as a propaganda medium and were also of the opinion that Branches would welcome the opportunity of showing the film in their district ... I can assure Branches that this is an excellent production and illustrates what can be done in this direction. (WWF Circular, 30 October 1953)

The film had its first large-scale screening to thousands of wharfies at a stop-work meeting in the Leichhardt Stadium on 3 November 1953. The film was then purchased by WWF branches at

£25 per copy, both within NSW and interstate, and the National Library and other distributors bought copies.

It was a long battle to win the campaign to achieve pensions, which were gained at last in 1967. It is hard to judge the real impact of the film, as it is with all WWFFU works, which had no box office statistics. Gow spoke of the 'campaign which was successful and perhaps aided to some extent by the film' (Moran interview). One decisive outcome, though, was that it led the WWF Executive to formalise the Unit's filmwork.

The Forever Living

The years of the WWFFU were ones in which anti-communist sentiments were considerable, and although the Cold War did not directly cause the loss of life in Australia, this occurred overseas. American scientific workers Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were charged with supplying secrets associated with the manufacture of atomic bombs to the Soviet Union. A wide campaign, including mass protests in Australia, failed to prevent their executions on 19 June 1953. Although it was revealed that they were indeed guilty of the charges, they were seen by many as victims of an overzealous judge, and martyrs for their cause because they were Jewish and communists. The Sydney Branch of the WWF was one of many groups concerned with the Rosenbergs' case. Gow and Disher weren't members of the Sydney Protest Committee, but they volunteered their time and skills to produce a short film, *The Forever Living* to support the cause.

Outspoken WWF Sydney Branch Treasurer and noted orator Stan Moran was a CPA member and a participant in the Sydney Protest Committee. In his autobiography Moran recalls one of the Committee's activities:

On the eve of their execution, the Sydney Committee called for a twenty-four hour vigil outside the US Consul's office, then in Wynyard Street. It was a bitterly cold night and we had fires going in a couple of four-gallon tins on the corner of Wynyard and

York Streets. As the people marched up and down past the US Consul they would pause briefly to warm their hands and then rejoin the line of placard protestors. (34)

Gow and Disher borrowed a camera from ex-RFA member Bob Matthews, and filmed the events that Moran described, for *The Forever Living*. It was produced in the same year as the Petrov affair, and its quietly dramatic scenes stand in sharp contrast to many feature film, press and newsreel reports of Cold War casualties. The silent film is eight minutes long, and its establishing and closing sequences show the Rosenbergs (depicted by two actors from the New Theatre), working in their lab, and sitting in their prison cell awaiting the call to the chair. There are scenes of protest demonstrations in the Sydney Domain, with Moran and others addressing the crowd. The Wynyard Park night vigil is featured, with demonstrators rallying by the light of hurricane lamps. They all wear buttons that read 'Save the Rosenbergs'. We see Disher handing out leaflets along a line of protestors, while another activist holds up a lamp behind her to illuminate the scene for the camera. Here are the earnest faces of thousands of people marching in the bitterly cold mid-winter night. They file past a table to write out telegrams to the American Ambassador in Canberra, pleading that 'your government grant clemency for Rosenbergs'. The police are seen directing the demonstrators away from the entrance to the Embassy office. The camera keeps tilting up to the high-rise building, as if to accuse it with its gaze. Disher recalled that 'it was a very tense night. People were still quite sure that they could stop it [the execution order]' (Interview).

A Committee member produced the intertitles that narrate the story of the film; and a recording by Pablo Casal of the Jewish hymn, the Colnedri, was played as the film screened. The Protest Committee paid for the film stock and the couple of prints struck. *The Forever Living* had a brief season in commemorative rallies, which continued several years after the executions. Left-wing unions were amongst the groups organising these: one article noted that 'it is not only as a tribute to the Rosenbergs, but also in fulfilment of a duty to Australia that we commemorate their deaths ... they were a blood sacrifice to the insanity of hate and war. These same forces are at work in Australia and, unless stopped, will exact many sacrifices from our people' ('Rosenberg'). The film was also screened by the Sydney RFA. In more recent times the film has

been shown at a Spoleto Film Festival in Melbourne, at the instigation of WWFFU researcher John Hughes. Although the film was made for a small audience and has been screened rarely, its existence is important as an early film of resistance.

The Hungry Miles

See Chapter Four.

November Victory

November Victory was the third film produced for the WWF, and was begun in November 1954 and completed in early 1955. In November 1954, the Federal Government, in collaboration with shipping interests, attempted to wrest the right to recruit waterside labour from the WWF, in the proposed changes to the Stevedoring Industry Bill. The resulting strike was supported by the ACTU and many other workers and labour organisations, and ended in a victory for the Federation and for the Australian labour movement. The SMH commented that 'the Government's handling of this matter must count as one of the worst blunders of the Menzies Government' ('Costly Defeat'). Work on all fifty-two wharves in Australia stopped from 4 to 16 November. In fighting against the Bill's alterations and their implications, the WWF embarked on a massive publicity and propaganda campaign, employing the publication of leaflets, factory and work site talks, and radio broadcasts. The Federation commissioned the Unit to make this film, which the *Guardian* recommended as 'a highly dramatic portrayal of the struggle' ('*November Victory* – A Wharfies').

The film is black and white, with narration by George Simpson Little, a Sydney actor known to the Unit members. It is twenty-two minutes in length, and it begins with the following intertitle:

Down through the years the Australian workers have struggled to improve their conditions, have battled to defend the gains they have won. From their constant struggle some events stand out—events that have become landmarks in labour history.

After a shot of the Eureka Flag, various etchings and short recreations indicate these events: the 1917 General Strike, the Rothbury killings in 1932, the pig-iron strikes of 1938, and the WWF's support for Indonesian independence with the Dutch shipping ban of 1945-49. Meetings are shot, and also recreated, for the film: meetings of Healy and other WWF Executive members, the ACTU with Healy and Albert Monk speaking about the strike, and HV Evatt, who supported the strike. There are scenes in which Jack 'Lair' Smith—a communist wharfie with a strong resemblance to the Prime Minister—appears as Menzies. The film shows the worksite meetings, deputations and other forms of WWF publicity that explain the reasons behind the strike. It employs a newsreel style, with dramatised recreations throughout.

Dick Preston's review in the *Maritime Worker* praised the film and two of its three producers:

The two waterside worker producers, K Gow and J Levy, who also produced the now famous *Pensions for Veterans* and the Warsaw Festival prize-winning film, *The Hungry Miles*, have brought to *November Victory* the best and most powerful elements of their past work. This, combined with their increasing knowledge and experience, has resulted in an inspiring and memorable film. Congratulations to the Sydney Branch officers and members for their courage and foresight in sponsoring this unique trade union development, a working-class film unit, which is already becoming known to thousands of Australians.

At least some members of ASIO had seen *November Victory*, and explained in one report: 'This film unit, with permanent paid employees, is devoted solely to propaganda. It made a scandalously untrue and distorted film version of the November 1954 waterfront strike, including a faked scene of a Federal Cabinet meeting' ('Some Notes'). The Cabinet scene was certainly faked, but for many wharfies and other workers the reality of the film's spirit was evident. It was enjoyed by audiences both here and overseas: along with *Pensions for Veterans*, *November Victory* was screened at the 1955 Karlovy Vary Film Festival, where it was 'very well received by the large international audience' ('Film Front News').

A report to the CPA Cultural Committee on the reception of the film stated:

During the Federal and State parliamentary election campaigns the Film Unit used *November Victory* extensively. Because of its strong theme of Unity this film was found to be ideal for street meetings, factory lunch hour screenings, etc. During the week prior to the Federal Election the film unit screened the film on twenty-two occasions, in the streets and at factory meetings. It was possible through the use of films to attract large crowds. At the conclusion of the victorious 1954 strike *November Victory* was received very favourably at a screening to the ACTU. (WWFFU, 'Report June 1956' 2)

Bones Of Building

Bones of Building was the first WWFFU film to be commissioned by an outside organisation, the BWIU. It was made to raise the consciousness of workers in the building industry about safety issues, which had been a subject of growing importance within the industry for some time (G Mitchell 95). Tom McDonald of the BWIU commented on the union's rationale for commissioning this film:

That film began a campaign to lift the consciousness about the rights and role of workers, and get them to believe that safety was in their hands. That was one of the starting points that has led to the transformation in the building industry ... the film should not be seen as a thing in itself, but it should be seen as a chapter in a bigger story, in a series of events which has created tremendous changes in the culture of the employers. (Interview)

It was just before this production that Disher was invited to join the Film Unit in an official capacity; prior to this she had been working voluntarily, in her own time after work. During the production of *Bones of Building*, the Film Unit's salaries and expenses were paid for by the BWIU. The film was made from an outline from the BWIU Executive, and then writer Gavin Casey was commissioned to complete the script. The lead role of Bill Smith was played by wharfie Dick Hackett, who previously appeared in *The Hungry Miles*. Nan Gow took the role of Bill's wife Marge. Another wharfie, Bob Evans, plays Bill's workmate, and George Sharman has a part as Bill's army mate, while Jock Levy plays a foreman. Two roles are taken by BWIU

executive officers – playing themselves: Alex Wren is the union organiser, and Pat Clancy is the Union Secretary.

The film is black and white, and is twenty-five minutes in length. Leonard Teale provides the narration. This work is considerably more sophisticated in style than previous films, and much of the story is told by dramatic means. It's the story of Bill Smith – 'just an ordinary average fella. And his wife Margery. It's a typical story, it could be any building worker'. We watch scenes from Bill's life as he leaves the Army in 1946, and quickly lands a job working for a construction company. He courts and marries Margery. One sequence was shot in the surf at Bondi Beach, and we see the young couple as Bill serenades his sweetheart on his ukulele, and they swim and play in the waves. Back at work, on a multi-storey building site, Bill doesn't listen to the sound advice of his union representative, and in a dramatic sequence, Bill falls through some rotten scaffolding planks, becoming permanently paralysed.

The production of *Bones of Building* is considerably more sophisticated than that of previous works. The soundtrack includes synchronous sections of dialogue and location sound, as well as sound effects. The ambulance service is used in two scenes, and in another, a dummy 'falls' from a construction site. There are graphic shots of building workers in unsafe conditions, and also of the men, looking straight to camera. After a sequence pointing to the importance of safety on the job, the film ends with a talk by Pat Clancy, giving the Union's message about safety to the viewer:

We want the bigger and better buildings that will be part of Australia's future to be free of the ghosts of killed and injured workers, built on foundations of rock, not on the bones and blood of the men who made them.

This was the first of the Unit's films which was subjected to censorship: one worker referred to 'the arse falling out of the market', at which another laughed. It was the laugh, and not the expletive, that was cut. McDonald observed:

the Unit saying and capturing what were the workers' thoughts and feelings, aspirations in respect of issues like safety – that was its great strength, in my view ... it

was a tool that lifted the whole campaign. It was the first film that was shown around building sites, therefore that was an attraction in itself ... it was quite a pioneering step. (Interview)

Bones of Building had its first public screening on 9 March 1956. Like other WWFFU works, it was shown extensively by the BWIU—at union, delegates' and training meetings, and on building sites with the help of the Unit's Kombi. The BWIU executive was very satisfied with the reception and effects of this film. One report written soon after the film's release was most encouraging, and noted the Union's perspective:

the BWIU believes that the workers are hungry for films of this nature which have the interests and welfare of the men on the job at heart. Various jobs have come forward voluntarily with collections after showings for the financing of future working-class films. This is the best proof of the success and the huge step forward we have made as we see workers preparing to form their own film groups to produce the films they want and indeed which they need ... the Union's attitude to films of this nature is that *Bones of Building* is but one of many more such films and that the audiences to be gained through the medium of films is practically unlimited. (WWFFU, 'Report from WWFFU to Realist')

Following on from the success of the safety campaign, the ACTU's National Safety Week was inaugurated in 1957. During this week, amongst a wide variety of activities (including the crowning of George John as 'Mr Safety of the NSW Building Industry'), *Bones of Building*, along with other safety and building industry films, was screened at safety conventions nation-wide ('Safety').

It was seen by non-union audiences, through Quality Films, the National Library, and film societies. The Department of Labour and Industry and the Repatriation Department used the film in safety campaigns, as did other unions. It was screened at the 1956 Melbourne Film Festival. Copies were sold overseas, including the United Kingdom. Along with *Pensions for Veterans* and *November Victory*, it was sent to the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, where it was 'very well received by the large international audience' ('Film Front'). The Sydney University Film Group screened the film, and nominated it as

the best example yet of the work of an independent Australian production unit ... its points are tellingly made in both documentary style and in a series of natural incidents which weave through the film effectively tying it together ... there is a looseness in editing and a tendency to dwell overlong on eccentric 'arty' shots of buildings. Not all will agree with that, however, but most agree even if not interested in building work, that this is an exciting and well made film.

WWF Newsreel No 1

While Australian commercial newsreels depicted the Royal visit and the Redex Car Trial, and ran stories such as *New Guinea: Fuzzy Wuzzies Produce Timber For The World*, the WWFFU made an episode of their own newsreel on the Federation's strike activity around the 1956 Margins Dispute. The strike ran from 23 January until 14 February 1956 (M Beasley, *Wharfies* 175-182), and the newsreel was screened from April that year. In the Kombi van, the Film Unit went out from the Sydney Branch to various suburbs, to Newcastle, Wollongong and Port Kembla, and then went on to the Melbourne Branch ('Wharfie Film Unit'). They travelled to these branches not only to film events, but to speak to workers, to teach film projection techniques, and to screen their other films ('The Film Unit').

The newsreel is black and white, and eleven minutes long. The soundtrack is of a poor quality; the voice-over is spoken by Levy and others, and hints at the fast pace in which this production was put together. The film begins with an roughly printed intertitle:

For many thousands of workers, the demand for an increased margin is a *just* and *urgent* claim. Since 1948 the waterside workers have been to the arbitration court nine times, to get back what has been taken off their margin by *price increases*. Result – all claims rejected. Strike for wage justice. [original emphases]

The work presents strike activity at several WWF branches. The narration traverses a circular route, beginning at the Sydney Town Hall, then travelling to Port Kembla, Melbourne, Newcastle, and back to document ongoing activity at the Sydney Branch.

Shots are mostly medium close-ups: a wharfie in the audience could easily recognise himself, his mates, or his union representative. Names of unions, companies, work sites, unionists, and politicians are supplied throughout. Action is fast-paced, and 'rough and ready' filmwork is the rule. There are shots of various WWF Strike Committee members speaking to groups at work sites (not just wharves, but construction sites, the Downing Street tramway depot, a Port Kembla steel factory and others) and at the Domain; meetings of the WWF and the ACTU; and there are many scenes showing strike rations being handed out by Women's Committee members. These sequences are shown which are part of 'a campaign to put the real facts before the people', the voice-over declares. One sequence features Gow, teaching Melbourne wharfies how to load a film projector:

An unusual sidelight from Melbourne branch. In [the] Realist Theatre, members of the branch formed themselves into a group, learned how to screen films, and showed the films made by their own union to more than eight thousand people during the strike – an important part of the publicity drive.

The withdrawal of support for the strike from the ACTU is narrated, with a plea for unity in upcoming campaigns. There is some analysis of the political situation behind the events being recorded: shots of Women's Committee members are accompanied with the narration that informs us they are 'showing their growing awareness and practical assistance in trade union activity'. The concluding title predicts that this is only 'the end ... of round one'. The work is raw in its style, but the vitality of the scenes keep it strong.

As described earlier, the commercial newsreels were prolific and popular institutions in Australian cinemas. Disher remembered the Film Unit's aspirations for the possibilities that could have arisen, had they been able to continue the production of newsreels:

We had this dream that we were going to make regular newsreels, turn them out and get them off to the branches on a regular basis, and we were going to use the style that they were used to. But we were going to change the content! ... we wouldn't have got them on to theatres, but we would have at least got them onto the waterfront, and on to the places where people were. (Interview)

Banners Held High

May Day was first celebrated in Australia in 1891 during a shearers' strike (Stephen 6), and trade union banners and May Day have figured largely in the history of the labour movement. Much of the inspiration for the posters, banners and other displays that were produced for May Day marches after World War I came from the WAC in the 1930s, through the efforts of activists such as Noel Counihan (Stephen and Reeves 40-41). The WWF's Sydney Branch has produced many banners for parades throughout the years, as part of the work that went on in the top floor workshop of the Sussex Street building. In the 1950s, the workers on the banners included Sonny Glynn, Leon Lewis, Ralph Sawyer, Len Grant and Mick Gresham.

Films on May Day celebrations were not unknown in Australia. The RFA had made such films in the late 1940s, using footage from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney marches (D Williams, 'Making'). The WWF Film Group included films on May Day celebrations of other countries in its screenings, and often loaned such films out to other groups, such as the NSW Chinese Youth League. The mainstream newsreel companies in Australia regularly covered the May Day marches ('Domain Demonstration').

Little is known about *Banners Held High*, which was also known as *Australian May Day*. It may be the case that two films were made about May Day celebrations, one in 1955 and one in 1956, for the May Day Committee of the NSW TLC (the Committee's President was Ted Bulmer, BWIU Federal President, and its Secretary was Stan Moran, of the WWF Executive). It is also possible that footage from the two celebrations were combined for the final film of 1956. The film, produced in a newsreel style, was originally silent, and was made for the TLC's Six Hour Day Committee, 'who were enthusiastic about it and seem likely to consider adding a soundtrack' (WWFFU, 'Report from WWFFU'). Disher described some of the work that went into the making of the film:

some of the officers had come back from overseas and were inspired by a May Day march somewhere, where there were a lot of very gently flowing banners ... I went up

to Henderson's Silk Shop, and I bought yards and yards of taffeta, about fifteen different colours of taffeta fabric. And we made these banners and put them on very high long poles ... the wharfies always led the May Day march; at the head of the march there was this mass of colour ... we took quite a lot of shots of the people who were watching ... Keith did all sorts of things—he laid down on the ground [to film the banners]. (Interview)

There was a more recent episode in the story of this film. An exhibition was held at the Hyde Park Barracks from August 1984 to June 1986, curated by Ann Stephen, where WWF banners were represented. A video produced by Stephen and Bronwyn Barwell as part of the exhibition was *Badges of Labour, Banners of Pride*. A copy of the film *Banners Held High* was last screened at this exhibition, but was lost after the exhibition closed.

Aboriginal Culture

This 1956 WWF-Link film in the *Land of Australia* series was also known as *Aboriginal Legends* and *Aboriginal Art*. The artwork was by Harry Reade and Clem Millward, and it was narrated by Leonard Teale. The film depicts two Aboriginal legends, Wayamba the Turtle and Bohra the Kangaroo. Some music for the soundtrack, recordings of Aboriginal musicians, was supplied by Professor AP Elkin of the Sydney University Anthropology Department (P Hamilton, *Sydney* 6). The animation is simple and effective, and the design of the animal figures and backgrounds are of an indigenous style.

Along with *Hewers of Coal*, *Aboriginal Culture* was screened at the 1957 SFF. It was shown through the Sydney Film Society in 1957, and the Sydney University Film Group in 1957 and 1958. Various organisations purchased the film, such as the Visual Education Centres in Melbourne and in Sydney, which purchased fifteen prints for use in NSW schools. The film was shown on 13 July 1957 at the Tenth Jubilee International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia (Falbr). It also screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival that year. The Unit sent a copy of this film to

Michael Balcon at Ealing Films in the UK, who reported that 'in my view the treatment is attractive, particularly for specialised audiences'.

A Question of Health

A Question of Health is a short film made by the WWFFU members for Ted Roach. He held the position of Assistant General Secretary of the WWF from 1941 to 1967, and was a long-standing CPA member. His obituary notes that 'in 1954, Ted was given the job of improving safety, health and hygiene nationally' within the Federation (Kevins and Mallory 29). Amongst his efforts to improve the health and safety of wharfies, he organised a Single Industry Safety Organisation. In 1956 Roach ran for office in his local Bankstown Council elections. Bankstown had seen its share of radical politics; in the Depression, the Unemployed Workers' Movement had organised campaigns against evictions, and the Battle of Bankstown was reported to have been fierce. Since those days, the elected council was removed from office on two occasions, and replaced by an administrator. Roach campaigned within a Communist Group in South Ward, against Labour and Independent candidates.

At this time in the area, public health was of great concern. The area was not yet sewered, and due to the housing shortage and other factors, infectious diseases such as hepatitis, poliomyelitis and encephalitis were regularly reported (*Chief Health Inspector's Report*). Roach's platform highlighted his concern with health. In a letter to the local newspaper he outlined the Communist program, in which the provision of adequate sewerage and garbage disposal facilities were the key issues. If sixteen days' worth of Federal defence spending (£520,000 daily) were diverted to Bankstown, the desperately needed facilities could be installed:

The money is available if people fight for it. The Federal Government recently spent £2,500,000 reconditioning the warship 'Hobart'. The ship was not put back into commission and is now awaiting a tug to tow it to Japan for scrap. This is a criminal waste of people's money. It would have been better spent on hygiene, health, parks,

playing fields, gymnasiums, social centres, amenities for pensioners, in places like Bankstown Municipality.

A month after the opening of the Melbourne Olympic Games, the election was held on 1 December 1956. Roach was not successful—the Independent candidates won eight out of twelve seats, South Ward included—and no Communist candidates were elected. But while the Bankstown cinemas were showing *Captain Thunderbolt* (Cecil Holmes, 1953), *The Dam Busters* (Michael Anderson, 1954), and *The Vanishing American* (Joseph Kane, 1955), Roach had been supplementing his campaign by screening *A Question of Health* to community groups.

The film is just four minutes long, black and white, and has a soundtrack which consists only of a voice-over. Levy recalls that the Film Unit was pressured into making this production (Telephone interview). On the title and credit cards, no names of filmmakers or production companies are shown. The film is very straightforward, with a monotonal commentary, showing scenes of the Bankstown central area, and graphically illustrating the problem—open sewerage pits and garbage dumps, as well as the uncompleted local hospital. The film is purely informational, with little to commend it stylistically; the standard of camerawork and editing is not high. The unsophisticated narration moves strictly along with the frank images of dangerous pollution:

The dangers to the community of this primitive practice cannot be over-emphasised ... in 1955, 175 cases of hepatitis were reported. This year, 1956, shows a 20% increase of all notifiable diseases. Shocking and horrible as these scenes are, they are shown in the interest of public health and safety.

The film recommends that residents should apply pressure to the Federal Government to divert some of the £192 million defence allocation to fix these problems. At this point there is a shot of Menzies at Sydney Airport. The work finishes with the comment that 'the people of Bankstown should demand the fundamental services that will safeguard the health of their children—services that are in keeping with the needs of a progressive and responsible community'.

The film found its way to Quality Films, where it was loaned to film societies. The Victorian *Federation News* was critical but encouraging: 'It performs its task of showing foul conditions quite well, though it is a pity it is not a better piece of film-craft. Its importance lies in the fact that it is one of the rare films of community protest. It may lead to more and better films on similar subjects' ('General'). The Sydney University Film Group reviewed the film along the same lines:

The camera records dully, and the 'now you see' commentary hammers home, crudely but effectively, a few important facts and figures. But, despite its cinematic weaknesses, it leaves one in no doubt that the sewerage arrangements of the Bankstown area are outdated, and a menace to public health, and that is perhaps sufficient in a film of this kind. ('RJM')

Other community activities in support of public health had been organised in Sydney's rapidly expanding suburbs. One was a 1952 theatre production called 'Pollution Solution', part of a campaign to establish a sewage treatment plant at Malabar during a serious outbreak of poliomyelitis. This beachfront performance featured the surf clubs of the Cronulla-Malabar area. An audience member recalled that 'it was extraordinarily successful' but because of ALP member Danny Curtin's intervention, the campaign was halted (Curthoys and McDonald 14). The problems of adequate health services were not solved immediately: Greig reports that by 1960, one quarter of Sydney's residents were still not connected to mains sewerage, and three quarters of those lived in outer suburbs such as Bankstown (40).

Click Go The Shears

Click Go The Shears was the second and last film to be made in the Link *Land of Australia* series. It runs for three minutes and is shot in colour. The artists were Harry Reade and Clem Millward,

and the film was produced with the technique of static coloured drawings and celluloid moveable frames. The song is sung by Cedric McLaughlin and the Link Singers. The film is quite simple, with very little animation. The Sydney University Film Group screened it in 1958, as did a group from within the Melbourne Film society movement.

Spring and Summer in Sydney

A short colour film titled *Spring and Summer in Sydney* was made around January 1957. Levy shot this in the Sydney Botanical Gardens when no other filmwork was scheduled. Like *Banners Held High*, it is another film which has been lost. Levy suggested that it may have been sent to the Sound Service company in Melbourne, which processed the unit's stock, and lost when that company went out of business (Personal interview).

Hewers of Coal

See Chapter Four.

The Housing Problem And You

See Chapter Four.

Think Twice

As with the impetus behind producing *Bones of Building*, it was a heightened safety awareness which brought about the making of *Think Twice*. In September 1957, AR Buckley, Secretary of the Boilermakers Society, suggested that as part of a new safety campaign, a film be made 'showing the dangers of electric welding and burning, in accordance with the experiences of the Union over the last ten to twenty years' ('Welding'). He negotiated with the WWFFU about the production, which was completed by September 1957.

Much, if not all, of this film was shot on Cockatoo Island. This was one of the few times that the mainstream press showed any interest in the WWFFU. Disher recalls that reporters

wanted to interview me, purely on the basis that I was a woman, and I'd gone onto Cockatoo Island, which was really a prohibited area for women. There were no women there at all, except one or two in an office ... I co-operated, because I wanted the publicity to go to the film. (Interview)

The film is twenty minutes and is in colour. Leonard Teale once again presents the commentary. Levy has a small acting part in the work, as an injured worker lying on a stretcher; otherwise the actors are the workers themselves. The film competently presents the dangers that metalworkers face, from elements such as fumes and heat burns, and from the improper use of new equipment. In one gruesome sequence a pair of human lungs (borrowed from the NSW Health Department) are used to demonstrate what happens when proper ventilation equipment isn't used. The message is very clear, as the narration tells us: 'Learn the importance of safety first in every aspect of work—the responsibility for its improvement lies with conscientious management, your trade union, and you yourself, the man [*sic*] on the job.'

Think Twice was enthusiastically received at its launch. The *Tribune* notes that

among those who attended were representatives of the NSW Department of Labour and Industry, Metal Trades Employers' Federation, union leaders and manufacturers of safety gear. The Department of Labour and Industry is very interested in having the film widely displayed because it has such telling lessons to both workers and employers on safety in industry. ('Praise for Safety')

It was widely used in the industry. Organisations including the Division of Occupational Safety and the Department of Labour and Industry in several states bought copies. Private companies such as BHP bought copies, and Buckley presented a print to visiting UK delegates from the United Society of Boilermakers. *Think Twice* was presented at the SFF in 1958. In 1959 it was screened at the Melbourne Film Festival, where it won the first prize for a 'teaching' film in the Australian Film Awards. There it was described: 'With good visuals and a pertinent commentary, this film shows the various hazards connected with boilermaking'. At its screening by the Sydney University Film Group, Richard Keys described the film's 'commendable assurance and style'.

Four's a Crowd

In 1957, the Unit produced a short comedy for the WWF, *Four's a Crowd*. Like previous films, it was made to counter hostile mainstream press attacks on the Federation, although in this case, it focused on the personal habits of the rank and file, and was approached from a humorous viewpoint. It was also known as *Individual Work Attitudes*, and the film's original title was *One for All*. Several retired wharfies interviewed for this history referred to it only as 'Nick-Away'. Levy said that *Four's a Crowd* 'was a bit of a lark but had a serious side to it' (Address).

The film sets out to display four different types of worker who, although they may have been in the minority, gave all wharfies a bad reputation. The waterfront was known for providing workers with nicknames 'which they carried with them everywhere they transferred to, even to their last resting places' ('Nicknames'). Stan Moran recalled a 'collection of colourful characters', including 'Nick-Away Ned (always knocking off early), the London Fog (never lifts), Glass Arm Harry (his arm too fragile to push the barrow), Cocaine (a slow working dope), and Singlet (never off his back)' (59).

The film is fourteen minutes in length, and is in black and white. The soundtrack is comprised of a voice-over performed by Leonard Teale, pre-recorded music and opens and concludes with a song. 'Because It's Our Union' was written and sung by wharfie Dick Hackett, who accompanied himself on his ukulele:

When papers run by Tories
 Carry terrifying stories
 Of the horrid man bosses who oppress me,
 They may bluster, scream and rage,
 I just turn another page,
 For their bedtime stories simply don't impress me.

Because it's my union.
 I built this union.
 If you want to know who runs it, I'm the guy.
 And no matter what they say,
 This union's here to stay,
 'Cause I'll fight for my union till I die.

Some graphics and simple animation begin the film, with the intertitle: 'any similarity between persons portrayed in this film and *real* persons is no coincidence' [original emphasis]. Then the antics of four characters are portrayed, each in turn by Levy. Glass-Arm Harry is a lazy worker, and lets his mates down, as well as getting into trouble from the boss, 'Sackem Plenty', who ends up as the butt of many of the sight gags. Tiddly Pete likes to have a drink, or two or three, before his shift; he is followed by some newspaper reporters, and this incident produces headlines from (the fictitious) *The Sunday Bomber*: '3,000 Wharfies Drunk Aboard Bermagui', and from *The Daily Slosh*: 'Wharfies — a Mob of Tossspots'. The next character, Nick-Away Ned, likes to leave the job early, running into Sackem Plenty again. Lastly we are introduced to Ron the Roaster, a self-styled expert on any topic of conversation who ends up talking himself into trouble. Each section features wharfies as extras. The style is pure slapstick, with a generous use of time-lapse photography, accompanied by appropriate music. At the end of the film, all four

characters appear in a superimposition shot, with a more serious note as the narration warns of the effects of such behaviour, and the importance of keeping to the job.

Outside the Federation, *Four's a Crowd* was purchased by other unions, including the BWIU. In that organisation's journal *The Building Worker*, Victorian Assistant General Secretary Ron Hancock wrote a review that noted 'While there is a laugh in almost every line, this latest addition to working-class films still manages to pack in a real message for workers ... although made for wharfies it's still hilarious for building workers too. Congratulations to our friends of the Film Unit again'. The film was supported by Tom McDonald, who said that it 'could prove a very valuable addition to the Union's collection of films. At the present time, in order to give balance to our programs, the usual procedure is to hire a comedy. Although *Four's a Crowd* is a comedy there is still good working class material in it' (BWIU NSW State Executive Meeting 7 May 1957). The film was also seen by film societies in Melbourne and Sydney. The Sydney Film Society stated that

made on a shoe string budget, *Four's a Crowd* adds weight to the notion that enforced thrift is a film maker's best friend when he [*sic*] rises to the occasion with ingenuity ... the four delinquent types ... are all played with considerable virtuosity by Jerome Levy in a style reminiscent of the best comedians of the silent era.

Not Only The Need

See Chapter Four.

Appendix B

Biographies of the WWFFU Filmmakers

Norma Hawkins (nee Disher) (1922 -), grew up in Bega and moved to Sydney where, in the early 1950s, she first attended a production at the New Theatre, *Deep Are the Roots* (Levy, Address). She was on the theatre's production committee, and regularly made costumes for many of the performances. She was also responsible for the musical accompaniment to the plays, and during the war had worked for seven years at Radio 2SM as the Music Librarian. By 1953, when she began working in the film area, Norma was employed as an administrative officer for the Sydney Trade Union Club.

Keith Gow (1921-1987) had been long involved in the New Theatre, first in Newcastle and then in Sydney. His first experience working in the film industry was on *Kangaroo* (Lewis Milestone, 1952), where he was property man, special effects, and in charge of the second unit. He also had property department credits *Return to Paradise* (Mark Robson, 1953), shot in Samoa, and on Australia's first Cinemascope film, *Long John Silver* (Byron Haskin, 1953). Other feature film credits include *Smiley Gets A Gun* (Anthony Kimmins, 1958: special effects), and *Summer Of The 17th Doll* (Leslie Norman, 1959: electrics). Gow began work on the Sydney waterfront in 1950.

Jerome 'Jock' Levy (1916 -), a migrant from London, arrived in Australia in 1925 and began acting and directing on stage in the late 30s with the Jewish Youth Theatre. He was in the cast of *The Overlanders* (Harry Watt, 1946), and other feature filmwork included *Long John Silver* (props), *Smiley* (Anthony Kimmins, 1956: cast), and *Three In One* (Cecil Holmes, 1956: cast). Levy's theatrical background stood him in good stead to appear before camera in a number of the Unit's works. He began work on the Sydney waterfront in 1944, and continued his work with the New Theatre, which he had begun in the 1930s.

After the work of the WWFFU ended, and the Link and Wattle films were made, the three Unit members worked on at least one other film, *Canada Cup, 1959* (Merton Woods, 1959). Gow and Levy went on to other film work. Gow worked as special effects person on commercial features, and as a cameraman and director at Ampol, ABC, the DOI, and other organisations. In his later years of work he directed a number of training films for the ACTU. He has been described as 'one of Australia's major documentary makers' (Adamson, Obituary). Levy worked in TV commercials, and at Visatone, Artransa and Supreme studios, with acting and special effects credits on a large number of feature films and shorts. Disher did not seek work in the film industry, and she continued her strong commitment to the New Theatre.

Appendix C

List of Personal Interviews

Adamson, Judith.

Filmmaker and historian. Judith worked at the DOI from 1950 and was active in Sydney's screen culture from the 1950s onward.

Allison, Edmund.

Actor, filmmaker, activist, Quality Films founder and manager, Realist Film Association member.

Beasley, Margo.

Historian and author of *Wharfies: the History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*.

Black, Harry.

Retired waterside worker.

Bull, Tas.

Seaman, waterside worker and WWF General Secretary (1984-1992).

Butcher, Arnold.

Musician and retired waterside worker. Active participant in New Theatre.

Butcher, Loretta.

Dancer and actor in Maritime Industries Theatre and New Theatre.

Clarke, Ray.

Activist, Realist Film Association member, Democratic Rights Council Member.

Clarke, Joyce.

Activist, NSW Teachers' Federation executive, Pensioners' Association member.

Davidson, Sue.

Curator at Powerhouse Museum.

Freedman, Rod.

Filmmaker.

Hamilton, Peter.

Architect, activist, filmmaker, founder of Wattle Films and Recordings.

Hawkins (*nee* Disher), Norma.

WWFFU member, activist, New Theatre member.

Hughes, John.

Filmmaker, WWFFU researcher.

Jones, Kevin.

Curator, Australian National Maritime Museum.

Knight, Elisabeth.

Filmmaker.

Levy, Jock.

WWFFU member, activist, New Theatre member, actor.

McDonald, Tom.

BWIU executive.

Parker, Eric.

Retired waterside worker, WWF Film Group member.

Roberts, John.

Retired waterside worker.

Sawyer, Ralph.

Retired waterside worker.

Shirley, Graham.

Filmmaker, historian, Sydney Film Oral History Group member.

Stein, Harry.

Retired waterside worker.

Williams, Deane.

Academic, historian, researcher on Melbourne post-war cinema.

Zubrycki, Tom.

Filmmaker, activist.

Appendix D

The Wharfies' Film Unit. Hindsight.

ABC Radio National. 1 and 6 Nov. 1998.

Works Consulted

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