

APPENDIX A

Prefiguration and Realpolitik: The 1950s

The N.S.W. Builders Labourers' Federation is one of Australia's oldest unions, being formed in the 1870s when it was known as the United Labourers. In 1912 it changed its name to the Builders Labourers' Union, and in 1926 joined with labourers' unions in other states to become the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation.

During the 1930s the Union in N.S.W. was under "centrist" leadership. It was the second world war that dramatically changed the nature of both the building industry and the unions involved.

Union membership was low because the industry itself was at that point after the depression fairly stagnant and the scattered nature of small job-sites throughout the state made organisation difficult. One old builders labourer even described the Union in 1941 as "not a viable organisation".¹ During the war years, this low membership led to the two main unions in the building industry, the Builders Labourers and the Building Workers Industrial Union (B.W.I.U.), discussing proposals for amalgamation. However, the large amount of construction work undertaken by the Allied Works Council and the introduction of compulsory unionism greatly increased the membership of both unions and so amalgamation plans were dropped.

After the war, the Union became known for the rough behaviour and corruption of many of its officials. In Jack Munday's opinion the Union became "close to being a criminal outfit"² and those who were members of the Union at the time such as Les Robinson and Harry Connell remember many incidents of bashing and intimidation.³ These conditions were not well reported, and the evidence exists mostly in the memories of those who survived them. Martin reminds us that firm evidence of corruption or violence in union affairs is hard to come by.⁴ The reason much of this chapter is based on oral evidence is because as successive leaderships came to power in this period, the previous administration would "burn the books" leaving no printed trace of their corrupt practices and little joy for later researchers.

Although much of what follows comes from interviews with people opposed to the Thomas, Foster, Bodkin regimes, there is little need to

1 Keith Jessop, interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1976.

2 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

3 Interview: Les Robinson, 20 February 1978; and Harry Connell, 12 February 1978.

4 Ross M. Martin, Trade Unions in Australia, pp.58 and 129-30.

doubt their word.

I have never heard of any builders labourer's attempt to defend the record of the leadership in the 40s and 50s, neither have the leaders nor their families ever sought to clear their names despite written allegations of brutality and corruption. For instance, in an official Union publication in 1973, Pete Thomas wrote of the 1950s: "In those days, the union in N.S.W. was controlled by a bloody-minded rightwing group, operating by standover practices. To oppose those who were then in charge was to invite a bashing".⁵ The view that the leadership of the forties and fifties was also extremely conservative as well as corrupt is reinforced by the B.W.I.U.'s claims that: "In the late forties and early fifties...the building unions...came out jointly and called on B.W.I.U. members to remove the militant leadership of the B.W.I.U."⁶

It is also important to note that reports of this period do not differ in details or analysis, even from observers who are now ideologically opposed to each other such as Jack Munday and Les Robinson. The picture as it emerges from retrospective accounts is as follows.

Munday claims that Fred Thomas, who became Secretary in the late 1940s had only been "a short time in the B.Ls". He proceeded to build around himself a coterie of "standover men" and "thug types".⁷ Les Robinson describes Thomas as "just a crook"⁸ and Munday says that symptomatic of the period is an anecdote "Speed" Morgan⁹ loves to tell about how it was his job to turn off the lights during the meetings whilst the others used to "slip in and bash up the militants". In this period, Thomas installed Jack Williams as Federal Secretary. Williams was an ex-sergeant of police who had left the force to buy a hotel in Moree. He became Federal Secretary without working one day as a builders labourer. Many members of the Union in that period allege that Thomas and Williams did not just employ physical intimidation. In collusion with the employers they arranged for militants to be driven

5 Pete Thomas, Taming the Concrete Jungle, p.65.

6 Building Industry Branch of the Socialist Party of Australia, Six Turbulent Years, p.11.

7 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

8 Interview: Les Robinson, 20 February 1978. Munday enlarges upon this statement by describing how "Thomas was kicked out of the Fire Brigade for thieving the hose".

9 "Speed" Morgan is so named because of his alleged practices as a professional cyclist. He was sent by the N.S.W. right-wing to Tasmania to "stop the Left there" (Munday, 13 August 1975). He was Tasmanian secretary of the B.L.F. until his death in 1980.

off building sites and denied jobs around the city.¹⁰

It was commonly known that the leadership bribed men who were not builders labourers to go to Union meetings by offering "either a few quid or a free beer". They would issue these men with a "ticket" and retrieve each ticket at the end of the meeting.¹¹ It was only in the late 1950s that this practice was eventually halted by the militants in opposition who were then able to outnumber the leadership grouping even with their false members.

The expansion of the building industry and the growing influence of the Communist Party amongst the rank and file led to a strengthening of the opposition within the Union.¹²

A Rank and File Committee was formed as a result of a dispute over wet weather at the Dunlop Tyre Factory in 1951. Prominent Communists, Joe Ferguson, Les Robinson and Don McHugh are mentioned as being among the founders of the Rank and File Committee.¹³

There seems general agreement that the C.P.A. was an important element in the Rank and File struggle. Laurie Aarons perhaps puts it most strongly when he claims: "There wouldn't have been a sustained campaign against the gangsters if it hadn't been for the Party - there's no doubt about that". Aarons added that the C.P.A.'s struggle against the corrupt leadership had been "more or less continuous" from the forties onwards and that "it was the Party and virtually only the Party involved".¹⁴

The Builders Labourers' Federation was particularly important to the C.P.A. because the other main union in the building industry, the Building Workers Industrial Union, was led by C.P.A. member Pat Clancy who was fighting both deregistration and the formation of the "scab" Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Aarons explains, "it was important to strengthen the Party position as a whole...in such an important industry".¹⁵ Joe Owens points out that the C.P.A. had strength

10 Interviews: Don Crotty, 7 March 1978; Harry Connell, 12 February 1978; Ralph Kelly, 13 December 1977.

11 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

12 The conditions which brought about the changes in the Union are more extensively discussed in chapters 3 and 10.

13 Interview: Les Robinson, 20 February 1978.

14 Interview: Laurie Aarons, 28 December 1977. Although this is a natural claim for the secretary of the C.P.A. to make, I have never heard anyone deny this claim.

15 Interview: Laurie Aarons, 28 December 1977; Also a very influential publication within the C.P.A. at the time emphasised the need to win leadership of trade unions, Lance Sharkey, The Trade Unions, pp.12-13. Although originally published in 1942, the booklet was reprinted seven times in the 1940s and 1950s.

nationally in the building unions at the time, mentioning Gerry Dawson from the Queensland B.W.I.U. and Paddy Malone and (later) Norm Gallagher in the Victorian B.L.F.¹⁶ However there is no evidence that the C.P.A. ever planted cadres in the B.L.F. in the fifties or later.

Clancy was respected by the junior militants in the B.L.F. and regarded as "almost a father figure".¹⁷ He gave encouragement and advice to them in their work of organising amongst the rank and file.¹⁸

C.P.A. policy since 1951 had involved united front tactics with other unionists, "even with the Groupers", in order to obtain common goals.¹⁹ Consequently, although the Communists were the largest grouping, the Rank and File Committee contained many non-Communists. Tom Hogan describes the Committee as a "loose coalition of forces",²⁰ and Munday describes it as "diverse and broad". The Committee produced Hoist, a regular roneod news sheet which was widely distributed, and started to organise members to attend the monthly branch meetings and pass resolutions that would force reforms in the Union and the building industry in general.²¹ Munday claims that the majority of workers at the Branch meetings "were now sincere, not necessarily militant, workers opposed to the corrupt Thomas leadership".²²

Possibly under this sort of pressure, Thomas responded by burning the minute books and allegedly absconding with £8,601.²³ This could not be proved however and the Rank and File decided to write the loss off as "experience" and set about the task of winning the leadership.

"Banjo" Patterson, who had worked with Thomas, became acting Secretary after Thomas and, according to Jack Munday, "moved to the left" and this consequently led to a "breakthrough" for the rank and file.²⁴

Even though there were some of the old leadership remaining, the Rank and File had high hopes for the 1958 election. However yet another setback for the Rank and File occurred. Another non-labourer, in fact an S.P. bookmaker, from an old Labor family in Newtown, W.F. (Bill) Bodkin, "came from oblivion" as a candidate. A fellow

16 Interview: Joe Owens, 24 January 1978.

17 Ibid.

18 Interview: Laurie Aarons, 28 December 1977.

19 Alistair Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, p.139.

20 Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

21 Keith Jessop, interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1976.

22 Interview: Jack Munday, 12 July 1975.

23 Ibid. No reports in media.

24 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

bookmaker, C.D. Water, was elected returning officer at a huge Branch meeting. He won by 230-170. There were more postal votes from the South Coast than there were members and all were filled out and posted at the same time.²⁵ The inevitable occurred and despite the fact that the Rank and File were widely expected "to clean up", Bodkin romped home. There was a move to challenge the ballot from the Rank and File and also from Stan Winter, an independent right-wing candidate. The "left", however, being ideologically opposed to court-controlled ballots, decided not to go ahead with the challenge but to begin building up the Rank and File to win the 1961 elections.²⁶ Paul Gardiner, writing in the Financial Review referred to the "Bodkin Regime" as being, "an inheritance of the 1950s":

There are still dark mutterings about the regime, all of them probably libellous...²⁷

The Rank and File in this period gained "many hundreds of supporters in the inner city". Men like Munday and Bert McGill were "paid off"²⁸ by Rank and File collections,

for weeks at a time to go round Newcastle, Wollongong and city jobs, delivering Hoist, getting to know workers and getting them along to meetings....We controlled every monthly meeting in that period and the decisions were just ignored.²⁹

The Bodkin-Sheehan regime evidently resorted to very much the same tactics as Thomas had used.³⁰ Because the Rank and File put so much emphasis on gaining majority decisions at the Branch meetings the leadership responded by deliberately misleading the membership over meeting dates and times by inserting contradictory advertisements in the Sydney Morning Herald, but this ploy was mostly foiled by the vigilance of the Rank and File.³¹ If it was not for the existence of Rule 13 which states that each state branch "must hold an ordinary meeting at least once each calendar month" it is very likely that Bodkin

²⁵ Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paul Gardiner, Australian Financial Review, 8 June 1973.

²⁸ "Paid off" is an expression used to describe the action of paying a rank and filer his usual wage to temporarily undertake union work.

²⁹ Ibid. Don Crotty describes how his job Yoeman's Construction at Double Bay, a large (13 storey) job with 47 labourers, collected significant amounts of money for the Rank and File because every labourer contributed.

³⁰ Alleged by Les Robinson, "they used thugs to biff blokes"; Don Crotty, "we were shouted down at meetings"; and Don McPhee, "it was a known fact that tickets were given away for the price of a drink".

³¹ Tribune, 16 August 1961.

would have ruled totally by executive fiat. As it was the excessive secrecy of the Bodkin clique was countered by imaginative and harrassing tactics on the part of the Rank and File. During Executive meetings Munday and others would wait outside the meeting room and demand to read the minutes as soon as the meeting ended.³²

Robinson claims that the Rank and File, under Munday's influence, became one of the first groups in the trade union movement successfully to use pressure-group tactics. Apart from the monthly meetings he mentions "catching the Secretary in the pub during working hours" (one of the Rank and File's criticisms was Bodkin's continual drunkenness), "forcing the leadership into silly errors", and "building a self-supporting organisation that [politically] conscious rank and file Builders Labourers were really proud to be in".³³

Rank and File meetings used to be held in various places, sometimes in Hyde Park or in Hotels such as the Great Western, the Town Hall or the Grand. These "vigilante" meetings would be attended by job reps who would be paid by the workers on the job-site out of their own wages to attend the meeting.

Being a militant delegate or job rep in those days was hard work. As well as being under constant attack from both the boss and the Union, morale on many jobs was very low. Tom Hogan describes how he was elected delegate on one of the biggest jobs in town, the Hotel Menzies:

Just after I was transferred to the main contractor, the delegate pissed off with the dough. I was elected delegate - men regarded me with suspicion then - it turned out that the last three delos had shot through with the subs.

He pointed out that, although there were 120 Builders Labourers on the job their politics and activity were totally bound by the confines of that job.³⁴ Lack of support from the Union over many years had led militants and non-militants alike to adopt self-survival tactics restricted to their own particular situation. It was only the existence of the Rank and File committee which enabled militants such as Tom Hogan, Don McPhee and Don Crotty³⁵ to become involved outside of

32 Interview: Jack Munday, 3 April 1978.

33 Interview: Les Robinson, 20 February 1978. Robinson adds that "the development of the Rank and File movement was one of the highlights of the Builders Labourers Federation and it developed people for later on".

34 Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

35 Both McPhee and Crotty describe how they became involved in Rank and File activities through the encouragement of men like Munday and McGill. Other Rank and File activists at this time were Kevin Gledhill, Peter Smith, Harry Connell, Steve Cleary, Darcy Duggan and Jack Dempsey.

their own jobs. Although many Rank and File activists were in the C.P.A., there were still many militants whose ideology was from the C.P.A. point of view, basically unformed, "they had union consciousness but no political consciousness...the only thing they had in common was a tendency to get sacked".³⁶ To a less determined bunch their task would have appeared overwhelming.

The Bodkin leadership, secure behind a strategy of rigged meetings and ballots, indulged in all sorts of petty tyrannies and minor lurks. Ralph Kelly claims they extorted money from workers, particularly migrants, whom they referred to as "wogs". They would demand £1 for the right to work or they would put the worker off the job (with the employer's co-operation). There was also a story at the time that bosses would look out the window and say "oh God, here comes Stan Winter [union organiser]...get a spin out of petty cash and shunt him off". Kelly maintains the organisers picked up a £5 note from each job and never worried about the safety conditions "or anything else".³⁷

Even the largest job in Sydney, the Opera House, was totally ignored:

The leadership had no contacts on the job...never came near you... the only time you saw them was when you paid your dues...and when you went down to the Trades Hall all you saw were standover men with bodgey tickets - they were not builders labourers(38) they were obviously a straight out bunch of gangsters. You could see them hanging around the Clubs at the Cross.³⁹

The failure of the Bodkin leadership to undertake normal Union business is nicely exemplified by one of the few official Union files to escape the successive burnings. The file on Builders Labourers' Federation disputes decisions under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act contains five cases covering the period 1943-1961 and 42 between 1961 and 1969.⁴⁰ A closer survey of three of these pre-1961 disputes shows:

- (1) Builders labourers at Clyde Oil Refinery having a lunch-time payment suddenly rescinded and the employer's action being upheld by the

36 Interview: Darcy Duggan, 12 July 1977. Tom Hogan adds "the industry was such that if you opened your mouth you'd be fired - so all militants ended up on about 100 jobs a year", a slight exaggeration.

37 Interview: Ralph Kelly, 13 December 1977.

38 It was pointed out to me that the industry was very small at the time and because there were not many job-sites around, it was much easier to identify a non-builders labourer.

39 Interview: Don McPhee, 6 December 1977.

40 A.B.L.F. (N.S.W.) Documents: File, Decisions: Disputes, n.d. (1943-1961).

Board of Reference, although the decision does continue "if the employer has been in the habit of making some payment to the Builders Labourers because they are working in company with other employees receiving the payment, you might like to consider whether it is a wise practice to make a change".⁴¹

- (2) Builders labourers working for Kell & Rigby, stripping formwork in a 16" space where it was "necessary for the men to work lying on their backs and on rough ground", were awarded a special rate of 7½d an hour instead of the claimed 1/6.⁴²
- (3) Builders labourers working for Civil & Civic on Blues Point were denied the same height allowances as the carpenters on the same site even though it was acknowledged that builders labourers were "more exposed to the elements than are carpenters and joiners, in as much as they frequently work on the extremities of each floor".⁴³

With decisions such as these it is no wonder that conditions for builders labourers remained appalling. Safety, especially, began to loom large in many job disputes. As buildings became higher the accident rate soared. There were many deaths in the industry.

Safety was non-existent...the D.L.I. [Dept of Labour and Industry] were meant to check safety precautions but there were very few prosecutions. Builders flouted safety regulations...we lost a lot of time just to get handrails or overhead protection.⁴⁴

The practice of dogmen "riding the hook" because employers' refused to hire two dogmen for each crane, led to an estimated dozen deaths a year during the 1960s.⁴⁵

These sorts of practices were encouraged by the meanness that the tender system of contracting engendered. Another practice commonly associated with tender contracting was "body hire". To avoid payment

41 The Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1904-1956, Board No. 33 of 1958: In the Matter Builders' Labourers (Construction on Site) Award: A dispute between DA Constructions - and - the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation 27 February 1958.

42 The Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1904-1956, Board No. 119 of 1958: In the Matter of Builders' Labourers' (Construction on Site) Award: A dispute between Kell and Rigby Pty Ltd and the A.B.L.F. 1 September 1958.

43 Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1960: A.B.L.F. - and - Civil & Civic Pty Ltd: N.J. Hoad, Conciliator 5 June 1961.

44 Interview: Don Crotty, 7 March 1978.

45 Paul Gardiner, "Union Power and Developers (once naughty words) beat bad old days" The Australian Financial Review, 7 June 1973; and also John Martin, executive Director of the M.B.A. (N.S.W.) letter to the Editor, Australian Financial Review, 2. June 1973.

for idle labour in wet weather, or for public holidays and other award-fixed working conditions, the contractors would employ men under a one hour hire and fire rule. This money-in-the-hand mentality was always one of the Rank and File's main attacking points and eventually led to their "Civilize the Industry" campaign in the 70s.

Other problems most frequently mentioned were the fly-by-night contractors and the difficulty of getting a job in the first place. Munday says "workers buy the local paper at anything up to 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning...and then tramp round the streets looking for the next job".⁴⁶ He explains that he found this personally distasteful and he could see also that the most active fighters against this sort of degradation were the Communists. Like many others at this time he was drawn towards the Party. "I think had I at that time met people from other organisations who impressed me like the Communists I would have joined them."⁴⁷ Tom Hogan describes a similar experience:

the thing that made me join the C.P. as a very humble member of it was the fact of the hard work...the hours that fellows were prepared to put into it. They were giving the real leadership on those jobs. There seemed to be Communists and Communist detractors ...the people I had been warned against were the people I felt closest to - Jack, Bert McGill, Joe Ferguson, Kevin Gledhill and Harry Connell.

He agreed that "what the bosses were doing to us" was the reason that militancy was bound to arise, "I think it was the reason a person like Jack was thrown up in the first place - and others after him".⁴⁸

Although taller buildings brought worse accidents they also brought about conditions whereby it became easier for the Rank and File to organise. Builders labourers became clustered in large groups instead of being spread out through cottage building in the suburbs. Many of the early large buildings were concentrated around the Quay area, in particular the Opera House, the A.M.P., British Tobacco, Goldfields House and the State Office Block. This led to large numbers of builders labourers drinking and talking together in the Quayside pubs.⁴⁹

There were other technological reasons⁵⁰ why builders labourers began to see more of each other at work, and hence socially. A

⁴⁶ Quoted in Caroline Graham, Anatomy of a Revolutionary Union: A Post Mortem on the BLF 1968-1975, B.A. (Hons) thesis, University of Sydney, 1975.

⁴⁷ Interview: Jack Munday, 3 April 1978.

⁴⁸ Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

⁴⁹ For a full discussion of the way the boom in the C.B.D. changed the character of the industry see chapter 10.

⁵⁰ See chapter 10.

camaraderie grew up amongst the builders labourers of the fifties and sixties that was vital to the success of the Rank and File committee and later to the defence of the Green Bans.

One of the first successes engendered by these new conditions was the election at a branch meeting in February 1960 of two temporary organisers from the Rank and File committee. Several months before, Communist activist Bert McGill had been elected at a General Meeting of the Branch. Munday reports the vote as being 39-36. The Executive sacked McGill as soon as the Branch meeting ended. Because "anti-Communism was rife at the time", McGill did not persist but during the next month he came to terms with "independently worried" non-Party labourers from the large Stock Exchange job-site.⁵¹ This job-site included Mick McNamara. Don McPhee describes the February Branch meeting:

There was a big roll-up. Mick [McNamara] brought about twenty bodgies, that is long-hairs, down from his job and was talking very militant. McGill and Williams [a Bodkin nomination] stood for organiser and McNamara threw his name up. McGill saw the light and said 'Alright this city's getting bigger - you'll need more organisers. Instead of going for one we'll go for two'.⁵²

A motion calling for two organisers was passed and in the ensuing vote McGill and McNamara were elected and Williams was defeated. Although McGill was a Communist, McNamara a twenty year old, "left-A.L.P." member was a "cleanskin" and Munday believes his nomination was totally spontaneous.⁵³ The two were sacked the next day by the leadership so the same thing happened the following month at the branch meeting. McGill became known as "Knockout" McGill because workers believed that every time they elected him, the Executive would "knockout" him.

The March general meeting of the Branch ended at 9.50 p.m. and at 10.05 p.m. the Executive Committee began a special meeting. The Executive decided not to act on the decisions of the earlier general meeting.⁵⁴ The main decision had been the re-appointment of McGill and McNamara.

This time the Rank and File decided to take the matter to the Commonwealth Industrial Court. Eventually the court ordered the

51 Interview: Jack Munday, 20 June 1978.

52 Interview: Don McPhee, 6 December 1977.

53 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975. The following account of the events leading up to the 1961 election are all from the same interview.

54 Daily Telegraph, 7 April 1960.

Executive to implement the decision of the general meeting. The judges pronounced: "We think it is clear that the decisions of the general meeting prevail over those of the executive committee". The Court ordered Bodkin and the Executive to recognise McNamara and McGill as Branch organisers and to pay three quarters of the legal costs of McNamara (the applicant).⁵⁵

The Sydney newspapers heralded this triumph for the Rank and File by concentrating on McNamara's extreme youth. The Telegraph headlined "At 21, He is Youngest Trade Union Official" and quoted him as saying that he would work as an organiser before deciding which political party to join.⁵⁶

McNamara believes the Bodkin leadership deliberately set out to capitalise upon his youth and inexperience:

They made life difficult for us. They sent Bert [McGill] who was experienced out to the Cronulla sandhills to keep him away and me, who was inexperienced, into the City. They hoped I'd chuck it.⁵⁷

This situation was discussed with the older militants in the Rank and File and McNamara gained in confidence and experience. Then the Executive decided to move McNamara out of the City. At this arbitrary act, "eight or nine big jobs stopped and marched on the office". They caught the officials in the pub and unceremoniously discussed the problem with them. McNamara reports that he was immediately sent back to the City as organiser.⁵⁸

The election of two Rank and File organisers certainly helped both morally and organisationally and the Rank and File set about attracting supporters for the 1961 elections. However majority decisions made at the Branch meetings were still being ignored. Hundreds of rank and filers would turn up at the meetings and because the Bodkin group no longer had sufficient money to bribe enough people to win votes they used other tactics instead. The President, W. Sheean, would "chair" the meetings starting with a drunken report from Bodkin. Then whenever an opposition member moved that the question be put, Sheean would rule that the noes had it. When a division was demanded the meeting would break down in uproar. Sheean's tactic of persistently ignoring majority votes reduced the procedure to a farce and meetings would only last about ten minutes.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Sydney Morning Herald, 7 April 1960.

⁵⁶ Daily Telegraph, 8 April 1960.

⁵⁷ Mick McNamara: interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1976.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

The Munday group realised that this could not go on. They were losing members because they could not get decisions enforced. They decided that more positive action would have to be taken.

In January 1961, a general meeting was called to endorse three delegates to Federal Council. It was attended by 200 Union members.⁶⁰ The Rank and File prepared a circular pointing out that the move to appoint the Federal delegates was an attempt to delay Union elections. The circular advocated "throw out the officials who are bringing the Union into dispute".⁶¹

The President, Sheean, refused to accept a point of order that the meeting was unconstitutional and irregular. When the Federal Secretary, T. Foster, who was present by invitation of the Executive, tried to address the meeting he was angrily received. It was obvious that the Rank and File had a huge majority at the meeting. Sheean closed the meeting and tried to leave the building "but men blocked the doorway and he was forced back on to the platform".⁶² Munday relates his version of the events, "Bodkin kept descending the stairs and I kept picking him up, carrying him back and sitting him in his seat". The "crim elements" ran out the back because five carloads of the 21st Division arrived on the scene. The Rank and File told the police to stay out and went ahead with conducting their own meeting,

it was the first democratic meeting ever held in the Builders' Labourers...we kept them [the Bodkin group] sitting in their seats til 10 o'clock with the 21 Division down below...it was the first time we hit the headlines.⁶³

Other allegations made by the newspapers were that "during the wild meeting, brawls involving as many as 150 members broke out every few minutes...Federal and State officials were struck by members as they tried to bring the meeting to order".⁶⁴

Officials blamed "Left-wing factions and Communists"⁶⁵ for the disorder and Sheean announced after the meeting that several members of the Union would be expelled. Munday believes that this incident was the turning point because the next day the rank and file held a big march of about 500 labourers from the Quay to the Trades Hall.

⁶⁰ Sydney Morning Herald, 11 January 1961.

⁶¹ Daily Telegraph, 11 January 1961.

⁶² Sydney Morning Herald, 11 January 1961.

⁶³ The headlines were "Unionists in Brawls" Daily Telegraph, 11 April 1961; and "Uproar, Blows at Trades Hall: Police Halt Stormy Meeting of Unionists" Sydney Morning Herald, 11 January 1961.

⁶⁴ Daily Telegraph, 11 April 1961.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Ironically, as they approached the Trades Hall, who should emerge out of the Bourke Hotel but a rather drunken Bodkin. The hapless Secretary was pursued down the street by a large crowd of irate builders labourers. The Rank and Filers held an overflow meeting in the main auditorium of the Trades Hall and decided to concentrate all their activities on removing the Bodkin leadership in the election to be held in September of that year.

A high level of activity was kept up during 1961. The first of the Rank and File preselections, which later became a feature of the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation was held. Any Union member was eligible to vote or nominate in this preselection and it was understood that anyone who stood for preselection and was not chosen would not stand against the Rank and File pre-selected candidate.

In this period there were several other groupings apart from the Rank and File committee, although the Rank and File was quite clearly "the most coherent grouping". It consisted as it had in the past of C.P.A. members, "left" A.L.P. members and non-party militants. The "centre" A.L.P. forces provided another faction under the leadership of Jack Stephensen and Terry Foster, who had moved towards the centre from the right. There was also a right-wing A.L.P. grouping under the leadership of Stan Winter,⁶⁶ who for some time had functioned as the ideological leader of the non-gangster right-wing. He held a certain amount of sway, particularly on individual jobs such as the Hotel Chevron.⁶⁷ This group was supported by Colbourne, the state Secretary of the A.L.P. and hence had the de facto official A.L.P. imprimatur.

All these factions were opposed to the "rump" of the Bodkin forces. In late 1961 the Rank and File held discussions after their own preselection, with the "centre" A.L.P. group and in order to put forward the broadest possible front the Rank and File dropped some names from their ticket and included some of the "centre's" candidates. The final Rank and File ticket was headed by Vince Henneberry (centre group) as President and Mick McNamara as Secretary.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Don McPhee actually described Winter as "a paid organiser for Santamaria", (Interview: Don McPhee, 6 December 1977.)

⁶⁷ According to Tom Hogan who worked on the Chevron, Winter had remarkable control over the job. Control of jobs to the extent that their collective "nature" is determined by a B.L. or group of B.Ls, is a feature of the industry. See more in chapter 10.

⁶⁸ Unidentified News Clipping headed "August 1961", McNamara Papers (see Notes on footnoting).

The nomination of Mick McNamara as Secretary arose out of a series of compromises between the various factions. There was a certain amount of disagreement about who should be Secretary. Les Robinson claims that Munday was the obvious candidate and therefore he (Robinson) was opposed to McNamara's nomination from the start, "I had misgivings at the time. Most people thought Jack Munday was the logical choice. But apparently they thought it was better to put Mick up and get the A.L.P. vote".⁶⁹ Munday himself claims that it would have been "adventurist" for him, as a known communist to take the Secretary's position,⁷⁰ and Laurie Aarons maintains "it is not a bad idea, when there is a big change in a Union, to have a fairly broad and representative leadership".⁷¹

The policy of detente with non-communist "progressive" forces is very much the C.P.A. line of today, but it was not so then. In 1958 the official (1951) party line towards A.L.P. unionists had changed from moderation and unity back to the intransigent stance of the late forties.⁷² This hard-line period lasted from about 1959 to 1964.⁷³

Within the Builders Labourers however it is obvious that the period of co-operation during the mid-fifties had had a lasting effect. Friendships had been made and bonds forged so that the Rank and File worked successfully even during the late fifties and early sixties. For one thing, they were fighting a particularly oppressive and corrupt union opposition and for another, leading communists within the Rank and File such as Jack Munday, Tom Hogan and Harry Connell were certainly not the old style communists who uncritically accepted the central committee's fluctuating policies.

With a "broad left" Rank and File team chosen, the election campaign started in earnest. It soon became obvious that the Bodkin leadership was quite at a loss in the credit squeeze conditions of 1961. Although the squeeze did not hit the Sydney building industry

69 Interview: Les Robinson, 20 February 1978. He also claims that his drifting away and eventual split from the N.S.W. leadership was caused mainly by his objection to McNamara's secretaryship. Speaking of the 1961-63 split away of the "China-liners" he said "I think it started off as an industrial position over McNamara...we didn't oppose Jack, my argument was that Jack should take over the leadership".

70 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

71 Interview: Laurie Aarons, 28 December 1977.

72 For a fuller discussion of the C.P.A. see chapter 10.

73 Alastair Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, pp.157-158. In Six Turbulent Years, p.11, the Socialist Party of Australia incorrectly ascribes popular front tactics to the C.P.A. for the entire Lance Sharkey era since 1949. "This line of patient building of the widest possible united support for militant policies, in fact, remained the line of the C.P.A. up until the leadership of L. Sharkey was replaced by that of L. Aarons." This is merely a minor example of the S.P.A.'s rewriting of history.

as badly as it did other cities (because of its size), it created unstable conditions that the old guard was unable to deal with by their usual strategies. They were not getting around the job sites. Don Crotty believes they were probably at a disadvantage because none of them had ever worked on a multi-storey building whereas the majority of the rank and filers had.⁷⁴ Intimidation no longer worked as effectively as it had. Workers began actively opposing the Bodkin team at job meetings. Bob Pringle relates:

I was on a building site when Harry Connell came and spoke about the election. I always remember Harry...there he was on his Pat Malone [alone]...a little bloke in shorts and a briefcase. He was confronted by these two guys - big heavy types - probably Bodkin and Foster. All the blokes were on Harry's side.⁷⁵

In August, the Bodkin Executive attempted to deprive the membership of the right to elect returning officers and scrutineers by changing meeting dates and failing to advertise for the election of these officers. The Rank and File displayed its usual initiative by holding a meeting in the absence of the Executive and elected a Returning Officer, Les Robinson, and two scrutineers, Brian O'Shea and Harry Connell.

As a result of Bodkin's dishonest practices, a member of the Stan Winter ticket, Charles Leary, applied to the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar for a court controlled ballot. In granting this application Mr Justice Joske made comments that reinforce the allegations made by Munday and others about the dishonesty and corruption of the Bodkin regime. The judgement is worth quoting at some length:

I am satisfied that they
 . Deprived the meeting of August 1, without justification and for their own purposes, of the opportunity of electing the returning officer and scrutineers at that meeting.
 . Left the time and place of the meeting on August 24 unstated in order that at a propitious moment and in their own way they would be able to call it and get their supporters to it so as to obtain the election of their own candidates.
 . Again for their own purposes, did not give proper notice of the meeting on August 22.
 The conclusion at which I arrive is that they are thoroughly untrustworthy persons.⁷⁶

Ballot-rigging, as a final way out for Bodkin, was eliminated and the die was cast. At the election the entire Bodkin grouping was defeated.

74 Interview: Don Crotty, 7 March 1978.

75 Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.

76 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 September 1961.

With three exceptions, the Rank and File/Centre ticket swept the poll for the thirteen main positions in the union. The extent of the landslide can be seen by the outcome of voting for the Secretary's position. McNamara received 720 votes and Bodkin 187.⁷⁷ Despite this result McNamara still maintains that the ballot was interfered with because the voting was inconsistent.⁷⁸

Jack Munday was one of the three beaten members of McNamara's ticket. He received 442 votes and came ninth out of sixteen candidates for the six organisers' positions. He ascribes his defeat more to anti-communism than to ballot-rigging:⁷⁹ "Even though I travelled furthest and had been most active I got beaten. I think it was because I was a known Communist. It was an anti-Communist vote."⁸⁰ It may have been partly an "anti-communist" vote but it was very much a C.P.A. inspired victory. Both Aarons and Robinson maintain that, although objective conditions were ripe for a change, it was the organisation of the communists that allowed it to happen. It must be remembered that the Party had not split then. It was larger and more powerful within the trade unions. Pat Clancy and the B.W.I.U. were in support, many other N.S.W. unions were on side and even Norm Gallagher had sent up financial aid from Victoria.

The delicate manoeuvring that had taken place between the Communists and the left-A.L.P. members was to become a feature of B.L.F. leadership throughout the sixties. Although Caroline Graham claims that McNamara's nomination was the result of a tacit agreement in the Rank and File that the membership would not accept overt Communist Party leadership⁸¹ much of the delicacy of the situation was not engendered from within the Union but from without. The bitter divisions within the Labor Party were responsible for most of the problems presented during the actual campaign. McNamara was accused by Jack Kane of the D.L.P. of standing on a unity ticket with McGill. He challenged the A.L.P. to act on the "revelation".⁸² The situation necessitated the

77 The N.S.W. Builders Labourer, Vol. 1, No. 1.

78 Mick McNamara: interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1976.

79 One of the other defeated candidates was Keith Jessop, also a Communist.

80 Interview: Jack Munday, 13 August 1975.

81 Caroline Graham, op.cit., p.7.

82 Unidentified News Clipping headed "October 1961", McNamara Papers.

production of tickets from McNamara and the other A.L.P. members advocating the election of only A.L.P. members. This enforced duplicity caused a situation where there were four rival A.L.P. tickets and one "rank and file ticket which had Communist Party support".⁸³

The final line-up of forces in the new leadership was described by Munday as one right-winger, Stan Winter, four centrists and sixteen Rank and Filers. President was Vince Henneberry; Vice President, J.B. Williamson; Trustees, R. Prendergast and T. Austin;⁸⁴ Guardian, J.H. Stephensen; and Treasurer, M. Lynch. Maurie Lynch actually defeated the incumbent Federal Secretary of the Union, T.J. Foster, for the position of Treasurer by seventeen votes.

The new officials took office with £9 in the bank and debts amounting to £15,000.⁸⁵ It was not an auspicious beginning.

83 Unidentified News Clipping headed "November 1961", McNamara Papers.

84 Theo Austin was described by Munday (13 August 1975) as "an old fence sitter from the Bodkin era".

85 Unidentified News Clipping headed "November 1961", McNamara Papers.