

1970 was the most important year ever for the N.S.W. B.L.F. in its development of industrial action and militant forms of struggle. Highlighted by the five week Margins strike in May-June, the rest of the year buzzed with activity also, including major disputes with Frankipile, the Public Works Department and Dillinghams.

The first big dispute was with the large building firm Frankipile of Australia. As Dick Prendergast, who helped organise the dispute described: "After years of substandard conditions and in a lot of cases non existent amenities, workers...hit the grass for two weeks".¹ The men won \$8 a week over-award payment and insisted that settlement terms cover all jobs in Australia, not just N.S.W.

The victory was significant for contributing towards the feeling of militancy that was building up in the industry. The Union donated \$500 to the strike fund and commended the officials involved.² The Executive felt that the result was "most satisfactory".³ Although there had to be a further bout of industrial action before the company paid the agreed increases on all sites,⁴ the dispute set the tone of struggle for 1970. Bud Cook predicted that over-award gains from collective bargaining would be common in the future.⁵ Perhaps the most significant outcome though was the effect on workers' psyches:

Disorganised at the start of the dispute, the Frankipile workers became very well organised and united to make the gains they did.

The struggle was an achievement they can be proud of and is deserving of the highest praise.⁶

Maybe because of their successful apprenticeship in militancy the Frankipile workers became involved in industrial action⁷ again, later in the year, when a delegate was sacked. The company, no doubt trying to dampen moves for a further prolonged strike, initiated proceedings to open the way to possible penal action. Pete Thomas describes the scene:

The case was listed for hearing. The Commonwealth Arbitration Commission solemnly assembled; the employers' legal men, headed

1 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.5.

2 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970.

3 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 February 1970.

4 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 17 February and 24 February 1970.

5 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 February 1970.

6 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.5. Munday referred to it as "this fine struggle", The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.1.

7 Minutes: General Meeting, 4 August 1970.

by a Q.C. were there - but the union wasn't. The union's deliberate absence caused a flurry. Phones ran hot. But it was the employer who backed off. The delegate was reinstated and a bans-clause application was abandoned.⁸

Munday hailed the result as another "significant victory for the Branch".⁹

The next group of workers in major dispute¹⁰ were P.W.D. employees in Newcastle, Wollongong and Sydney. A 24 hour strike was held in February to support their demand that the full benefits of the Construction-on-Site Award be passed on to them.¹¹ The struggle with the P.W.D. lingered on with problems relating to wet weather payment,¹² scaffolders' rates,¹³ the fourth rate,¹⁴ over-award payments, amenities, victimisation and financial unionism.¹⁵ After a sustained campaign which included a P.W.D. worker being "paid off" by the Union to help organise, especially around unfinancial unionism and the fourth rate, Munday was able to report happily upon P.W.D. achievements¹⁶ and Ron Donoghue, a P.W.D. employee, told the Executive that the workers appreciated the "leadership given".¹⁷

Another industrial campaign carried on throughout the year was that of riggers, scaffolders and dogmen claiming higher rates. Dogmen used tactics such as no Sundays, no early starts or late finishes and no working through smoko or lunch. They initiated one 24-hour stoppage and broke several concrete pours when they ran over time. Given the important tactical position that dogmen hold, these manoeuvres were frustrating and economically damaging for the employers. Joe Owens recorded that "most employers have indicated their willingness to pay, but claim that the Master Builders will not allow them to do so".¹⁸

The position of strength of the dogmen meant that they were earning high money and to some extent this flowed right through the industry.¹⁹ Most of the officials felt the dogmen, riggers and

8 Pete Thomas, Taming the Concrete Jungle, p.18.

9 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 11 August 1970.

10 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 12, 17, 24 February and 3 March 1970, and General Meeting, 3 February, 1970.

11 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.1.

12 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 September 1970.

13 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

14 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 October 1970.

15 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

16 Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

17 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

18 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.9.

19 Interview: Noel Olive, 9 March 1978. A remark by Lynch, (Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970) reinforces this view, "No apologies should be made for sectional campaigns, more unionism and better pay has resulted".

scaffolders campaigns were effective²⁰ but Munday sounded a warning note in March when he argued that: "Sectional Disputes were taking up too much time of the officials...and had taken away some of the value of action around the Margins campaign". He added, without comment, that the M.B.A. had threatened "to go for deregistration" of the Union if the disputes continued.²¹ One of the decisions taken by the dogmen during their 24 hour stoppage was that if the matter was taken to arbitration they would not consider themselves bound by any unfavourable decision. The strikers then marched from the Trades Hall to Martin Place handing out leaflets about the dangers involved in their work and what their claims were.²²

The sectional disputes were mostly successful and the militancy of these skilled workers was reinforced by their gains. For instance the dogmen were back in dispute in December²³ with new demands.

The main thrust of the Union's industrial activity, apart from the Margins campaign was a crackdown on unfinancial unionism.

Before the Margins strike the Executive continually discussed the need to implement "no ticket - no start"²⁴ and "putting non unionists off jobs".²⁵ The building of home units and the amount of sub-contracting involved was considered to make dues collection on these sites particularly difficult. Prendergast at one stage estimated the proportion of unionists on home unit construction as 1% and considered that "so-called over employment can work against unions in regard to collecting finance".²⁶ Presumably this was because, if they were put off one job for non-unionism, they could easily find another.

At the first Executive meeting after the strike Munday spoke of the need for new methods to combat non-unionism.²⁷ He told the June Branch meeting that vigilante action during the strike had "raised strongly the question of non-unionism in the industry, and said that in future we do not work with non-union labour".²⁸ Tom Hogan agrees that the emphasis after the 1970 strike was on full unionism. "We were

20 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 17 and 24 February and 3 March 1970.

21 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

22 Tribune, 4 March 1970, p.10.

23 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 December 1970.

24 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

25 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970. At the same meeting Munday urged more use of job meetings for sub-contractors.

26 Ibid. Home units as a problem were mentioned again. Minutes: Executive Meeting, 14 July 1970.

27 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 9 June 1970.

28 Minutes: General Meeting, 9 June 1970.

insisting on 'no ticket - no start' while the B.W.I.U. were saying 'fill this form in to pay later and you'll be right'.²⁹ Munday made a similar criticism when he remarked that "if some larger unions took similar action as Builders Labourers recently, the incidence of unionism would improve".³⁰ In his summary of the year's activity at the December Branch meeting Bud Cook, referring to the Margins strike added: "the aim of the Union flowing from this victory was for full financial unionism".³¹

The "no ticket - no start" campaign was pursued vigorously with delegates' conferences organised on the issue³² and successful³³ showcard days held.³⁴ An agreement was reached with the P.W.D. that no builders labourer be employed unless he was a member of the Union.³⁵ After some problems³⁶ this "closed shop" position in the P.W.D. became a reality. By November Munday was also able to report that the City and North Sydney areas only accepted fully unionised jobs. He announced proudly that "a new situation now exists in the B.L.F."³⁷

Workers were taking the situation into their own hands. Keith Jessop reported that in the area where he worked there was "extensive abuse of workers if after joining the Union they did not pay their dues".³⁸ A significant dispute with A.F. Little occurred in late October which Munday believed was most effective and "it was evident that it was forcing the employers to adhere to the policy of the Union, that is, no ticket, no start".³⁹

By November, the Branch was in the position to pass a policy motion that: "From this date we will not work with other than fully paid financial Builders Laborers on any site".⁴⁰

Arising naturally out of the campaign for full unionism arose the question of union hire. Bob Pringle had been raising the issue within the Union since 1968.⁴¹ Now his was still the major but not the lone voice. At the Special Executive Meeting in April he urged that the

29 Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

30 Minutes: General Meeting, 9 June 1970.

31 Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

32 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 16 June 1970.

33 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

34 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 September 1970.

35 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

36 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

37 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

38 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

39 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

40 Ibid.

41 Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.

question of hiring labour through the union office be explored: "We must tackle the question of who has the right to hire and fire".⁴² In October the Branch decided that the Executive should study the prospects for union hire and report back.⁴³ At the next meeting Munday accepted the principle as an unstated premise saying that "it was only by action that we will ever be able to have fully financial unionism and finally union hire".⁴⁴

Bob Pringle put the argument most clearly. In explaining that "cleaning up the city was a step towards this [union hire]" he concluded that "union hire dismays the bosses".⁴⁵

Union hire had to wait two years before a concerted campaign could be launched. The problem was that the officials were just too busy.⁴⁶ Time and again Munday complained about officials being tied down by localised disputes.⁴⁷ Workers were taking the initiative on their own job sites⁴⁸ as the impetus of the Margins campaign carried over into other areas. In March Munday wrote in The Builders' Labourer:

So widespread is the movement in support of the Federation's claims that the officials and job delegates have been working really hard to keep up with the demands of the workers on the jobs. This intense activity demonstrates the militancy of our Union.⁴⁹

The same issue contained an anonymous item:

Marrs' are blueing, Maros are blueing, the Doggies are blueing, Chillman's are blueing. She's on all over the place. The only people not blueing are the builders; they're spewing.

We say, to horse men, let's all get in on the act.⁵⁰

The militancy of the Margins strike stimulated this new industrial outlook. As well as its campaign against unfinancial unionism, the

42 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

43 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

44 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 October 1970.

45 Ibid.

46 Good examples of meetings at which numerous disputes were discussed or the busyness of officials bemoaned are Minutes: Executive Meetings, 17 February, 24 February, 10 September and 17 November 1970.

47 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 4 August and 15 September 1970.

48 Localized disputes of some significance occurred with Civil & Civic, Marrs' and Maros (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 February 1970), E.A. Watts (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 19 August 1970), Mills Scaffolding (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 11 August 1970), Crows at Silverwater (Minutes: Executive Meetings, 10 and 22 September and General Meeting, 6 October 1970), Mogul (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970), Kell & Rigby (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November and General Meeting, 1 December 1970), and Cyclone at Newcastle (Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 December 1970).

49 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.1.

50 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.21.

Union renewed its efforts to "civilize the building industry" with special emphasis on amenities. The amenities campaign led to one of the most spectacular series of incidents in an already spectacular year.

Amenities on building sites had been primitive or non-existent. The management of Civil & Civic admitted:

The standard of site accommodation provided by most builders for their workers on site is deplorable. Steps have been taken in our Company over the last several months to improve the level of site accommodation that we offer our workmen. Prior to this some of our conditions on site were below standard.⁵¹

Although wages had risen during the building boom, amenities remained bad. Mick McEvoy describes returning from the American-run construction camps in Papua New Guinea and not being able to believe the conditions for building workers in Sydney: "You had no washroom, changed in the tool shed, no such thing as a separate eating place...these are small things to people outside but they're big things when you spend one third of your day on the work site".⁵² The Union, realising that after the Margins strike the time was right for gains to be made,⁵³ had discussions with the M.B.A. about "civilizing the industry".⁵⁴ With little result from these discussions, the Union decided to resort to direct action.

City organiser Tom Hogan described how the "great compressor incident" came about:

An excavator in Clarence Street had eight obviously newly arrived Italian migrants as labourers. The job consisted of a hole, a compressor, eight jackhammers and a hose. Not a tap, not a toilet not a shed in sight. I saw the boss and told him he would have to have the job up to scratch by the next day. But the next day nothing had changed.

I'd seen a number of the leadership and told them what I intended to do. It had pretty general acceptance...no one said "no".

I couldn't speak to any of the workers because they had not one word of English. So I stopped the compressor, uncoupled the hoses and started to pull it [the compressor] forwards. The workers stepped forward to help...and to this day I don't know whether they were assisting me to push it down the hole or to get it out of the way or what, but the boss obviously thought I was taking it out into Clarence Street. He started to laugh until suddenly we got a bit of pace up and veered right. He nearly collapsed. It was a beautiful

51 Civil & Civic Pty Ltd., Labour Relations in the Future attached to Productivity Agreement: Building Trades Unions (N.S.W.) and the Electrical Trades Union (N.S.W.) and Civil & Civic Pty Ltd, 1970-1971.

52 Interview: Mick McEvoy, 10 October 1977.

53 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 September 1970. Pringle pointed out the fact and argued "but we should also look for job conditions".

54 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 September 1970 and General Meeting, 1 September 1970.

shot. It went down about fifteen foot and landed on its end. It jerked the motor back two foot and stood there pointing skywards. That action alone would have cost builders in the city millions of dollars to get amenities up to scratch.⁵⁵

Hogan claimed that what the migrant workers did that day had the effect of bringing decent sheds on to building sites:

Builders started ringing us saying "can you please give us two weeks, we can't get the sheds up in time". So we rang up shed people and in fact new companies sprang up selling amenities on building sites. They came into our office saying "does this meet your approval?"⁵⁶

Hogan returned to the Clarence Street job the next day and found four fully lined sheds, three toilets and a full row of washbasins. "The workers were immensely pleased but we still couldn't talk to each other." He was followed around building sites for the next few weeks "by about twenty police".⁵⁷

Such action was infectious. In October Danny Simpson announced at the B.L.F. Branch meeting that "tomorrow morning Summit workers intended tipping over unacceptable sheds".⁵⁸ The Summit site was being excavated by Brambles, a giant company which "would get certain jobs up to scratch if a few militants happened to be working on it, but all the rest would be a shambles".⁵⁹ At the Summit job-site, the labourers had only an 8ft x 6ft x 6ft tin shed which was supposed to be the change room for fourteen men.⁶⁰ Because of the way excavation workers travelled from site to site there were "interconnections between jobs so the whole of the rank and file got to know what the situation was". Accordingly when the Summit workers called for all Brambles jobs in the city to stop work the response was overwhelming. Tom Hogan again describes the event:

Brambles had about fourteen jobs in the city at that time. They all stopped and came up to the Summit. About the last five jobs I visited to pull out had already done so before I got there and were on their way up to Kings Cross. At least two hundred, mainly migrants, marched right through the Botanical Gardens to Kings Cross and we had our usual marshalls of the N.S.W. police force alongside us. When the marchers got up to the site they saw the one tiny shed and the Summit workers explained the circumstances to them. So they said, "well we've judged the shed and its guilty, it's got to go down". They grabbed it, all 200 put a hand on it. I tried but I couldn't get in. So the shed was pushed down and beautiful new sheds were erected that afternoon.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

⁵⁶ Tom Hogan, Interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1980.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

⁵⁹ Tom Hogan, Interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1980.

⁶⁰ Pete Thomas, Taming the Concrete Jungle, p.21.

⁶¹ Tom Hogan, Interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1980.

The remains of the shed were declared "black" and no one would move it. The shed remained there for eighteen months and concrete was poured all around, but it was not touched until the building was completed. "It was an enormous experience to be there and see what the rank and file in action could actually get, and get in a hurry", remembers Hogan.⁶²

Mundey was called to a compulsory Commission Conference on the shed and compressor incidents where he explained to the Commissioner "that new approaches had now to be made where amenities were non-existent". Inspector Longbottom from the State Special Branch and other police were also in attendance.⁶³ No formal charges were laid but employers received the message. Mundey was able to describe the compressor and shed incidents as "most effective" in his report to the November General Meeting.⁶⁴

These "luddite" acts of the Union leadership caused consternation amongst other unionists and within the "left" generally.⁶⁵ As with the reaction to the vigilantes, the C.P.A. in particular went through a certain amount of soul searching over the issue. C.P.A. organiser Mick Tubbs remembers that many in the Party, "including myself" were aghast at what they saw as unwarranted larrikinism. "Hands were thrown up in horror." He talks about his change of heart on the issue:

I realised that it wasn't alienating them from their membership. It was part of the B.Ls to be that way. The average B.L. was a knockabout, a bit of a larrikin and providing it was kept within bounds, providing serious questions were considered seriously and sensibly, and realisable objectives were projected, then they accepted that [sabotage] as part of the industry...better to be that way than stuffy Union officials.

Tubbs also believes there was no real attempt within the Party to dampen the Union's direct action methods although the issues were often raised in discussion. He says "in any other society some of the major developers would have been in gaol".⁶⁶ It is also important to remember that the C.P.A. at the time was undergoing the traumatic post-Czechoslovakia split and the Aarons group in control of the Party was unlikely, even within the Party, openly to oppose acts by the B.L.F. when that Union was solidly in their camp.

62 Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.

63 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970. The Union placed this incident and another at Brighton-le-Sands where police had arrived on the site "when Bro. R. Pringle was performing normal Union duties" before Labor Council for consideration.

64 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

65 Discussed in chapters 3 and 10.

66 Interview: Mick Tubbs, 26 October 1977.

There were others within the C.P.A. who wholeheartedly espoused the rights of workers to take such action. Stella Nord claims "we felt that if this was the way the bosses treated workers then they had no right to the equipment anyway".⁶⁷

Another section within the "left" that saw these direct action methods as something new and exciting in working class struggle was the libertarian group involved in anti-censorship activity, mainly centred around the University of N.S.W. student newspaper Tharunka. The editor, Wendy Bacon, heard about the shed and compressor incidents and, because she believed that the anti-censorship struggle should be broadened to include working class action, sought an interview with Brian Hogan who had been involved with the sabotage incident at the Summit.⁶⁸ Thus began a strong association between the Sydney libertarians and the B.L.F.⁶⁹

Despite the colourful nature of the more publicised incidents, the Union was in deadly earnest. Throughout the year more and more disputes occurred over amenities. If they did not start as pure amenities disputes, they often included better amenities in the final list of demands. Companies which at one stage or other during the year were the subject of amenities demands including Frankipile,⁷⁰ Eastments,⁷¹ A.V. Jennings⁷² and Charles⁷³ (described as "the worst amenities in Sydney"). Pressure was maintained on the M.B.A.⁷⁴ and on the sectional employers' organisations⁷⁵ to keep their members in line over the matter. The November Branch meeting passed four important policy motions of which two concerned amenities:

2. Work shall not begin on any site until amenities are bought up to the required standards...
4. That as from January 1st 1971 the only acceptable sheds on any site will be those fully lined and with adequate heating,

67 Interview: Stella Nord, 13 March 1978.

68 Interview: Wendy Bacon, 16 January 1978.

69 The association was reinforced by the fact that the issue of Tharunka in which the interview with Hogan appeared, happened to be the one chosen by police for prosecution. Part of the defence case rested on evidence about the distribution of the paper and whether the people who read it were likely to be offended. As the issue had been widely distributed on building sites, Munday was asked to give evidence that builders labourers were unlikely to be offended by the material in the issue.

70 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.5.

71 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.9.

72 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

73 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

74 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 November 1970.

75 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

lighting, ventilation etc.⁷⁶

In December, Munday reported "on the present campaign waged in relation to amenities on jobs and the success achieved in this matter".⁷⁷

Although the struggle over amenities continued throughout the seventies, after the campaign of 1970 conditions were never again so bad.

Another aspect of the "Civilize the Building Industry" campaign was safety. With the building boom in full swing and buildings rising higher and higher, deaths⁷⁸ and serious accidents⁷⁹ were all too common. The need for speed in development projects, whilst affording the workers increased industrial muscle,⁸⁰ also brought about neglect of safety issues by employers. A job delegate from E.A. Watts wrote: "In these days of sub-contracting, speed is what employers look for mostly. Without workers speed is lost. Without safety workers are lost."⁸¹ The government organisation supposed to police safety precautions, the Department of Labour and Industry (D.L.I.) was inadequate. Munday informed members, "...let us face it, the D.L.I. have too few inspectors and our Union firmly believes that they do not enforce safety and amenity regulations sufficiently". He went on to write about the general instability and insecurity of the industry and the need to insist on proper amenities and safety precautions before projects commenced. Finally, he came to the crunch of what the "Civilize the Industry" campaign was about and presaged the coming of the green bans:

Further we should have a real say in the industry. Not only on the need to register builders, but to programme the entire building industry in the interest of building workers and the general public, not in the interest of greedy so-called "developers", loan sharks and jerry builders, who really are agents who sub-contract every conceivable part of work out. Their sole concern with the industry is to make the fastest available dollar.⁸²

Another aspect of speed-up in production techniques meant that dogmen riding the crane hooks on tall city building sites became increasingly

76 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

77 Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

78 For instance two occasions on which deaths were reported were Minutes: Executive Meetings, 22 October and 15 December 1970.

79 A good description of the way workers organised on an Allen Construction job at North Sydney is, Theo Austin, "Job Safety Enforced after Serious Injury", The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.7.

80 Allan Luthey wrote ominously in The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.17 "E.A. Watts has the big hole to fill and as usual a certain time to fill it".

81 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.17.

82 Jack Munday, "Our Strike Proves they Fear Workers' Action Most", The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.3.

exposed to dangerous situations. In March, Joe Owens, himself a former dogman, reported in Tribune on "...conditions that dogmen face as they work at heights, in high winds (regulations set no limit on velocity of wind in which work can go on) and with every contractor on the job putting on the pressure so as to keep up with his own tight schedule".⁸³ Dogging, which had always been a dangerous occupation (in the ten years previous to 1970, 30 dogmen had been killed), became even more so at the super-heights they were now required to work. Owens explained: "With loads such as panels there is the risk of wind starting the load spinning and getting the fall rope twisted with the dogman's bellrope, fouling up his means of communication".⁸⁴ During the year dogmen tried to control aspects of their work with varying success. One of the demands of the dogmen's dispute of February-March had been for more say on issues such as whether wind conditions were too bad for them to carry out their work.⁸⁵ In December they were in dispute again about working in wet weather.⁸⁶ Throughout the year there were more and more calls, particularly from Brian Hogan and Joe Owens for the banning of dogmen riding hooks.⁸⁷ As this would have entailed employers hiring two dogmen for every crane, (one at the top and one at the bottom) the employers resisted this move,⁸⁸ but the impetus for "banning the hook" was to grow stronger as the boom progressed.

Another activity which was banned by the Union was the use of free-fall hoists. Members refused to drive them but the D.L.I. would not ban them⁸⁹ although they had a shocking accident record, and so employers still used them, particularly in outlying areas where unionism was not strong.⁹⁰

The B.T.G. launched an accident pay campaign in April⁹¹ but it was the actions of builders labourers on jobs such as Chillmans (Sussex Street) which paved the way for the successful strike on this issue in 1971. Joe Owens wrote of the Chillmans dispute:

⁸³ Tribune, 4 March 1970, p.10.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 December 1970.

⁸⁷ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 17 February, 24 November and 15 December 1970.

⁸⁸ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

⁸⁹ Bud Cook, "Time for a Clean-Up", The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.43.

⁹⁰ Minutes: General Meeting, 4 August 1970.

⁹¹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 7 April 1970 and General Meeting, 7 April 1970.

Currently they are in conference re claims for sick and accident pay. It is high time builders accepted their responsibility and made up the compo payments to award wages. Their balance sheets show they can well afford it.⁹²

Possibly because it was their membership that was most at risk, the B.L.F. put more emphasis on safety than did the other building unions. When Bud Cook summarised the year's activities he stressed "the important role that safety played and will continue to play in the industry".⁹³

Yet another aspect of the "Civilize the Industry Campaign" was the drive to regulate those operations within the industry most subject to abuse, particularly demolishing, excavating and concreting. These operations were often handled by small sub-contractors, whose methods were hardest to police and who were most likely to go out of business leaving unpaid insurance premiums and unpaid labourers. The problem of "subbies going broke" was a continual headache. Sometimes the Union won fights to get their members what was owed to them,⁹⁴ but often they did not. Bankrupt sub-contractors would simply appear again under another name. The building unions gave evidence to the N.S.W. Parliamentary Select Committee, calling for the registration of both builders and sub-contractors. Builders, the more stable element in the industry also had a poor record. In seven years 355 builders had gone bankrupt, owing \$14 million.⁹⁵

One of the reasons that demolishers and excavators came to the forefront in the Union's industrial drives was simply because there was so much going on. The front cover of the March journal featured the massive excavation for the E.A. Watts job at Sydney Technical College. More than a quarter of a million cubic yards of earth and rock had been removed from the site.⁹⁶ Excavating in the soft Sydney sandstone created respiratory problems that did not become widely recognised until years later.

Demolishing practices were equally hazardous. Often, even the cat scaffolding required by the D.L.I. was not erected. Malpractice was rife. Reputable demolition companies complained that other firms

⁹² The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.9.

⁹³ Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

⁹⁴ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 11 August 1970.

⁹⁵ Evidence given to the N.S.W. Parliamentary Select Committee by Mr F.J.O. Ryan, Registrar of Companies, cited by Bud Cook, "Time for a Clean-Up", The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.43.

⁹⁶ The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, front cover.

were under-bidding on tenders because they were able to get away with neglecting safety procedures,⁹⁷ paying "cash in hand", avoiding paying employees' income tax and paying lower Workers Compensation Insurance than they should. One demolisher wrote:

I have seen the Demolition Industry deteriorate to such an extent that prices for demolishing is [sic] being carried out cheaper than 15 years ago, in spite of all rising costs.⁹⁸

The fact that jobs in demolition and excavation work were mainly unskilled meant that migrant labour was a large percentage of the workforce in these areas which added to the difficulty of organisation. The first big breakthrough came when Brambles excavation workers won a significant over-award increase after a strike in October. Three large City jobs stopped and marched in a protest on 4 October. Munday described the dispute as "a good one" and added that "other excavators and demolishers must receive more attention from the Union".⁹⁹ He thought the Union should aim to extend the over-award payment to all sub-contractor excavators.¹⁰⁰

Concentration on the excavation sub-contractors¹⁰¹ culminated in a meeting of builders labourers working in the excavation field drawing up a log of claims. These included bringing amenities up to standard, no working in the rain, all special rates paid without absorption, proper pay slips to accompany all pay packets, and all work sub-let by excavators also to be bound by the agreement.¹⁰²

By December, acting Secretary Bud Cook was able to speak of the "big break throughs" that had been made "on behalf of the workers, such as in the Demolition, Excavation, Frankipile, Concreters etc."¹⁰³

Another aspect of the industry over which the Union tried to get more control was victimisation of militants. The Union kept a close watch in the weeks following the Margins strike to ascertain whether

97 Evidence given to the N.S.W. Parliamentary Select Committee by Whelan the Wrecker, cited by Bud Cook, "Time for a Clean-Up", The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.43.

98 Correspondence: Neville L. Platt Demolition Pty Ltd, to the Builders Labourers Union (N.S.W. Branch), 17 June 1970. The Union tried to ban one particular demolisher from any work in the City. During discussion of the proposition, many officials and rank and filers strongly supported the move. Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

99 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

100 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 6 October 1970.

101 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 November 1970.

102 A.B.L.F. (N.S.W. Branch) Circular, 24 November 1970, roneod.

103 Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

activists were being sacked.¹⁰⁴ There was little evidence of deliberate or co-ordinated victimisation but isolated instances occurred.¹⁰⁵ The main problem, as always, was the inability of known militants to get employment in the first place. Don Crotty says that things "became a little bit easier but not a great deal". Even with the building boom and the demand for skilled labour, militants, who were predominantly ticketed men, still had to follow the old routine of buying the early edition of the Sydney Morning Herald at 5.30 a.m. to make sure they were the first person at the building site to apply for the advertised job. Only on "really unionised jobs" was the demeaning practice of the early morning job queue eliminated.¹⁰⁶

An event of great significance which occurred during 1970 was the commencement of the high rise Qantas building by Dillingham Constructions. The project ran into industrial trouble right from the start. A giant building with a semi-governmental institution as the client and a huge multi-national developer as the main contractor was bound to become some sort of industrial pace-setter and it did. Government bodies as clients are much less flexible when it comes to tactics than are private clients.¹⁰⁷ Mick McEvoy one of the early labourers on the site explained the situation: "Qantas was completely committed to that building, they'd sunk so much money into it. They could not pull out. Every-body realised that - the client and the men".¹⁰⁸ McEvoy also made the interesting observation that the Qantas project was "virtually the Opera House, stage two". Much of the workforce had come straight from the Opera House which was finishing up at the time. These men had fought and won industrial battles on the Opera House and were seasoned campaigners. McEvoy claimed it was a safe and secure job rather than a militant one as "they could feel safe behind the structure of the building".¹⁰⁹ However the Qantas job soon became an important focus for industrial activity, never aspiring to the workers' control atmosphere of Dillingham's other big job at Clarence Street, but nevertheless winning important struggles. A hard core of experienced unionists such as Brian Rix, Mick Curtin, Reg Mason and Duncan Williams from the B.L.F.

104 Minutes: Special General Meeting, 25 August 1970.

105 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 22 September and 22 October 1970.

106 Interview: Don Crotty, 7 March 1978.

107 Discussed in chapter 10.

108 Interview: Mick McEvoy, 10 October 1977.

109 Brian Rix also concurs on this assessment. He describes the original workforce as "not necessarily militant but if given the right leadership accepted it". Interview: Brian Rix, 20 December 1977.

and Tommy Morrison from the B.W.I.U. guided the workers on the job.¹¹⁰ The tradesmen and the labourers purposely set about achieving unity in their disputes. "A daily series of little victories"¹¹¹ helped gain control and welded the workers into a formidable force. The testing period that occurs between employer and employees on all big jobs culminated in the decisive site-allowance strike which began in August and lasted for almost four months. The dispute was aggravated by the employer resisting the over-award demands with grim determination.¹¹² Both Dillinghams and the M.B.A. feared that the over-award payment would become generalised if conceded.¹¹³

Organisation around the strike was intense. Subscription lists were distributed,¹¹⁴ job meetings were held almost daily¹¹⁵ and participation by the strikers, even the migrants, was high.¹¹⁶ In October the site was blackballed.¹¹⁷ The B.L.F. leadership became increasingly critical of the way the B.W.I.U. leadership was conducting the struggle¹¹⁸ and when the B.W.I.U. eventually backed out of the dispute altogether, Munday declared it "most unfortunate to say the least".¹¹⁹ Mick Curtin the job delegate was more specific, criticising Clancy for "not accepting a democratic decision of a large majority"¹²⁰ at a combined meeting. Bud Cook said that the tradesmens' leaders "came out of the struggle in a very poor light as far as the workers were concerned".¹²¹

The B.L.F. leadership took a unanimous decision not to attend court over the matter¹²² and Munday sent a telegram instead. Despite the minor furore that this action caused, the dispute was eventually won, with Dillinghams paying a site allowance of 11.25¢ per hour.¹²³ The

110 Interview: Duncan Williams, 25 February 1976.

111 Interview: Brian Rix, 20 December 1977.

112 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 10 and 22 September 1970.

113 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

114 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 September 1970.

115 Interview: Duncan Williams, 25 February 1976, and Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

116 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

120 Ibid.

121 Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

122 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

123 The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Dillingham Constructions Pty Ltd, (Qantas Project) and the Australian Builders' Labourers' Federation, 30 November 1970 [CNo. 2067 of 1970].

leadership called this "a magnificent victory" and congratulated the workers on the job with great enthusiasm.¹²⁴

A feature of the industry that was becoming more common as the boom conditions accelerated was over-award payments. Bud Cook forecast that "bartering of over-award gains" directly with the employers "will be common in the future".¹²⁵ Pringle believed that "the climate is right for gains in the industry",¹²⁶ but Munday warned that "the Dillinghams [Qantas] job struggle showed that employers were united on stopping over-award payments".¹²⁷ He thought that employers feared that over-award payments won at Dillinghams "would tend to become general".¹²⁸ Despite employer resistance, many over-award disputes broke out in the months following the Margins strike.¹²⁹ Successful results were achieved with Brambles,¹³⁰ Marrickville Margarine,¹³¹ Crows,¹³² Dillinghams¹³³ and the P.W.D.¹³⁴

As usual, in the unsettled state of the industry at the time, although significant gains were being made on strongly unionised, militant jobs, other areas were lagging. Tom Hogan believed that a number of employers were actually paying under-award rates,¹³⁵ and even more were paying what was known as the fourth rate. The fourth rate applied to those labourers under the award who were deemed to have no skills whatsoever, i.e. pick and shovel men. There had been a move for some time to eliminate this rate but the success of the Margins strike added impetus to the campaign.

During the Margins campaign Prendergast argued that the lowest grouping should be deleted.¹³⁶ Donoghue complained that too much organising was being done around the top rates and not enough for the lower rates.¹³⁷ In September Tom Hogan moved that "...award rates printed from now show three rates only with an explanation that these be the only minimum rates recognised by the Federation".¹³⁸

124 Minutes: Executive and General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

125 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 February 1970.

126 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970.

127 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 September 1970.

128 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

129 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 September 1970.

130 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 6 October 1970.

131 Ibid.

132 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

133 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

134 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

135 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 November 1970.

136 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

137 Ibid.

138 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

The employer which most resisted the elimination of the fourth rate was the P.W.D. Like most government instrumentalities it remained inflexible and averse to collective bargaining techniques.

When the P.W.D. announced that "the fourth rate of pay will be paid where applicable", Pringle urged that this should be resisted, by stoppages if necessary.¹³⁹ In October Munday attended a meeting with the P.W.D. over the issue¹⁴⁰ and a stoppage, planned for November was brought forward. Donoghue agreed that this was a good idea because payment of the fourth rate was widespread in the P.W.D.¹⁴¹ By November, Cook was able to announce that "the prospects were bright for eliminating the fourth rate in the P.W.D."¹⁴²

The fourth rate campaign met with varying success. Munday was called to a conference with the Commission over the matter in October¹⁴³ and the November General meeting passed a policy motion that: "We resolutely reject the suggestion that any builders laborer has no skills whatever and declare the fourth rate inapplicable at all times".¹⁴⁴ However, employers, particularly those in outlying districts¹⁴⁵ and poorly unionised sections of the industry, continued to pay the fourth rate. Its disappearance from the industry was gradual rather than dramatic but in the central business district where the bulk of the membership worked, the rate was eliminated by the end of 1970.¹⁴⁶

The Union's move away from reliance on traditional union procedures such as arbitration, gained impetus after the successes of direct action methods during the five weeks strike. The leadership's attitude to the arbitration system was unashamedly one of opposition. Bud Cook advocated "casting aside the outdated Arbitration Court system".¹⁴⁷ Munday spoke of the need to "bypass arbitration and resort to collective bargaining".¹⁴⁸ Joe Owens wrote that "arbitration has no future" and

¹³⁹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 October 1970.

¹⁴⁰ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

¹⁴³ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 22 and 27 October and 8 December 1970.

In October, all building trades stopped work in Wagga Wagga in support of builders labourers who were receiving the fourth rate.

¹⁴⁶ Other aspects of payment procedures in the building industry that were opposed by the Union with varying success were bonus payments, (Minutes: General Meeting, 7 July 1970) and "all-in" payments, (The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.43).

¹⁴⁷ Minutes: General Meeting, 3 February 1970.

¹⁴⁸ Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

that it was "being slowly and surely carted off to the funeral pyre". He saw as the answer, not collective bargaining but socialism.¹⁴⁹ Dick Prendergast urged workers "to attend Arbitration Courts to see so-called democracy in action".¹⁵⁰

As well as the incident described earlier where the Union failed to attend a Commission hearing in the Frankipile dispute,¹⁵¹ the Union adopted a similar tactic during the Dillingham [Qantas] strike. After one session at the Commission, Munday explained "that the Court hearing was attended only as a tactic, and that we would accept only favourable decisions".¹⁵² At a later Executive meeting, Bud Cook advocated not appearing at Court in relation to the Dillinghams dispute. This was agreed to by all present, even Ron Donoghue who was possibly the most traditionally minded member of the Executive.¹⁵³ The Commission Case which was boycotted involved Dillinghams moving for penal action over the strikes on the Qantas project. A telegram to Judge Moore, signed by Munday, advocated that the company agree to genuine negotiations "and not engage in antiquated penal action proceedings".¹⁵⁴ The dispute was won without penal action being incurred.

The year 1970 was also significant because it marked the beginning of the M.B.A.'s move to deregister the Union. Bud Cook mentions that "the M.B.A. had been threatening for some time to deregister us...threats had gone as far back as 1969".¹⁵⁵ But by 1970 the M.B.A. threats became more frequent with specific reference made to the Union's actions during the Margins dispute,¹⁵⁶ the dogmen's dispute,¹⁵⁷ and eventually the Dillinghams strike.¹⁵⁸

In November the Union actually received a letter from the M.B.A. threatening deregistration.¹⁵⁹ This was the first time the matter was raised in written form. Geoff Anderson, writing in 1971 believed that:

149 Joe Owens, "Does Arbitration Have any Future", The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.41.

150 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.47.

151 This non-attendance is described by Bob Pringle (Interview: 8 March 1978) as the first time a union had walked out of the Commission since Clarrie O'Shea.

152 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

153 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

154 Pete Thomas, Taming the Concrete Jungle, p.18.

155 Interview: Bud Cook, 5 March 1978.

156 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 March 1970.

157 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

158 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

159 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

were it not for the fact that they [the B.L.F.] are registered under the Commonwealth Arbitration Act, the M.B.A. would have moved for their de-registration at least twelve months ago.¹⁶⁰

Another pattern that began to develop during 1970 was police harassment of builders labourers during industrial disputes. In November several members were arrested by the police during industrial action at a Leighton Industries job in Baulkham Hills.¹⁶¹ The Union responded by blackbanning all other Leighton's projects¹⁶² and argued that the only condition they would accept was the withdrawal of all charges against the workers involved.¹⁶³ Eventually, after an extensive campaign, the company backed down and the bans were lifted.¹⁶⁴

A more spectacular incident occurred in December when Tom Hogan was arrested while addressing workers on a building site and became the first person to be charged under the Summary Offences Act. This Act had been specially introduced by the Askin government, according to Munday and Owens "because of the 1970 strike".¹⁶⁵ Munday claimed that Hogan's arrest under the new Act was "hardly accidental". His crime was "waiting on a building site". He was there at the direction of strikers "to investigate a purely Union matter!"¹⁶⁶ Hogan refused to plead in Court and told the Magistrate that it was "purely an industrial matter".¹⁶⁷ The case was held over until the following year and became one of the focii for continued activity around opposition to the Summary Offences Act.

More attention from the police occurred when Commonwealth Police visited the Union's office after Jack Munday had been interviewed on the A.B.C. about comments he had made in an Australian Left Review article. The police had a list of seventeen questions with them. They refused Munday a copy and he refused to give them oral answers. But in interview he stated:

The main points of the intended police questions were on my ideas on militant forms of strike action - occupations, combating scabs, retaliation on scab-built buildings, and agitation for workers'

¹⁶⁰ Geoff Anderson, op.cit., p.40. Federal registration means that N.S.W. alone could not be deregistered.

¹⁶¹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 December 1970.

¹⁶² Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 December 1970.

¹⁶³ Minutes: General Meeting, 1 December 1970.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 24 December 1970. See chapter 5 for details.

¹⁶⁵ Interview: Joe Owens, 24 January 1978, also mentioned by Munday in Australian Left Review, No. 32, p.11.

¹⁶⁶ Jack Munday, "Interview with Jack Munday", Australian Left Review, No. 32, September 1971, p.11.

¹⁶⁷ Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 24 December 1970.

control and abolition of the penal powers.¹⁶⁸

It was not to be Munday's only such visit from the police.¹⁶⁹

One of the recurrent problems for the leadership during 1970 was the poor financial situation, mainly exacerbated by non-unionism. At the beginning of the year Munday had made a plea to the organisers to lift finance and membership to allow work on a wider front to go ahead.¹⁷⁰ Later, he reported that "last year's balance sheet revealed that stoppages had created problems re membership and he called for greater efforts around this question".¹⁷¹ Elaborating on the situation he quoted government statistics that pointed out that the number of potential members was 9,102 whereas the number of actual members was 4,200: "Since 1968 all areas have shown falls financially". He made comparisons between 1969 where the financial membership had been 3,600 and the unfinancial membership 2,100, and the first three months of 1971 where the figures were worse. The A.C.T. in particular showed 96 financial and 713 unfinancial members. Munday explained that: "...fragmentation makes collecting dues harder. Our two greatest means are organisers and delegates..." whose payments were down, whereas payments at the counter were rising. He called for a detailed Executive examination of the situation because "no explanation was given why the position financially is still deteriorating...Improvements have been made in last year and a half but a big problem still remains". It was decided that a weekly detailed report would be given and that the whole Executive should give much more thought to improving the financial aspects of organising.¹⁷²

After the successful Margins strike the situation did not markedly improve.¹⁷³ A special Branch meeting was arranged to discuss unfinancial membership and organisers were requested to attend.¹⁷⁴ In September Munday again expressed the opinion that "we were too tolerant" to unfinancial members and organised a show-card day on a number of City building sites.¹⁷⁵ This was a success and Munday paid special tribute

¹⁶⁸ Jack Munday, "Interview with Jack Munday", Australian Left Review, No. 32, September, 1971, p.8.

¹⁶⁹ See chapter 5.

¹⁷⁰ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

¹⁷¹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 March 1970.

¹⁷² Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

¹⁷³ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 7 July 1970.

¹⁷⁴ Minutes: General Meeting, 7 July 1970.

¹⁷⁵ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 September 1970.

to the work that Tom Hogan had done in preparation.¹⁷⁶ Another show-card day was organised, with Munday exhorting the Executive that it was "tragic that a militant Union such as ours should only have about half its potential membership". He believed that "the post-election period and the new attitudes shown should improve this position".¹⁷⁷ The second show-card day was also a success and Munday advised the Executive that they should continue.¹⁷⁸ By November Munday happily announced that "the position of the Branch was the strongest it had ever been and he looked forward to bigger and better things in the next three years".¹⁷⁹ By this he obviously meant both financially and industrially. The following week he was even more exuberant:

Bro. Secretary reported that payins were excellent and that in the last 6 weeks only once were payins less than \$2000. City and North Sydney now fully accept full unionised jobs. A new situation now exists in the B.L.F.¹⁸⁰

Concentration on dues collecting and techniques to counter non-unionism had eventually paid off. The delayed beneficial effects of the Margins strike were also beginning to be felt. No longer would financial problems dog the efforts of the N.S.W. leadership.

Organising problems, however, occurred continually. Complaints were made about organisers not ringing in to the office,¹⁸¹ and not filling out job reports¹⁸² and not contributing enough articles to the journal.¹⁸³ Continual discussions were held about the advisability of area surveys, authorisation forms and special organisers meetings.¹⁸⁴ Defaulting reps, although not common, were also a problem,¹⁸⁵ and frequent mention was made of the problems of organising the outer suburbs.¹⁸⁶ Jack Munday was particularly critical about organisation

¹⁷⁶ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 6 October 1970. Tom Hogan's name was often mentioned as the organiser with the most fanatical attitude to eliminating unfinancial unionism.

¹⁷⁷ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 October 1970.

¹⁷⁸ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

¹⁷⁹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 November 1970.

¹⁸⁰ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

¹⁸¹ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 25 August 1970 and 1 September 1970.

¹⁸² Minutes: Executive Meetings, 27 January 1970, 17 February 1970 and 31 March 1970.

¹⁸³ Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970 and Executive Meetings, 17 February 1970; 28 July 1970; 25 August 1970; 1 September 1970.

¹⁸⁴ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 June 1970.

¹⁸⁵ Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970 and Executive Meeting, 15 September 1970.

¹⁸⁶ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 24 March 1970; 10 November 1970; 17 November 1970 and Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

defects¹⁸⁷ but he gave credit where it was due, explaining that he felt "that all organisers have a go but there is a need to be more organised so that all jobs are visited".¹⁸⁸

The dedication of the Executive and organisers was obvious. Special all day Executive meetings, extra Branch meetings and weekend meetings were arranged frequently.¹⁸⁹ The office staff was loyal and hardworking. The leadership's appreciation of their efforts during the Margins strike was recorded in glowing terms:

We have saved until last a very special thanks to the girls of our office staff. Their self-sacrificing and hard work during the strike in no small way helped us to victory.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾

The amount of administrative work tripled whilst the strike was in progress and it is no small thanks to the office staff that some semblance of order was kept throughout that trying period.

Starting early and finishing late, their efforts went almost unnoticed to all but a few...Thank you on behalf of all B.Ls.¹⁹¹

Ironically however it was the 1970 strike that began to change the "easy going atmosphere" among the office and organising staff. Paula Rix, one of the "girls" referred to above believes:

...the thing that really changed the office-officials relationship was the 1970 strike because the membership expanded and the place was transformed...absolutely jumping...several crises a day.

I'm not saying they were bad bastards they were just things that happened when it got bigger.¹⁹²

The relationship of the officials with each other was also good. Of the organisers, only Austin and Lynch had failed to capture the spirit of the radically different organisation that the Union was rapidly becoming. Munday acknowledged in February that the "position with organisers was good but he felt there were some differences between he and Bro. Lynch".¹⁹³ By November Austin had retired¹⁹⁴ and Lynch had been defeated as organiser in the Triennial election.¹⁹⁵

187 He was especially scathing at two meetings in August and September. Minutes: Executive Meetings, 25 August 1970 and 1 September 1970.

188 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

189 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970 and Executive Meetings, 7 April 1970 and 4 August 1970.

190 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.5.

191 Ibid., p.9. The staff were also commended "for their effort" at the June Branch Meeting, Minutes: General Meeting, 9 June 1970 and an Executive meeting in November "for a really magnificent effort in the recent period" [of heavy payins]. Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

192 Interview: Paula Rix, 25 January 1978. For further discussion on this point see chapter 9.

193 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

194 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

195 Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

The central core of full time elected officials¹⁹⁶ was supplemented from time to time by temporary organisers brought on to service specific areas such as Newcastle and Wollongong or to organise around particular events. Bob Pringle,¹⁹⁷ Joe Owens,¹⁹⁸ Brian Hogan, Tom Hogan, Don Forskitt¹⁹⁹ and Bud Cook were all appointed as temporary organisers during this period. There was serious discussion²⁰⁰ about the advantages and disadvantages of appointing temporary organisers through endorsement at Branch general meetings and the policy was eventually adopted at the August Branch meeting.²⁰¹ Some organisers such as Joe Owens and Tom Hogan went back into industry for long periods,²⁰² between terms as organisers. In March, Ron Donoghue from the P.W.D. was elected unopposed as Vice President²⁰³ which enabled the important Public Works sector of the industry to be represented on the Executive.²⁰⁴ The Rank and File Preselection for the triennial elections was held on 16 August²⁰⁵ and was well attended. Mick Curtin described it as a "good broad meeting".²⁰⁶ Nobody opposed Munday at the pre-selection²⁰⁷ but McHugh from Canberra stood against him at the Election. McHugh had become increasingly critical of the C.P.A.,²⁰⁸ but Munday believed that McHugh's opposition was personal not ideological. He described McHugh as "ex-C.P.A., ex-A.L.P., not S.P.A., mainly McHugh".²⁰⁹

The Election process was carried out without a hitch. Keith Jessop was unopposed as returning officer and Rix and Mason as scrutineers.²¹⁰ Munday sounded surprised and perhaps a little pained when he discovered that there would have to be an election "as there were further nominations for various positions".²¹¹ Most of the Rank and File pre-selected candidates were unopposed except that McHugh stood

196 Munday, Prendergast, McGill, Austin, Lynch.

197 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

198 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 November 1970.

199 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.7.

200 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970, 31 March 1970 and 16 June 1970.

201 Minutes: General Meeting, 4 August 1970.

202 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.19.

203 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

204 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.19.

205 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 July 1970.

206 Interview: Mick Curtin, 29 February 1976.

207 See chapter 5.

208 Interview: Jack Munday, 30 March 1978.

209 Ibid.

210 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 July 1970.

211 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 September 1970.

as Federal Council delegate (as well as Secretary) and Lynch stood for one of the organiser's positions. The fact that the expensive and time-consuming electoral process was carried out because of two men who were soundly defeated probably prompted Munday to remark that "it was unfortunate the election occurred"²¹² and later referred to it as "futile".²¹³

The result as declared at the October Branch Meeting was:-²¹⁴

President	- R. Pringle (unopposed)
Vice-President	- R. Donoghue (unopposed)
Trustees	- B. Cook, R. Prendergast (unopposed)
Guardian	- A. Luthy (unopposed)
Executive	- B. Hogan, T. Hogan, J. Owens, D. Crotty (unopposed)
Secretary	- J. Munday - 684
	D. McHugh - 148
	Informal - 35

Bro. J. Munday declared elected.

Organisers' positions (3) -

B. McGill	- 555
M. Lynch	- 366
R. Prendergast	- 706
B. Hogan	- 615
Informal	- 61

Bros McGill, Prendergast and B. Hogan declared elected.

Delegates to Federal Council (3) -

M. Lynch	- 683
J. Munday	- 674
R. Pringle	- 649
D. McHugh	- 319
Informal	- 54

Bros Lynch, Munday and Pringle declared elected.

The fact that only 867 members voted out of approximately 9,000²¹⁵ who were eligible was probably because most positions were uncontested and the result appeared to be a foregone conclusion. The Secretary's position where McHugh was defeated by a margin of over four to one is a resounding victory and a very strong indication of membership support for Munday. If more had voted the margin for Munday would probably have been even greater as McHugh had probably mobilised the maximum number of his potential supporters.

²¹² Minutes: Executive Meeting, 6 October 1970.

²¹³ Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970. This interpretation is reinforced by Munday's remark "had Bro. Lynch not supported McHugh in getting nominations our union would have been \$3000 better off". Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 September 1970.

²¹⁴ Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

²¹⁵ Estimation made by Keith Jessop the returning officer; Keith Jessop: Interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1976.

It had been quite obvious for some time that McHugh was finding himself more and more out of tune with the Sydney leadership. The A.C.T. had remained a problem for the N.S.W. Executive throughout the sixties and was obviously not going to change in the seventies. McHugh had been the organiser in Canberra for over four years but resigned early in 1970, officially "to return to work in the industry"²¹⁶ but there was obviously more to it than that. Austin objected to the idea of McHugh attending an Executive meeting arguing that if McHugh resigned "by correspondence" he should be answered the same way.²¹⁷ As organisers were welcome to observe Executive meetings by this stage there was obviously an objection to McHugh per se. However, a motion was passed inviting him to attend an Executive meeting. There was intense debate the following week when Pringle moved a recision motion which was lost.²¹⁸ McHugh did not turn up to the Executive meeting and Munday "made some comments"²¹⁹ as the cryptic Minutes writer observed. Munday reported to the February General Meeting that "consultations between the Executive and Bro. McHugh had broken down and his resignation was reluctantly accepted by the Executive". McGill had earlier been sent to organise in Canberra in preparation for a proposed Award stoppage.²²⁰ McGill reported that the workers were "not over-enthusiastic" so it was arranged that both Munday and Pringle should attend the stoppage with Pringle chairing the meeting.²²¹

Munday had made several trips to Canberra and a Town Committee was elected.²²² The stoppage was reported to be "a success and attendance was not bad with 40 members attending and further action is following on". He reported that there were 151 financial members in the A.C.T. and the number of delegates had been increased from six to fourteen. He said that the task was to increase membership and he "had not found any present official to go to Canberra".²²³ He attended another Town Committee meeting in March and the Committee recommended "a member named R. Brennan to fill the vacancy".²²⁴

When the National Stoppage over margins was organised in April it was agreed by the Executive that Canberra should take part. All agreed that national unity was essential and Brian Hogan spoke of the

²¹⁶ The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.3.

²¹⁷ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 January 1970.

²¹⁸ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 January 1970.

²¹⁹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 January 1970.

²²⁰ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 January 1970.

²²¹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970.

²²² Minutes: Executive Meeting, 12 February 1970.

²²³ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

²²⁴ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 March 1970.

dangers involved if Canberra took separate action. Brennan advised that policing of jobs would be necessary in Canberra.²²⁵ Bud Cook travelled to the A.C.T. for the stoppage but the results were disappointing. The Town Committee, under the influence of McHugh, decided to elect their own negotiating committee and by-pass N.S.W. The M.B.A. in Canberra had been active in organising against the strike by advertising in newspapers and pay packets. The members accepted a proposition from the M.B.A. to get over-award payments but no margin increase until February. Cook reported that "McHugh had told untruths about the Master Builders Association offer". Cook also believed that McHugh had been preparing the ground for a separate Branch to be formed in Canberra.²²⁶ In defence of their unilateral action over the stoppage A.C.T. members claimed that as N.S.W. had made application to the Court for margins, N.S.W. had neglected the A.C.T. When Cook asked them who would sign the agreement on behalf of the A.C.T. "no answer was forthcoming". Munday "expressed strong views on the part played by Bro. McHugh in Canberra...the Executive cannot stand idly by any longer...[even] the Federal Secretary has expressed amazement". He proposed that Gallagher and he should visit Canberra and invite all builders labourers to discuss a Branch in the A.C.T. Amongst general agreement from the other Executive members such a motion was carried.²²⁷ The coming of the Margins strike prevented this from being done however.

Feeling about McHugh's actions were obviously so strong that Cook asked the Executive whether they supported McHugh for the position of A.C.T. Labor Council Secretary. Munday believed that Canberra should select and elect Labor Council officers and moved that the Executive "call upon Bro. Brennan to encourage the left and progressive forces to meet and select a candidate for the position..."²²⁸ Munday visited Canberra again after the Margins strike and had "fruitful" meetings.²²⁹ At the June Branch meeting Brian Hogan was elected as organiser in the Canberra area because Brennan had resigned. The journal announced that "Brian has impressed builders labourers and Union officials alike in Canberra, where he is working".²³⁰ Reporting on a Canberra stoppage in support of the nurses' strike Munday commented, "...it stood out that

225 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

226 Consequently proved to be a correct suspicion. See chapter 5.

227 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970.

228 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 5 May 1970.

229 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 25 June 1970.

230 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.7.

Bro. Hogan had done a good job in the A.C.T."²³¹ Under Hogan's further influence as organiser, the A.C.T. scene changed dramatically and by September Munday was able to report that 170 builders labourers met in Canberra at a four hour stoppage and that they now realised "the errors of supporting McHugh in not struggling around margins".²³²

However in November Canberra had resorted to its usual position as trouble spot for the Executive. Munday reported that a crisis had developed since Brian Hogan's departure. Peter Hawke, a member of the Town Committee had been temporarily appointed as organiser, a move which Hogan had supported.²³³ But the problem remained. It was difficult to keep permanent organisers based in Canberra. The membership there was not politicized to the same extent as in Sydney. Any move in Canberra had to take account of McHugh who, although pushing for separate branch status in the A.C.T., was not competent enough to enable such a branch to be viable.

The other country areas were less troublesome although the overall problems of whether they could support a regional organiser, and of finding suitable permanent organisers were still obvious.

The first activity for the year in Newcastle and Wollongong were stoppages of Public Works Department and Maritime Services Board employees.²³⁴ Austin was sent to Newcastle and Lynch to Wollongong to organise.²³⁵ Out of these stoppages arose discussion about the need for a full time organiser in Newcastle "due to the amount of [building] work".²³⁶ McGill was sent to Newcastle to survey the area and its needs.²³⁷ Also discussions were held with members in both Newcastle and Wollongong about the practicability of establishing Town Committees.²³⁸

For the Margins stoppage in April, McGill and Tom Hogan were sent to Newcastle while Brian Hogan was to go to Wollongong and "if necessary Bro. D. Forskitt be 'paid off'...to do stoppage with him".²³⁹

Both regional centres reported that their strike meetings were predominantly attended by workers from the P.W.D. probably because of

231 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 14 July 1970.

232 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 September 1970.

233 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

234 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

235 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

236 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 3 March 1970.

237 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

238 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.3.

239 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 20 April 1970. Originally Donoghue, who was not a full time official was to be sent to Wollongong but Munday eventually revised this decision.

the previous strike activity amongst P.W.D. employees in these areas. The Wollongong meeting was considered successful although "there was some difficulty encountered at the B.H.P."

The Newcastle stoppage, although it voted to support the Vietnam Moratorium, decided not to stop work the following week on the same day as the rest of N.S.W. Although this decision was criticised by Pringle and others, Munday said he thought it would be folly to attempt to force the Newcastle workers to stop work on the Monday contrary to the decision that had already been made in Newcastle.²⁴⁰

When the Margins strike actually arrived support in both areas was good, and also in Goulburn.²⁴¹ Wollongong voted overwhelmingly in support although Forskitt had some trouble stopping jobs.²⁴² Vigilante action was keen in Newcastle.²⁴³

However during the post-strike post-mortem discussion, Munday reported that "one weakness was in country areas, Newcastle and Wollongong particularly [required] much action".²⁴⁴ Don Forskitt who had been acting as temporary organiser in Wollongong during the strike was to stay on because "the locals requested more consistent service". The journal reported that "already Don has made an impact and has a higher degree of organisation and financial unionism than ever existed before". Similarly, Tom Hogan was appointed to Newcastle; "because of his splendid leadership in the strike, a petition was taken up by the Newcastle workers requesting Tom be the full time organiser in that area". Brian Hogan, as well as having the responsibility for Canberra was to visit Goulburn, Albury, Wagga and other South West centres.²⁴⁵

Forskitt's survey of the Wollongong area reported about 300 labourers.²⁴⁶ This was more than had been estimated and organisation was reported to be good, particularly in the P.W.D.²⁴⁷ The Branch gave little trouble for the rest of the year, having a four hour stoppage in support of the Canberra nurses' strike²⁴⁸ and holding an "excellent" meeting in September.²⁴⁹

240 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 April 1970.

241 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 5 and 12 May 1970.

242 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 5 and 12 May 1970.

243 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, pp.27 and 48. Also Interview: Tony O'Beirne, 2 March 1978.

244 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 9 June 1970.

245 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.7.

246 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 25 June 1970.

247 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 16 June 1970.

248 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 June 1970.

249 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 September 1970.

Newcastle on the other hand, received some of the backlash from the Union's continually worsening position with the B.W.I.U. In July the B.W.I.U. wrote to the Union informing them that the use of the B.W.I.U. room in Newcastle would no longer be available "because of overcrowding".²⁵⁰ The journal, under the headline "No Room at the Top", explained that although the N.S.W. Branch of the B.L.F. were the strongest advocates of amalgamation of building unions, "the B.W.I.U., has discovered...the B.W.I.U. office in Newcastle is 'too small' to accommodate our newly elected organiser in that area, Tom Hogan..." The journal went on to recall that "the co-operation of the B.W.I.U. in the past has been of a high order and it is somewhat of a surprise that now...the office is 'too small'". The Union organised itself an office next to the Newcastle Labor Council in Trades Hall and arranged that messages could be left there.²⁵¹

Apart from minor occurrences in other areas such as a show-card day on the Central Coast,²⁵² a dispute over the controversial fourth rate at Wagga²⁵³ and the election of delegates to Lismore Labor Council²⁵⁴ there was little recorded action in other country areas.

For the state wide stoppage in December Bob Pringle was sent to Wollongong and Joe Owens to Newcastle. This underlined the importance that the Executive attributed to these areas. Brian Hogan thought the move was "excellent".²⁵⁵

The B.L.F.'s relationship with other unions outside the B.T.G. remained correct and even friendly. Although critical of many aspects of Labor Council activity, the leadership continually emphasised the importance of the Union's involvement,²⁵⁶ with Munday urging Executive members to attend as delegates.²⁵⁷ Pringle even stood as left-wing candidate for Trustee in the annual Labor Council elections.²⁵⁸

Like most busy Unions they found it difficult to keep up a regular attendance of delegates to Labor Council but Executive members did volunteer to attend²⁵⁹ and when delegates for 1971 were being

250 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 21 July 1970.

251 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.9.

252 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 February 1970.

253 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

254 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 December 1970.

255 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 8 December 1970.

256 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 January 1970.

257 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 17 February 1970.

258 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 January 1970.

259 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

elected, the Executive recommended Munday, Owens and Pringle as delegates.²⁶⁰ Mick Curtin, a regular and enthusiastic attendee,²⁶¹ and Vince Ashton were endorsed as the other two delegates.²⁶²

The Union referred matters to Labor Council which it felt were important or which needed combined union action. These issues included education,²⁶³ free hospitalisation of pensioners,²⁶⁴ pollution from a chemical factory at Greystanes,²⁶⁵ police intervention on building sites,²⁶⁶ fund raising for a kidney machine project,²⁶⁷ victimisation of a student for anti-Vietnam activity²⁶⁸ and unsafe scaffolding at the Boy Scouts Jamboree.²⁶⁹ They also resolved to keep up pressure on Labor Council "and the Right Wing" about anti-Vietnam activity and the need to bypass arbitration.²⁷⁰

The Union co-operated in other mainstream union activities. It paid its share of the National Wage Case,²⁷¹ sent delegates to the Trade Union Research Center Conference,²⁷² and attended farewells for other union officials.²⁷³ The leadership continually tried to involve other unions in anti-Vietnam activity²⁷⁴ and eventually was rewarded by the Labor Council passing a B.L.F. resolution on support for the September Moratorium.²⁷⁵ The Union was actively involved in, or supportive of, regional labor councils, sending a representative to Trade Union Week in Orange,²⁷⁶ attending the Central Coast Trades and Labor Council,²⁷⁷ corresponding with Richmond Labor Council²⁷⁸ and electing delegates to Lismore and Newcastle Labor Councils.²⁷⁹

The B.L.F. also supported other unions engaged in struggles such as the Victorian Tramways Union,²⁸⁰ the Waterside Workers,²⁸¹ the

260 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

261 Interview: Mick Curtin, 29 February 1976.

262 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

263 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 January 1970.

264 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 January 1970.

265 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

266 Ibid.

267 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 10 and 17 November 1970.

268 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

269 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 December 1970.

270 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 March 1970.

271 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 7 April 1970.

272 Minutes: General Meeting, 4 August 1970.

273 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 July 1970.

274 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 April 1970.

275 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 September 1970.

276 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 January 1970.

277 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 January 1970.

278 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 24 March and 29 June 1970.

279 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 1 December 1970.

280 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 13 January 1970.

281 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

Canberra nurses,²⁸² the Painters and Dockers²⁸³ and the Miscellaneous Workers Union.²⁸⁴ The range of support included letters of encouragement, meetings on job sites, inviting representatives to speak at Executive meetings, and even strike action.²⁸⁵

The B.L.F. received support during their Margins strike from most of the traditionally "left" unions as well as the T.W.U., the A.W.U. and other unions in the building industry.²⁸⁶ However, despite an obviously friendly relationship with a significant number of unions and a ready participation in Labor Council activities, the Union was not uncritical of certain aspects of the established trade union movement. Dick Prendergast wrote a scathing article in the journal about Labor Council's refusal to allow scrutineers to be elected for the annual election. He added:

The N.S.W. Labor Council use the rules on many occasions in a tyrannical way as instanced at the last big Combined Delegates meeting...where they brought down a resolution almost every speaker opposed...but the Labor Council President would not allow any amendments to be moved...We as a Union encourage workers to attend Arbitration Courts to see so called democracy in action. We also urge them to attend N.S.W. Labor Council any Thursday night.²⁸⁷

The Union was also critical of the poor way the Labor Council organised a Tax and Prices Rally.²⁸⁸ Most importantly though, it felt the Council was not fully supportive of the Margins strike. Although this attitude was considered to be partly due to the influence of the tradesmen's unions²⁸⁹ Joe Owens cast broader aspersions. Under the heading "What is going On?" he wrote in the Builders Labourer:

Leafing through a sporting club journal recently, we were astonished to find that Mr. Ralph Marsh, M.L.C. who is secretary of the N.S.W. Labor Council, is also President of the Canterbury-Bankstown Master Builders' Bowling Club.

We also learnt that some of the leaders of the N.S.W. Labor Council disapproved of the Builders Labourers' strike.

It makes you wonder, doesn't it.²⁹⁰

The journal was often used for pointed articles such as these. As in the sixties it remained chatty, informative and readable. It still contained social news, "kids" birthdays, lots of photographs and

282 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 25 and 29 June and 7 July 1970.

283 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 14 July 1970.

284 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 25 June 1970.

285 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 14 July 1970.

286 See chapter 3.

287 The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.47.

288 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 4 August 1970.

289 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 20 May 1970.

290 The Builders' Labourer, July 1970, p.27.

sporting news and comment, normally by Jack Munday.²⁹¹ However, the regular publication began to falter. Having begun the year well with the "great accomplishment" of an issue at the printers in February,²⁹² only two issues, March and July, appeared although another was "at the publishers" in November.²⁹³ An April edition was intended²⁹⁴ but never transpired, presumably because of hectic strike activities. The July issue became a special post-strike pictorial edition intended to depict highlights of the strike.²⁹⁵ Regular calls were made for organisers and Executive members to contribute material.²⁹⁶ Munday was particularly scathing about the reluctance of officials to put pen to paper. This drying up of regular communication with the members was to become particularly significant in later years.

In the area of Federal-State relations 1970 began with the N.S.W. Branch complaining yet again²⁹⁷ about Gallagher's failure to carry out Federal Conference decisions.

On the matter of discussions with the Public Service Board Munday pointed out that a meeting had been arranged "only because of the efforts of the N.S.W. Branch". He added that "because of the Federal Secretary's inactivity there was still a problem re the Commonwealth Department of Works". Tom Hogan commented on Gallagher's "inactivity and neglect" over the Frankipile dispute and Lynch suggested that Gallagher be approached "to carry out the decision of the last Federal Conference re Frankipile". Luthy and Prendergast added to these remarks with Prendergast referring to the Federal Secretary's "incompetence" on a number of matters and once again called for him to carry out the decisions of Federal Conference. Munday also explained that "because of the Federal Secretary's inactivity there was still a problem re the Commonwealth Department of Works".²⁹⁸ At the next meeting the Executive was in no better humour. Austin remarked that "the Federal Secretary should be more prompt in filing the various applications". Luthy "was also critical of the Federal Secretary" and suggested the

291 For instance an article on class and sport, The Builders' Labourer, March 1970, p.27.

292 Minutes: General Meeting, 3 February 1970.

293 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 10 November 1970.

294 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 11 March 1970.

295 Minutes: General Meeting, 9 June 1970.

296 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 7, 16, 23 April, 9 June and 27 October 1970.

297 See Appendix C.

298 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 January 1970.

Branch send "a strong letter of protest" to him. Prendergast again "strongly criticized the Federal Secretary for his inactivity on a number of matters".²⁹⁹

Perhaps to allay criticism both Gallagher and Federal President Jim Delaney attended a N.S.W. Executive meeting in March.³⁰⁰ This was right in the middle of two important disputes, Frankipile and the National Margins campaign.

The Frankipile dispute won increases for Frankipile workers in all states although the brunt of the action was borne by N.S.W. Because of this, Munday called for the other states to provide financial support³⁰¹ and \$1000 was eventually forthcoming.³⁰² Munday was fulsome to his thanks to the Federation for this help.³⁰³

As for the Margins campaign, it became very obvious that N.S.W. felt it had set the pace as regards stoppages and other pressure tactics and that the Federal body was too keen to resort to talks with the employers without the necessary softening up process at the job level.³⁰⁴ In return Gallagher was not prepared to single out N.S.W. for special mention³⁰⁵ but did manage to congratulate them when he attended an Executive meeting in March.³⁰⁶

During the Margins strike these differences became exacerbated. The N.S.W. Branch felt that they had carried the Margins struggle with little assistance from other states.³⁰⁷ Even Gallagher admitted to "an un-evenness in the Federation's campaign" and said that "there was not enough being done by the other branches".³⁰⁸

Munday was critical of the F.M.C.'s handling of the strike.³⁰⁹ Gallagher seemed unperturbed by such criticism and at the conclusion of the June F.M.C. meeting congratulated all members without distinction as to state "for their sterling, militant action in this historic

299 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970. The cryptic quality of the remarks is due to the somewhat abbreviated nature of the minute taking rather than to obscurity (or even briefness) on the part of the complainants.

300 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 March 1970.

301 Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 3 February 1970.

302 Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 5 March 1970, p.7.

303 The Builders Labourer, March 1970, p.5.

304 Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 5 March 1970, p.7.

305 Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 5 March 1970, p.2.

306 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 March 1970.

307 Minutes: General Meeting, 12 May 1970 and Executive Meeting, 19 August 1970. See chapter 3 for details.

308 Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 1 June 1970, p.2.

309 Ibid., p.3.

national wages campaign, and elevates the Australian Builders' Labourers' Federation to a new height as a united, progressive Union..."³¹⁰

Perhaps, because of preoccupation with the Margins campaign there was little discussion between the state and federal bodies about that bugbear of previous years, amalgamation. Both state and federal bodies co-operated with the B.W.I.U. for a National Building Workers stoppage over long service leave.³¹¹ However, Gallagher remained suspicious of the B.W.I.U. particularly with regard to demarcation matters.³¹²

The Union's change of name³¹³ with its connotation of broadened scope was eventually concluded in June. By this stage, the N.S.W. delegation no longer resisted the inevitable and Munday even seconded the name change motion at the F.M.C.³¹⁴

The N.S.W. Branch supported the actions of Les Robinson, the South Australian Secretary, who was taken to court on charges arising out of a demarcation dispute with the plasterers' union in that state.³¹⁵ N.S.W. was again critical of the Federations' tactics³¹⁶ but rallied in support,³¹⁷ even to the extent of taking legal advice as to what they could do to prevent their funds being seized.³¹⁸ Tribune wrote a supportive article about the case, obviously supplied with information by the N.S.W. Branch.³¹⁹ However most of the Executive were unhappy about leaflets produced by the Federation on the matter,³²⁰ calling them "distorted"³²¹ and "libellous".³²²

In other matters, the two bodies co-operated reasonably well. Gallagher and Munday jointly visited the troubled Canberra area,³²³ and Munday represented the Federal Secretary at Award discussions in Brisbane.³²⁴ Munday referred to this as "a move in the right direction".³²⁵

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹¹ Minutes: Special Executive Meeting, 23 April 1970.

³¹² Correspondence: N. Gallagher to J. Munday, 20 August 1970.

³¹³ See Appendix C.

³¹⁴ Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 1 June 1970, p. 8.

³¹⁵ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 31 March 1970 and 7 April 1970.

³¹⁶ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 31 March 1970.

³¹⁷ Minutes: Federal Management Committee, 1 June 1970, pp. 5-6.

³¹⁸ Minutes: Executive Meetings, 31 March and 7 April 1970.

³¹⁹ Tribune, 9 September 1970, p. 12.

³²⁰ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 6 October 1970.

³²¹ Minutes: General Meeting, 6 October 1970.

³²² Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 July 1970.

³²³ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 5 May 1970.

³²⁴ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 27 October 1970.

³²⁵ Minutes: General Meeting, 3 November 1970.

When the Victorian Secretary, Paddy Malone, retired the N.S.W. Branch donated \$100 to support his Testimonial.³²⁶ When he died a few months later, Munday flew to Melbourne for the funeral.³²⁷

F.M.C. meetings revealed less polarisation than previously, with Gallagher and Munday moving and seconding a number of motions.³²⁸ In particular Munday took an extremely conciliatory stance over a request by the Tasmanian branch for repayment of its \$500 "loan" to the South Australian branch,³²⁹ a matter which had caused the N.S.W. Branch to encounter much hostility when they took a similar attitude in earlier years.

At the same F.M.C. meeting Munday moved, and Gallagher seconded, a motion supporting the Victorian Moratorium.³³⁰ This arose from the N.S.W. Branch's belief that a national directive would be more effective.³³¹ Munday also believed that the Federal body should be called upon "to involve ourselves in support of the Trade Unions of New Guinea and assist in their development".³³²

However, although at a political level there was no great divisive issue, the same old federal-state tensions remained. There was some discussion about whether N.S.W. was to be allowed the extra delegate to Federal Conference that their membership warranted.³³³ Obviously, the fact that N.S.W. was overtaking Victoria as the largest branch of the Federation was not particularly palatable to Gallagher. A similar lack of grace was evident when Gallagher refused a request to waive the balance of sustentation fees owing by the N.S.W. Branch³³⁴ on the grounds that the Margins strike which had won gains nationally, had badly depleted the Branch's finances.

However, Munday was elected treasurer at Federal Conference³³⁵ and reported that the Conference was "excellent",³³⁶ certainly the most enthusiastic response for many years.

The N.S.W. Branch supported Gallagher when he was arrested for

326 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 September 1970.

327 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 October 1970.

328 Minutes; Federal Management Committee Meetings, 5 March and 1 June 1970.

329 Minutes: Federal Management Committee Meeting, 5 March 1970, p.9.

330 Ibid.

331 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 22 September 1970.

332 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 29 June 1970.

333 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 28 July 1970.

334 Minutes: Executive Meetings, 25 June and 14 July 1970.

335 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 24 November 1970.

336 Minutes: Executive Meeting, 8 December 1970.

assault during a demonstration by the Carlton Association in defence of parkland in the area. In giving details of the gaoling of the Federal Secretary Munday said that "our main task now was to call for a stoppage on the 16th [December]. The main points should be for gaoled unionists and the \$4 flow on". It was also proposed that Munday fly to Melbourne to attend Gallagher's Court case on 17 December. Organisers were sent to Canberra, Wollongong and Newcastle to explain the issues and a leaflet was planned to explain the issues to other unionists and enlist their support.³³⁷ Joe Owens, sent to Wollongong, remembers that "it was a hell of a fight to get them [the members] out... the question of the environment just wasn't a burning issue in Wollongong".³³⁸ Bob Pringle believes that builders labourers are basically sceptical of anyone who goes to gaol when they could avoid it by paying a fine. He said "...they thought he was grandstanding...they said he was a mug for letting himself be gaoled".³³⁹ Munday maintains that the workers were not consulted before the Carlton bans were placed, nor were they carried by the workers.³⁴⁰ Although no one on the Executive argued that Gallagher should not be supported there was a fair amount of scepticism about N.S.W. support for Gallagher when the Federation's support for N.S.W. members under threat of imprisonment such as Tom Hogan and the Leighton workers was virtually non-existent. Munday simply stated at the end of his supporting speech about Gallagher that, "the Leighton dispute continues but no stoppages have occurred in other states". Brian Hogan went further. After endorsing Munday's suggestions about support action for Gallagher he added that "he doubted the sincerity of some Federal officers in calling for stoppages in view of Leightons". Owens argued that the Gallagher stoppage was "well worth fighting for" but he "expressed disappointment with other States for their lack of support". Even Luthy said that he agreed with the stoppage "but thought it should be national".³⁴¹

The general consensus appears to have been that N.S.W. was busy defending Gallagher who wanted to go to gaol whereas the Federal body was not extending itself sufficiently in support of N.S.W. members, such as Tom Hogan and the Leighton workers, who were facing gaol

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Interview: Joe Owens, 4 April 1978.

³³⁹ Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.

³⁴⁰ Interview: Jack Munday, 3 April 1978.

³⁴¹ Minutes: Executive Meeting, 15 December 1970.

sentences under the repugnant Summary Offences Act, which attacked activity such as the freedom to organise.

This tension was to carry over into the following year.