

**Workers' Control: Aspects of Australian Industrial
Relations in the 1970s**

Sam Oldham

Thesis Submitted in Completion of Master of Arts by Research

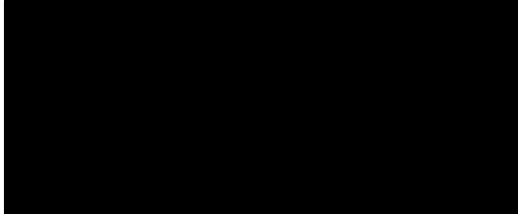
Faculty of Arts

Monash University

5 November 2015

Declaration

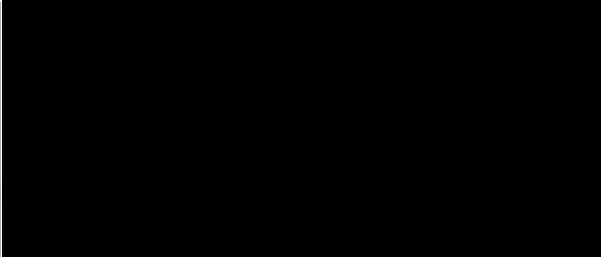
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



Copyright notice

© Sam Oldham (2015). Except as provided in the Copyright Act 1968, this thesis may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author.

I certify that I have made all reasonable efforts to secure copyright permissions for third-party content included in this thesis and have not knowingly added copyright content to my work without the owner's permission.



Abstract

From the late 1960s, Australian trade unions expanded their prerogatives to encroach upon the traditional concerns of employers and governments, in a tendency described as 'workers' control'. This thesis aims to reconstruct the history of workers' control as it existed in the Australian metal trades, from the late 1960s, when it emerged amid social and labour unrest generally, to the late 1970s, when it was submerged beneath the weight of recession, mass unemployment, and a renewed employer offensive. It is observed that metal workers asserted growing levels of control over 'hiring and firing', industrial health and safety, the labour process, and social and political affairs beyond their individual enterprises. In isolated cases, metal workers took full control over their enterprises in fleeting moments of self-management. It is argued that workers' control, in its emphasis on shop committees and direct action at the enterprise, aligns with older traditions of syndicalism and radical unionism.

Workers' control is largely neglected in existing labour historiography. Historians who have given it attention have tended to dismiss it as 'faddish', intrinsically limited, and ultimately unviable as a strategy for economic and social transformation. In reconstructing the history, this thesis aims to redeem workers' control by suggesting that it did not fail as a result of inherent shortcomings, but due to a concerted attack on shop committees and trade unions by the organised employing class, among other forces imposed upon it. Workers' control therefore maintains a core of viability for contemporary and future labour organising.

Abbreviations

ACTU – Australian Council of Trade Unions

AEU – Amalgamated Engineering Union

AIM – Australian Institute of Management

ALP – Australian Labor Party

AMWU – Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union

AMWSU – Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union

ASE – Australasian Society of Engineers

BBS – Boilermakers and Blacksmiths' Society

CPA – Communist Party of Australia

ECCUDO – Electricity Commission Combined Union Delegates' Organisation

ETU – Electrical Trades Union

FEDFA – Federated Engine Drivers and Firemens Association

FIA – Federated Ironworkers' Association

IRB – Industrial Relations Bureau

MTIA – Metal Trades Industry Association

NSWBLF – New South Wales Builders Laborers' Federation

TLC – Trades & Labor Council

SEC – State Electricity Commission

SMWU – Sheet Metal Workers' Union

VBEF – Vehicle Builders Employee Federation

WHAG – Worker Health Action Group

WHC – Worker Health Centre

VTHC – Victorian Trades Hall Council

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aims and Overview of the Thesis	1
1.2 Notes on Methodology and Source Material	8
1.3 Historiography and Literature Review	12

Chapter 2: The Emergence of Workers' Control

2.1 Industrial Relations Context	20
2.2 Mass Politicisation and Social Radicalisation	27
2.3 Workers' Control as Ideology	32

Chapter 3: Control over Conditions of Employment

3.1 Control over Hiring: the Closed Shop	40
3.2 Refusing the Sack: 'Control over Firing'	45
3.3 Control over Health and Safety	51

Chapter 4: Control over Work

4.1 Job Control and the Labour Process	58
4.2 Autonomy and Self-Management	69

Chapter 5: Social and Political Prerogatives

5.1 Social and Political Prerogatives at the Workplace	77
5.2 Workers' Control beyond the Workplace	85

Chapter 6: Crisis and Decline

6.1 Economic Crisis and the Employer Offensive	96
6.2 The Role of the State	101
6.3 Worker Co-option: Control versus Participation	108

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Workers' Control in Summary	117
7.2 Evaluating Workers' Control: Considerations for a Usable Past	122

Bibliography	127
---------------------	-----

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of my supervisors Professor Erik Eklund and Dr. Steven Wright. Their guidance and advice has been indispensable and their patience tireless.

I owe a particular gratitude to Katie Wood, who advised on sources and assisted me at the University of Melbourne Archives. I am also indebted to librarians at Monash University, Federation University, the State Library of Victoria, the State Library of New South Wales and the University of Wollongong.

I am profoundly and sincerely grateful to the trade union activists who gave interviews or who made time to talk to me about the project. Several interviews were not used in the final version of the thesis, while others who I spoke to simply offered direction and advice; all served to guide me in the process of reconstructing the history. It is an honour to thank Frank Cherry, Ken Purdham, Malcolm MacDonald, Andrew Dettmer, Gerome Small, George Koletsis, Graeme Watson, Ron Carli, Nando Lelli, Pat Johnstone, John Brunskill, Danny Gardiner, Tony Robins, and John Cleary.

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and family, particularly my grandmother, Gloria, without whose support it would not have been possible.

Responsibility for any errors remains my own.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aims and Overview of the Thesis

This thesis aims to reconstruct a tendency described as ‘workers’ control’ as it existed in the Australian metal trades from the late 1960s through to the late 1970s. Ideas of workers’ control over production were resurgent on a global scale during this period. Mass strikes and factory occupations occurred throughout France and Czechoslovakia in 1968, Italy in 1969, and in subsequent years across Turkey, Hungary, Portugal, Chile, Iran and elsewhere.¹ In Britain, an Institute for Workers’ Control (IWC) was established in 1968 to analyse ‘the growth of an explicit trade-union demand for workers’ control over the major decisions involved in modern industry.’² Ordinary workers were the agents of these upsurges, often acting spontaneously and with autonomy from trade union leaderships and political parties. Australia was not immune to these trends. Unprecedented numbers of strikes occurred from the late 1960s, including ‘numerous stoppages of a political or ideological rather than a purely economic or industrial motivation.’³ New forms of worker activity appeared. In a global precedent, members of the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation (NSWBLF) imposed ‘green bans’ on environmentally and socially destructive development projects throughout Sydney and Melbourne. These environmental bans, as observed by Mark Haskell, ‘may also be viewed as a particular manifestation of the movement for worker participation {sic} and control which is viable and growing’.⁴ ‘Work-ins’ —so named after the teach-ins and sit-ins of anti-Vietnam War activism—

¹ For an overview see Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, 2nd ed. (London: Bookmarks, 1998).

² Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The New Unionism: The Case for Workers’ Control* (London: Peter Owens Ltd, 1972), 6.

³ Milton Derber, ‘Changing Union-Management Relations at the Plant Level in Australian Metalworking,’ *Journal of Industrial Relations* 19, no. 1 (1977): 2.

⁴ Mark Haskell, ‘Green Bans: Worker Control and the Urban Environment,’ *Industrial Relations* 16, no. 2 (May 1977): 214.

occurred as workers refused to accept retrenchments and dismissals by simply continuing work. During several of these actions, workers ‘sacked’ their supervisors and temporarily took their enterprises under self-management.⁵ In isolated cases, factories and workplaces under occupation were converted into worker-owned cooperatives; the first coal mine in the world to be converted into a cooperative through a work-in was established at Nymboida, NSW in 1975.⁶ In Australia and elsewhere, these expansions of worker and union prerogative were part of the broader pattern of industrial activity referred to as workers’ control.

Radical unionism, resurgent in the 1970s, has existed internationally since the rise of industrial capitalism, appearing and reappearing throughout history. As noted in a recent work, ‘[o]ver the last century, instances of workers’ control have often enlivened activists’ imaginations and raised new possibilities for the democratic organization of workplaces and of communities’.⁷ Prior to the early 1970s, workers’ control became a global phenomenon in the late 1910s, as waves of workers occupied and appropriated their workplaces throughout Europe and elsewhere. These movements were comprised of workers organised in factory and shop committees, workers’ councils, or other democratic organs of control and decision-making.

In its ideological expressions, workers’ control has ambiguous conceptual parameters. Control by workers over production is somewhere near the core of socialist philosophy, dating back to prominent thinkers in the nineteenth century. Karl Marx noted that ‘[f]reedom [...] can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their

⁵ Verity Burgmann, Ray Jureidini and Meredith Burgmann, ‘Doing Without the Boss: Workers’ Control Experiments in Australia in the 1970s,’ *Labour History*, no. 103 (November 2012): 104. See also Sam Oldham, ‘Taking Control: The Work-In Phenomenon in the Australian Metal Trades, 1968-1978,’ *Labour History*, no. 109 (forthcoming).

⁶ Pete Thomas, *Miners in the 1970s: A Narrative History of the Miners Federation* (Sydney: Miners Federation, 1983), 41.

⁷ Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini, eds., Introduction to *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers’ Control from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 2.

common control'.⁸ Mikhail Bakunin, an early anarchist thinker, argued for 'the appropriation of capital, that is, of raw material and all the tools of labour, [...] by the solidaric collaboration of the workers [...] through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves.'⁹ Uses of the phrase 'workers' control' have been as diverse and sometimes disparate as the multifarious expressions of socialism itself, invoked variously by Marxists, Leninists, anarchists, syndicalists, parliamentary Labour parties and others.

Workers' control also represents a diversity of forms of action. Carter Goodrich, in his study of the radical British shop stewards' movement of the late 1910s, describes workers' control as 'a slogan and a convenient general term', whereas 'in actual reference to the facts of industry it breaks up into a bewildering variety of rights and claims.'¹⁰ Goodrich conceived of workers' control as a 'frontier' that is expanded by workers as their activities encroach on the prerogatives of capital. The Australian tendency of the 1970s took this form. Denis Freney, a left-wing member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), observed in 1973 that:

The right to strike and to form unions are forms of workers' control, limiting the bosses' power [...] What is new today is that workers feel the need to go beyond these traditional, partly accepted instances of workers' control to tackle new, formerly unquestioned "rights" of the boss [...] the attempt to impose control over different aspects of the power of the bosses and the ruling class

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. III: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 820.

⁹ Mikhail Bakunin, 'The Program of the Alliance,' in Sam Dolgoff, ed. and trans., *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 255, cited in Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 10th ed. (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 119-120.

¹⁰ Carter L. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 1975), 18.

(e.g., the bosses' right to sack [...] or what piece of environment to destroy, or what war to fight).¹¹

Jack Hutson, a research officer for the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), defined workers' control in 1969 along similar lines as

the extension of the right of the trade unions particularly in the workshop, through their representatives, to have an effective say in decisions made in respect to such matters as trade unionism, safety, welfare, discipline, wage fixation, appointment of supervisory staff, deployment of labor, technological changes, hiring and firing and access to financial records.¹²

These changes, while in some cases seemingly indistinguishable from conventional trade unionism, were viewed as comprising a 'tall order when put against the usually recognised trade union rights.'¹³ Workers' control, in the Australian context, represented an expansion of worker and union power at the enterprise level and beyond, encroaching on the historic 'rights' of capital. Proponents of the tendency did associate it with self-management and even worker ownership, but within a broader context of expanding union prerogatives. For many, direct encroachment was a means to achieve complete workers' control over industry. Joe Owens, a leading figure in both the CPA and NSWBLF, described workers' control as 'part of the wider political movement for self-management', and others in these organisations shared this view.¹⁴ This conception of trade unionism as a means for social transformation bears similarities to the radical unionism of the early twentieth century and to traditions of anarchism and syndicalism that rose to prominence on the radical left at the same time.

¹¹ Denis Freney, 'Workers' Control Perspectives,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 39, 1973, 3.

¹² Jack Hutson, 'Workers Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 1, February-March 1969, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ 'Symposium: Workers' Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 41, August 1973, 12.

The following chapter of this thesis (chapter 2) explores the reasons for the emergence of workers' control in the metal trades from the late 1960s. It is observed that a turn to direct bargaining precipitated the growth of worker self-organisation at the enterprise level and the rise of shop committees as organisational forms for workers' control. Shop committees proliferated dramatically throughout the 1950s and 1960s and these organs enabled incursions on capitalist prerogative in areas of hiring and firing, health and safety, the labour process, social consequences of commercial development, as well as in areas of state power and government policy. At the same time, worker confidence surged from the later 1960s as Australian society entered a period of mass politicisation. Opposition to the Vietnam War created a sort of ideological schism in which institutions of social domination and authority were questioned, including the institution of private enterprise. A final section of this chapter is devoted to how workers' control was understood and communicated ideologically during the period. The CPA, independent trade unionists, anarchists and socialists of various stripes attempted to label workers' control, often according to their respective dogma. This section attempts to better define workers' control and to contextualise it within older traditions of anarchist, syndicalist and socialist ideas.

In subsequent chapters, workers' control as an aspect of industrial relations is divided into three categories for analysis: control over employment conditions, control over work, and control over political and social affairs. In each of these areas, workers in trade unions expanded their prerogatives to the point that a clear tendency towards control could be identified. Worker interference in 'hiring and firing' was commonly invoked by both proponents and opponents as symbolic of a new unionism. Through their shopfloor organisations, metal trades workers imposed closed shop and union hire arrangements as forms of control over hiring. Similarly, they were able to reverse dismissals and retrenchments through strike action or through the work-in. As a further outcome of shopfloor organisation, workers established controls over health and safety conditions in a direct encroachment on

managerial prerogative. These activities together represented an expansion of workers' control over employment conditions. A chapter is then devoted to control over work, including the methods, processes and nature of work, with a section on self-management. It is argued that a tendency towards autonomy in work can be seen, beginning with subtle conflicts over job control and leading to attempts by workers to self-manage their enterprises. A subsequent chapter will analyse various worker and trade union interventions into social and political affairs, particularly the Vietnam War and other aspects of foreign policy, Medibank, environmental degradation as a consequence of commercial development, and social elements of the employment relationship. These were considered by observers to constitute a form of workers' control beyond the enterprise. These categories of action were together considered to comprise a distinct tendency in industrial relations. In the words of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, workers' control's 'random selection of objectives has a common theme of encroachment upon managerial authority' and 'workers' control is already affecting us all'.¹⁵ While the areas outlined above do not encompass the full ambit of workers' control during the period, they allow for an analysis of its major contours.

Chapter 6 gives reasons for the decline of workers' control in the later 1970s. It is argued that the tendency was undermined largely through the widespread dismissal of shopfloor unionists and the deliberate destruction of shop committees by employers. The impact of this offensive on workers was compounded by the mass unemployment of economic recession after 1975, which had a powerful demoralising effect. Federal and state governments assisted the process by increasing legislative support for employers or through direct intervention to restore managerial control. A final section of this chapter explores more inventive employer strategies for the neutralisation of workers' control. Worker participation schemes were enthusiastically adopted by employers and managers from the early 1970s for the

¹⁵ Gavin Souter, 'Sacking the boss: from "working-in" to taking over,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 28, 1973.

explicit purpose of replacing workers' control with systems of industrial relations management that were favourable to capital. These schemes were never widespread and their impact was less significant, though the fact employers turned to co-optation and collaboration as strategies for undermining independent worker activity is an important consideration for the present.

In its conclusions, this thesis suggests that the principles of workers' control in the 1970s might offer possibilities for future social change. It is a truism that practitioners of labour history 'are frequently committed in that they study the past in order to understand the present and thereby shape the future.'¹⁶ This thesis aims at a 'useable past' — 'an understanding of history that helps to justify a preferred course for the present.'¹⁷ In recent years, new forms of worker organisation have challenged capital. Internationally, 'workers' movements are forming through militant self-activity, autonomous action, and relentless opposition to the status quo.'¹⁸ Likewise, worker-owned cooperatives have spread widely in the United States since the global financial crisis of 2008, in many cases developing out of factory occupations and work-ins.¹⁹ Movements for workers' control, historic and contemporary, share common characteristics. This thesis challenges assertions made by several historians (reviewed below) that workers' control was doomed to be unsuccessful. It is suggested instead that, in future manifestations of workers' control, its shortfalls in the 1970s might be overcome and its victories expanded.

¹⁶ Eric C. Fry, 'Symposium: What is Labour History?' *Labour History*, no. 12 (May 1967): 62.

¹⁷ Robert J. Norrell, 'After Thirty Years of 'New' Labour History, There Is Still no Socialism in Reagan Country,' *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 1 (March 1990): 230.

¹⁸ Immanuel Ness, *Introduction to New Forms of Worker Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class-Struggle Unionism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁹ For an overview, see Gar Alperovitz, *What then must we do? Straight Talk about the Next American Revolution* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2013).

1.2 Notes on Methodology and Source Material

This scope of this study is limited to metal workers, the majority of whom were employed as fitters, engineers, mechanics and process workers (81,000 fitters, 150,000 engineers and mechanics, 63,000 process workers in a total metal workforce of 570,000 nationally in 1972).²⁰ Metal workers were employed broadly in manufacturing, particularly steel production, metal fabrication and engineering, ship and vehicle building, and to a lesser extent in power generation, construction and other industries.²¹ The history of workers' control in the mining industry has been largely recovered by Pete Thomas and metal workers in that sector are not a focus of this thesis.²² Metal workers elsewhere were organised by several trade unions. Tom Sheridan identifies eight prior to the formation of the AMWU in 1973: the AEU, Sheet Metal Workers' Union (SMWU), Boilermakers and Blacksmiths' Society (BBS), Australasian Society of Engineers (ASE), Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), Federated Moulders (Metals) Union, Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Federated Engine Drivers and Fireman's Association (FEDFA).²³ The AEU, with 86,000 members, stood as the largest metal union and second largest union in the country in 1969.²⁴ It amalgamated with the SMWU, BBS and the Federated Jewellers to form the giant Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU) after 1973, and again with the Federated Shipwrights & Ship Constructors Association to form the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union (AMWSU) in 1976. The skilled workers organised by these unions comprised something of a vanguard for workers' control, assisted by sympathetic officials aligned with the CPA. The FIA followed the AEU as

²⁰ Tom Sheridan, *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 6.

²¹ Norman Dufty, *Industrial Relations in the Australian Metal Industries* (Sydney: West Publishing Corporation, 1972), 8.

²² See Thomas, *Miners in the 1970s*, 21-61. See also Pete Thomas, *The Nymboida Story: The work-ins that saved a coal mine* (Sydney: Australian Coal & Shale Employees Federation, 1975).

²³ *Ibid*, 9-10.

²⁴ Dufty, *Industrial Relations*, 10.

the third largest Australian trade union with 66,000 members in 1972.²⁵ Officials of the FIA were hostile to shop committees and workers' control, and the internal dynamics of this and other organisations are discussed where they are relevant. Geographically, 60 percent of all manufacturing was concentrated in the Melbourne and Sydney metropolitan areas during the period, including most of the major steel, vehicle and ship manufacturers.²⁶ The thesis is therefore primarily concerned with the 'rust belt' states of Victoria, NSW and South Australia.

A rank-and-file approach is taken to the history. Trade unions were the basis for the workers' control tendency, though in many cases rank-and-file workers acted with degrees of autonomy from their officials. A unitary view of trade unionism, in which officials and members are assumed to have shared motivations, is avoided. In its initial formulation, rank-and-fileism represents an 'insistence on the fundamental division within trade unions between the interests and activities of the "bureaucracy", "leadership", or "officialdom" on the one hand, and those of the "rank and file", "membership" or "opposition" on the other.'²⁷ This perspective aligns with elements of socialist thought. Rudolf Rocker, the German anarcho-syndicalist historian, while on the one hand argued that the trade union was 'the germ of the Socialist economy of the future', on the other, warned against 'centralism, that artificial organization from above downward which turns over the affairs of everybody in a lump to a small minority' and 'kills all independent initiative.'²⁸ Contemporary thinkers have drawn even sharper conclusions. Immanuel Ness notes that '[e]xisting labor unions have proved incapable of mobilizing mass rank-and-file militancy to resist the ongoing deterioration in workplace conditions and the systematic erosion of workers' power.'²⁹

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Dufty, *Industrial Relations*, 15.

²⁷ Jonathan Zeitlin, 'Rank and Fileism in British Labour History: A Critique,' *International Review of Social History* 34, no. 1 (April 1989): 45.

²⁸ Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2004), 59-60.

²⁹ Ness, Introduction to *New Forms of Workers Organization*, 1.

Divisions between trade union leaderships and memberships are well-known to both the historiography and the leftist political traditions to which trade unionism has been central.

These points notwithstanding, the rank-and-filist approach has been revised and refined in recent years. Tom Bramble, for example, accepts its distinguishing features, while 'rejecting arguments that full-time officials are always conservative or that rank-and-file members are always ready to fight.'³⁰ Many union officials were complacent or hostile towards workers' control, viewing it as a threat to their official power. Others, however, particularly those that dominated the leaderships of the AMWSU and its forerunners, were supportive. A similar dynamic has characterised workers' control at other times. Goodrich, in reference to Britain, notes that 'expressions in official union policy have been less picturesque than the unofficial outbreak, but they are no less significant.'³¹ This thesis treats trade unions 'as secondary phenomena responding positively or negatively to interests and identities determined by more fundamental social processes and relationships'.³²

In accordance with a rank-and-filist approach, rank-and-file sources of labour history constitute the primary source material for this thesis. The Melbourne-based journal *Link*, underappreciated in other histories of the period, has been invaluable. Initially produced by a coalition of metal workers and student activists from 1972 and authorised by the AEU Ringwood branch, two further publications ran from 1974 at the Essendon and Coburg branches of the union (*Link: North Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*) and the Cumberland and Granville branches (*Link: Western Suburbs*)

³⁰ Tom Bramble, 'Trade Union Organization and Workplace Industrial Relations in the Vehicle Industry 1963 to 1991,' *Journal of Industrial Relations* 35, no. 1 (1993): 54.

³¹ Goodrich, *Frontier of Control*, 12.

³² Jonathan Zeitlin, 'From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations,' *The Economic History Review* 40, no. 2 (May 1987): 159.

before the publication ceased in 1979. John Cleary, a young member of the CPA, established the first *Link* with two others because

the organiser [...] can't get to eighty workplaces every week, or every month even. So it was just information. [...] we had those skills, and then we'd run around and distribute it afterwards [...] It was essentially straight reporting of what the shop stewards had been saying on the job.³³

Cleary notes that while many involved in the project were members of the CPA, 'the Communist Party didn't have a lot to do with it.'³⁴ *Link*, a direct source of labour history, is vital to a study of rank-and-file metal workers.

Beyond *Link*, a range of archival sources were consulted. Records of radical left groups and shop committees have been useful, particularly the CPA news sheet *Tribune* and its theoretical journal *Australian Left Review*. The CPA, relative to other left groups, paid close attention to workers' control. It is possible that the CPA may have distorted reports of workers' control in the pages of *Tribune*, possibly by unduly emphasising the role of the Party in various actions. The CPA was often alone in reporting on events relevant to workers' control, though CPA records are used in conjunction with other sources where possible. Records of shop committees were referred to where they exist, particularly those of the powerful shop committee networks in the Commonwealth industries of shipbuilding, aircraft, munitions, railways, housing and construction. Official trade union sources have been useful, though they are treated as institutional organs not necessarily expressive of rank-and-file workers. The left-wing metal unions, namely the AMWSU and its forerunners, actively reported on workers' control. In contrast, unions with right-wing leaderships, such as the FIA or VBEF, tended to scorn or otherwise ignore the tendency in their publications. For example, highly publicised incidents of workers' control, such as the

³³ John Cleary, interview with author, 12 August 2014.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

work-in at Harco Steel, receive no mention in the official FIA journal *Labor News*. These facts further reflect the importance of rank-and-file sources such as *Link*.

Lastly, interviews with former metal workers and union officials supplement archival sources. Peter Winn observes that oral methodologies reveal ‘aspects of the workers’ historical experience never recorded in written documents,’ and expand the scope of labour studies beyond ‘[l]eaders, institutions, ideologies, statistical averages, and structures,’ helping to re-establish the fact that ‘[w]orkers—all kinds of workers, not just union leaders or other labor elites—are the most direct source for the labor historian.’³⁵ Interviews were conducted with former metal workers and union officials from all major metal unions. Memory is inherently unreliable; oral sources are treated with standard caution and are taken to reflect individual experiences and interpretations. One issue outstanding with the oral interview process was that no women could be found, despite women representing a small but growing proportion of metal workers in the early 1970s. This renders the history skewed with a male bias. This flaw notwithstanding, the use of oral testimony is important to reconstructing the history.

1.3 Historiography and Literature Review

The 1970s was a period of change within scholarship just as it was socially and politically. The resurgence of class struggle invited a new wave of historical literature on workers’ control. To name a few, Maurice Brinton, in his seminal work *The Bolsheviks & Workers’ Control* (1970), reclaims the history of independent factory committees and trade unions during the Russian revolution, in a powerful critique of Leninism and the Bolshevik Government.³⁶ Italian autonomists revisited the workers’

³⁵ Peter Winn, ‘Oral History and the Factory Study: New Approaches to Labor History,’ *Latin American Research Review* 14, no. 2 (1979): 132, 131.

³⁶ Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks & Workers’ Control 1917 to 1921* (London: Solidarity, 1970).

councils of the abortive German revolution in 1918 and the Italian factory councils of 1919.³⁷ Goodrich's history of British shop stewards' was republished in a second edition in 1975, and the industrial syndicalism of the early twentieth century attracted fresh attention. In the United States, Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) provoked a rush of academic enquiry into the nature of work and the capitalist labour process.³⁸ In recent years, rank-and-file workers' struggles have generated new interest again. Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini edited a highly useful volume, *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present* (2011), providing a detailed overview of workers' control struggles from the nineteenth century to the present. Immanuel Ness's 2014 work *New Forms of Worker Organization* gives an equally valuable overview of more recent struggles. These texts provide a basis for comparison with and contextualisation of Australian events of the 1970s.

In line with these trends, Australian historians have recently reviewed workers' control in the 1970s. The most comprehensive analysis is that by Verity Burgmann, Meredith Burgmann and Ray Jureidini in their article *Doing Without the Boss*, with a focus on the work-in/self-management phenomenon. These authors conclude that 'no matter how difficult or doomed the experiment, the desire to do without the boss is latent and capable of occasional realisation.'³⁹ The contributions offered in this thesis are intended to build on their work by contextualising self-management within a broader framework for understanding workers' control. Verity and Meredith Burgmann's book *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders' Labourers Federation* (1998), while obviously dealing with the construction industry, is also helpful as a guide for enquiry into the metal trades. Green bans represented perhaps the most significant incursions on the power of

³⁷ See for example Sergio Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party in the German Workers' Councils,' *telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*, no. 13 (Fall 1972): 4-27.

³⁸ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

³⁹ Burgmann, Burgmann and Jureidini, 'Doing without the Boss,' 116.

capital and the state during the period, though the NSWBLF also adopted 'encroachment strategies, such as union hire and work-ins; demands for workers' control [...] the monitoring of safety procedures; election of safety officers and foremen [...] refusal to abide by industrial court decisions' and so on.⁴⁰ These actions are analogous to those in the metal trades and they developed in similar circumstances.

Tom O'Lincoln takes a critical view of workers' control in his popular history of the CPA, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (2009). O'Lincoln excoriates what he describes as 'that apparently radical area: workers' control', particularly 'the serious weaknesses of the work-in tactic', as demonstrated by the failure of the 1971 work-in at Harco Steel in Sydney, which was ended through employer recourse to the Summary Offences Act.⁴¹ In his words, 'capitalists [...] will make use of their repressive institutions', as they did at Harco and elsewhere, and 'workers' control struggles must ultimately raise the question of the state [...] by attempting to smash it as Lenin believed or by some more gradual kind of subversion'.⁴² An argument advanced in this thesis is that trade unionists *did* confront the state throughout the period, rendering parts of its 'repressive institutions' ineffective. Confrontation with the state never extended to a defence of work-ins, though it is arguable that, if it had, the power of the state to intervene would have been diminished. Drew Cottle and Angela Keyes, in their article *The 1971 Harco 'Stay-Put': Workers' Control in One Factory?*, in a similar way generalise the failure of Harco to suggest that '[w]orkers' control under capitalism remains an elusive contradiction,

⁴⁰ Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1998), 297.

⁴¹ Tom O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (Melbourne: Red Rag Publications, 2009), 176.

⁴² *Ibid*, 176.

if not an impossibility.⁴³ Like O'Lincoln, these authors seem to ignore the fact that many work-ins were successful in reversing retrenchments, in reorganising the labour process and in some cases as a means for direct appropriation of enterprises by workers. What is more, O'Lincoln, Cottle and Keyes conceive of workers' control as limited to the work-in phenomenon or attempts by workers to appropriate their enterprises. This denies the fact that these actions represented only part of a tendency that was more comprehensive in its aims and expressions.

O'Lincoln critiques Freney's 1973 article, quoted above, for 'blurring the qualitative distinction between workers' control and trade unionism, presenting the former as merely an extension of the latter' and 'avoiding the distinctive quality of workers' control as an intervention in the productive process itself.'⁴⁴ D.W. Rawson, in his book *Unions and Unionists in Australia* (1978), makes a similar argument, suggesting that '[i]f trade unionism is workers' control, much of the argument is reduced to the proper scope of trade union objectives' [emphasis original].⁴⁵ This thesis accepts Rawson's point, but suggests that workers' control represented a significant extension of union prerogative beyond the traditional terrain of wages and conditions. Moreover, workers' control had radical aims beyond those typical to trade unionism. Rawson also offers a discussion of workers' control in relation to workers' participation. As a corollary to his point above, he argues that workers' control becomes inherently a form of participation as the 'aims of unionism are achieved [...] by negotiation between management and union representatives' and the latter therefore "'participate" in the operation of capitalist industry by agreeing to

⁴³ Drew Cottle and Angela Keyes, 'The 1971 Harco 'Stay-Put': Workers' Control in One Factory?,' *The Hummer: Bulletin of the Sydney Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2003/04). <http://asslh.org.au/hummer/vol-4-no-1/harco/>.

⁴⁴ O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, 177.

⁴⁵ D. W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 120.

conditions of employment'.⁴⁶ While shop committees and stewards did negotiate over control issues and in this sense 'participate' in management, the independence and autonomy of worker organisations from management was the defining characteristic of workers' control, distinguishing it from schemes for workers' participation, which were based around ideas of co-determination achieved through management systems.

Other works address important aspects of workers' control without referencing the tendency explicitly. Milton Derber, Norman Dufty and Stephen J. Frenkel conducted a number of detailed studies of industrial relations in the metal trades during the 1970s and 1980s, providing support for analysis of workers' control.⁴⁷ Christopher Wright has produced a history of Australian employers with a focus on management strategies and changing shopfloor relations throughout the 1970s.⁴⁸ Malcolm Rimmer is one of the few historians to study shop committees in detail, and he acknowledges that '[l]ittle is known about Australian shop floor union organisation' as 'few unions allow for shop committees in their rules'.⁴⁹ Other studies of committees were produced during the 1960s and 1970s by Orwell de Foenander⁵⁰ and Jack Hutson,⁵¹ from right and left wing perspectives respectively. The role of shopfloor organisation remains largely lost to the historiography, reinforcing the value of rank-and-file sources such as *Link* and oral interviews. Shopfloor relations have received closer attention in recent years. Mark Westcott offers a detailed analysis

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Milton Derber, 'Changing Union-Management Relations'. Dufty, *Industrial Relations*. Stephen J. Frenkel, *Industrial Action: Patterns of Labour Conflict* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

⁴⁸ Christopher Wright, *The Management of Labour: A History of Australian Employers* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Malcolm Rimmer, 'Work Place Organisation,' in Bill Ford and David Plowman, eds., *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, 2nd ed., (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983), 122.

⁵⁰ Orwell de Foenander, *Shop stewards and shop committees: a study in trade unionism and industrial relations in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965).

⁵¹ Jack Hutson, *Penal Colony to Penal Powers* (Sydney: AEU, 1966).

of workers' control struggles at the Paramatta River Shell oil refinery in the late 1970s. Westcott describes action by FEDFA members to achieve 'discretion over work to construct a regime of work performance that replaced that formally directed by management'.⁵² Westcott is concerned specifically with shopfloor conflict at Shell, designating it accordingly as workers' control. However, elsewhere, Westcott refers to FEDFA involvement in the green bans as evidence of their diverse 'industrial tactics' as separate from encroachments in the form of job control.⁵³ This thesis aims to incorporate these seemingly disparate tendencies into a broader conception of the workers' control tendency.

In the canon of trade union history, few historians have addressed workers' control outright. The practice of labour history shifted with social science generally in the 1970s. Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee observe that 'most of the labour histories [of the 1950s and 1960s] were orthodox narratives, contained within a close institutional focus.' With the emergence of 'new' labour history in the 1970s, 'historians began to question the old labour history's emphasis on formal institutions such as the Labor Party and the trade unions.'⁵⁴ Among general histories of Australian trade unionism, Bramble, in *Trade Unionism in Australia* (2012), discusses workers' control and takes a broader conception similar to that taken in this thesis. Bramble deploys a rank-and-filist approach that runs also through his analyses of South Australian vehicle manufacturing, which have also been of use.⁵⁵ This thesis aims to extend Bramble's classification, arguing, for example, that the rebellions in vehicle manufacturing that are central to his studies fall within the category of workers'

⁵² Mark Westcott, 'Worker Control in the Australian Oil Industry,' *Labour & Industry* 22, no. 4 (August-December 2012): 404.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, 'Australia Deconstructed? Assembling a People's History of Australia since 1788,' *Australian Historical Studies* 23, no. 91 (1988): 155.

⁵⁵ Tom Bramble, 'Conflict, Coercion and Co-option: The Role of Full-Time Officials in the South Australian Branch of the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation, 1967-80,' *Labour History*, no. 63 (1992): 135-154.

control. Some resulted in control over the speed of production lines, for example, while in others, sabotage and the refusal of work have relevance.

Official histories of the major metal unions, including Sheridan's work and Robert Murray and Kate White's history of the FIA, *The Ironworkers*, adhere more or less to an institutional approach, tending to focus on official developments.⁵⁶ For example, Bobbie Oliver points out that 'Sheridan devoted only a few lines to members' attitudes' on the formation of the AMWU in 1973.⁵⁷ Sheridan's work nonetheless stands as the most meticulous extant study of the AEU and is invaluable to any study of metal trades unionism. A recent collection of personal testimonies from retired AMWU activists is highly useful.⁵⁸ Most testimonies are from shop stewards and rank-and-file members during the 1970s and, while few mention workers' control, their recollections are important. It is notable that significant gaps remain in the historiography of metal trades unionism, with the ASE, the SMWU and other organisations having been largely ignored.⁵⁹

Lastly, the advent of workers' participation in the later 1970s has been well-documented in scholarship; *Democracy in the Workplace* by Russell D. Lansbury offers a thorough overview.⁶⁰ However, critical approaches to worker participation schemes, including their role in undermining workers' control at the enterprise level, are scarce. This thesis supports Harvie Ramsay's contention that workers' participation schemes 'are shown to correspond to periods when management authority is felt to be facing

⁵⁶ Robert Murray and Kate White, *The Ironworkers: A History of the Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982).

⁵⁷ Andrew Dettmer, *Organise, Educate, Control: The AMWU in Australia 1852-2012* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2013), 59.

⁵⁸ AMWU, *Talking Back: Reflections of Retired AMWU Activists* (Granville, NSW: AMWU, 2006).

⁵⁹ Malcolm Saunders and Neil Lloyd confirm this in their article, 'Arbitration or Collaboration? The Australasian Society of Engineers in South Australia, 1904-1968,' *Labour History*, no. 101 (November 2011): 123.

⁶⁰ Russell D. Lansbury, ed., *Democracy in the work place* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1980).

challenge' and are 'thus best understood as a means of attempting to secure labour's compliance' as opposed to a genuine democratisation of industry.⁶¹ An aim of this thesis is to draw a clear distinction between independent workers' control through shop committees and trade unions, and participation schemes based around worker-management collaboration, often with managers retaining ultimate authority.

⁶¹ Harvie Ramsay, 'Cycles of Control: Worker Participation in Sociological and historical Perspective,' *Sociology* 11, no. 3 (September 1977): 481-506.

Chapter 2: The Emergence of Workers' Control

2.1 Industrial Relations Context

Workers' control emerged in the final stages of the growth in trade union power after WWII. Throughout the post-war economic boom, full employment gave leverage to workers; the threat of dismissal lost its effectiveness, while booming profits made employers more willing to grant concessions and maintain production rather than confront unions.⁶² In this context, workers became impatient with industrial awards and turned to over-award wage agreements negotiated directly with employers.⁶³ By the late 1960s, these agreements accounted for 30 percent of all wages in the metal trades.⁶⁴ Direct negotiation spurred growth in rank-and-file self-organisation and provided fertile conditions for the expansion of union activity into areas of managerial prerogative. As recalled by the industrial relations manager at GM-Holden Elizabeth: 'We had the attitude then that we would do all in our power to keep production going' which gave shop stewards 'an environment to take up a whole range of issues.'⁶⁵ Struggles for higher wages was the determinant factor in the surge in rank-and-file self-activity. In the words of Frank Cherry: 'Without local struggle for wage growth, the shopfloor movement would grow very weak. In many cases people would lose their desire to fight for their rights on the job. [...] I think that the whole democratic base of the union would be at stake.'⁶⁶ The movement for workers' control was indivisible from this surge in shopfloor organisation and the democratisation of unions as a result of the wages struggle.

⁶² Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia*, 127.

⁶³ Wright, *Management of Labour*, 185.

⁶⁴ Tom Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia: A History from Flood to Ebb Tide* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 69.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

As rank-and-file control expanded it imposed itself upon the traditional authority of union leaderships. By the late 1960s, power within the metal unions had shifted away from officials in a trend that invoked alarm from employers and conservative commentators. The Brisbane *Courier Mail*, reporting on a strike at Evans Deakin shipyards in August 1969, warned that: 'The real trouble is rank and file control [...] The campaign is being run by a bunch of stirrers [...] Every time the Metal Trades Federation makes a decision, the rank and file knock it over.'⁶⁷ Arbitration commissioner AE Woodward argued the following year that '[o]ne of the biggest dangers in union affairs today is the spread of so-called "participatory democracy" which means, in effect, rule by mass meetings.'⁶⁸ Mass meetings, as a tool for participatory decision-making, came to the fore in the mid-1960s. Laurie Carmichael, Victorian State Secretary of the AEU, described mass meetings as 'a new development in the union' in 1964.⁶⁹ Union officials were increasingly relegated into positions of either sympathy with or opposition to rank-and-file power growing within their own organisations.

Shop committees, comprised of shop stewards and rank-and-file unionists at the enterprise level, often from multiple unions, proliferated widely in the two decades prior to 1975.⁷⁰ Nominally, shop committees existed to improve communication between union members and officials, and to maintain shop conditions affecting members of multiple unions. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) attempted to formalise these parameters through a 'Charter for Shop Committees' adopted in 1961. However, buoyed by the security of full employment, shop committees widely engaged in bargaining over wages and conditions, despite

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

⁶⁸ AE Woodward, 'Industrial Relations in the 70s,' *Journal of Industrial Relations* 12, no. 2, (1970): 124.

⁶⁹ Minutes of National Conference of Full-Time Officials, AEU Melbourne District Committee, November 1964, Box 1, 1987.0116, University of Melbourne Archives.

⁷⁰ de Foenander, *Shop Committees*, 1, See also Wright, *Management of Labour*, 185.

all attempts to restrict their activities.⁷¹ Jack Hutson warned in 1965 that any attempt by union officials and employers to contain the activities of shop committees ‘risks being at loggerheads with them’ as they ‘fill a deeply felt need of the rank and file dictated by the hard facts of industrial life itself.’⁷² Shop committees had a readiness to act outside of established industrial relations norms. As noted by Norman Dufty, shop committees were ‘not within the jurisdiction of nor subject to the control of any individual union’ and therefore ‘represent[ed] alternative centres of allegiance, power and authority’.⁷³ The latent danger of shop committees to capitalist power was widely identified by employers. The Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA) bemoaned ‘plant by plant duress’ coordinated by committees in the 1960s.⁷⁴ The Victorian Chamber of Manufactures advised its members not to recognise committees in 1962, as did the Metal Trades Employers’ Federation in October 1965.⁷⁵ The latent radicalism of worker committees was understood by metal workers. A shop steward on the powerful Kenworth Trucks shop committee ‘saw the committee as a real alternative to the bosses {sic} management’ in 1976, while another steward remarked that: ‘We could run the place better than they [management] do.’⁷⁶ From the outset, they were forms for worker self-activity and expression, whose proliferation employers could do little to contain.

Union leaderships responded in different ways. The AEU leadership, dominated by the CPA, endorsed shop committees as ‘the means by which increased

⁷¹ See Nikki Balgrave and Greg Patmore, ‘The AMWU: Politics and Industrial Relations, 1852-2012,’ in Dettmer, ed., *Organise Educate Control*, 21. See also Dufty, *Industrial Relations*, 146. See also Hutson, *Penal Colony*, 219.

⁷² Hutson, *Penal Colony*, 219, 217.

⁷³ Dufty, *Industrial Relations*, 92.

⁷⁴ Susanna Short, *Laurie Short: A Political Life* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 233.

⁷⁵ Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 280.

⁷⁶ ‘Kenworth: How far can committees go?’ *Link*, July 1976.

workers control over the employers can be exercised at the point of production.’⁷⁷ AEU officials encouraged the autonomy of stewards. Ted Gnatenko, AEU steward at GM- Holden Elizabeth, quipped that stewards were the ‘masters of the union, and the organisers were the servants’ by the late 1960s.⁷⁸ Officials of the BBS and SMWU took similar approaches; it was due to cooperation between these unions that they amalgamated to form the AMWU between 1971 and 1973.⁷⁹ Thereafter, AMWU officials hoped that shop committees would ‘infect’ members of other unions with militancy.⁸⁰ Conversely, the rank-and-file upsurge provoked tensions within conservative unions. The FIA scorned shop committees; FIA President Laurie Short regularly warned members against joining them, describing them as ‘Communist “cells” in disguise’.⁸¹ These warnings carried into the pages of *Labor News*.⁸² In the vehicle industry, VBEF officials attempted to block combined-union committees organised by the AEU for fear their power would be usurped, which ‘led to fierce attacks on [the VBEF leadership] by the VBEF militants, who favoured greater use of direct action.’⁸³ Despite their leaderships, members of the FIA and VBEF were active at the shop floor, inspired by their peers in left-wing unions and the surge in rank-and-file activity generally.

By breaching no strike clauses in awards and agreements, shop committees increasingly came into conflict with the penal powers of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act and attracted fines to their unions throughout the 1960s. To avoid penalties, even left-wing union officials sought to curtail the activities of members;

⁷⁷ Addresses, Reports and Decisions of the Second Commonwealth Conference, AEU Melbourne District Committee, 26 April - 5 May 1971, Box 1, 1987.0116, University of Melbourne Archives.

⁷⁸ Tom Bramble, ‘Australian Trade Union Strategies since 1945,’ *Labour and Industry* 11, no. 3 (April 2001): 14.

⁷⁹ Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 295.

⁸⁰ J. Goss, *Trade Unions in the Factory* (Kuralta Park: AMWU, 1975), 31.

⁸¹ Short, *Laurie Short*, 233.

⁸² See for example ‘Shop Committees’, *Labor News*, vol. 25, no. 177, February 1970, 3.

⁸³ Bramble, ‘Conflict, Coercion and Co-option,’ *Labour History*, 141.

AEU officials were often forced to 'restrain rank-and-file members with the bit between their teeth'.⁸⁴ John Halfpenny, as an AEU organiser, lamented in 1964 that 'Penal Powers rob workers of the right to struggle and turn Union Officials into strike breakers.'⁸⁵ Conflict between shop committees and the arbitration system reached breaking point with the Metal Trades Work Value case of early 1968, during which an unpopular wage decision by the Arbitration Commission provoked 400 strikes, for which '[s]hop committees were the engine'.⁸⁶ The AEU incurred more than \$23,000 in fines, compared to \$33,000 for the previous 18 years, and calls by members to refuse payment were widespread.⁸⁷ Discontent spilled over with the arrest of the President of the Tramways Union, Clarrie O'Shea, in Melbourne for failure to pay penalties in May 1969. A spontaneous general strike secured his release and the penal powers thereafter became a 'dead letter'.⁸⁸ In a watershed moment for the development of shop committees and the emergence of workers' control, the repressive institutions of the arbitration apparatus were rendered largely powerless.

The absence of penal powers precipitated a deluge of shopfloor activity in the metal trades between 1969 and 1974; metal workers made more gains through direct action in this period than in the entire period since 1952 through arbitration.⁸⁹ Penal powers had protected managerial prerogatives. Jack Hutson noted weeks prior to the O'Shea case that use of the penal powers to end strikes in response to sacked unionists 'have shown what a powerful bulwark is the arbitration system to encroachment on managerial rights, and this is a formidable limiting factor to the achievement of

⁸⁴ Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 280.

⁸⁵ Minutes of National Conference of Full-Time Officials, AEU Melbourne District Committee, November 1964, Box 1, 1987.0116, University of Melbourne Archives.

⁸⁶ Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 42.

⁸⁷ Nikki Balnave and Greg Patmore, 'The AMWU: Politics and Industrial Relations, 1852-2012,' in Dettmer, ed., *Organise, Educate, Control*, 21.

⁸⁸ Breen Creighton, 'Law and the Control of Industrial Conflict,' in Kathryn Cole, ed., *Power, Conflict and Control in Australian Trade Unions* (Ringwood: Pelican Books, 1982), 129.

⁸⁹ Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 62.

workers' control.'⁹⁰ A crisis in employer and state authority ensued. Joe Palmada, a CPA figure, noted later that 'the present movement [for workers' control] received tremendous impetus from the penal powers strike [...] which has paralysed the system of compulsory arbitration, opening the way for new offensives by the workers.'⁹¹ Malcolm MacDonald, a convenor of the Newport Power Station Shop Committee and later an FEDFA organiser, describes an 'enormous' and immediate surge of workplace activity, with employers powerless to confront it. MacDonald responded to rolling strikes at the BHP South Melbourne plant in 1970, and recalls the helplessness of the foreman, who could only idly repeat: 'This is madness. This is madness.'⁹² Conservative union officials were also hamstrung. In the steel town of Port Kembla, FIA members at Australian Iron & Steel (AI&S) elected a radical 'Rank and File Ticket' leadership under the migrant Fernando (Nando) Lelli in 1970.⁹³ Lelli recalls that the national leadership of the FIA constantly undermined his leadership, even suggesting he was receiving money from the Soviet Union. In the later 1960s, the FIA had expelled Lelli for joining the combined-union shop committee. As he recalls:

I was acting on behalf of the Ironworkers and on behalf of the committee. Because we had formed for one purpose: to obtain as much power as we could [...] I got a letter from my union advising me that I had been expelled as a delegate [...] I had to withdraw my position of secretary of the shop committee because the shop committee was not endorsed by the ACTU.⁹⁴

Harry Hurrell, national secretary of the FIA, denounced AI&S members as 'hellbent to anarchy' after strikes in 1971.⁹⁵ Despite their efforts, employers and oppositionist union officials could no longer rely on arbitration to police the activities of workers.

⁹⁰ Jack Hutson, 'Workers Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 1, February-March 1969, 12.

⁹¹ Joe Palmada, 'Issues of industrial strategy,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 31, July 1971, 2.

⁹² Malcolm Macdonald, interview with author, 15 July 2014.

⁹³ 'On the Industrial Scene,' *Tribune*, April 28, 1971, 12.

⁹⁴ Nando Lelli, interview with author, 2 September 2014.

⁹⁵ 'Ironworkers in Action,' *Tribune*, August 19, 1971, 12.

The CPA encouraged shop committees. From the late 1950s, the Party eschewed its focus on capturing official union positions for an emphasis on developing rank-and-file activism.⁹⁶ Graeme Watson, an ETU steward in the 1970s and later an organiser, recalls that ‘where there was a Communist Party bloke [in the workplace] he had people around him’.⁹⁷ CPA members dominated the leaderships of the AEU, BBS and SMWU, and these unions were at the forefront of the shop committee movement. Beyond the metal trades, CPA officials dominated the leadership of the NSWBLF, resulting in a ‘welcoming and encouraging’ attitude to rank-and-file militancy.⁹⁸ As in the metal unions, the NSWBLF’s ‘new concept of unionism was displayed clearly in the union’s hostility to the arbitration system and its concomitant emphasis on direct action strategies.’⁹⁹ The role of the CPA should not be exaggerated; the party entered the 1970s smaller than it had been in decades and was itself swept by the rank-and-file upsurge. In a speech to a Sydney industrial relations conference in 1971, Clyde Cameron, as shadow Minister for Employment, emphasised that ‘[t]he shop steward’s movement, the area committees, and other grassroots movements are a fact of life and they are not disposed of merely by referring to them as being “Commo-led” or as the reaction of dissatisfied British migrants.’ They are ‘expressive of the fact that many workers feel their needs are best satisfied at the workplaces and they are not content to be led by what they regard as the remote control of Lygon Street [VTHC offices].’¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the shop committee movement had far more organic origins than the agitation of the CPA, arising clearly out of the direct interests of workers.

⁹⁶ See Douglas Jordan, *Conflict in the Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics and the Trade Union Movement, 1945-1960* (Ultimo, NSW: Resistance Books, 2013).

⁹⁷ Graeme Watson, interview with author, 7 July 2014.

⁹⁸ Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union*, 79.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Call to members for more involvement in union affairs,’ *Labor News*, vol. 26, no. 191, September 1971, 8.

Other historical movements for workers' control developed along similar lines, growing out of struggles for material gain before becoming struggles for control. In reference to the British shop stewards movement, Goodrich asserts that '[i]t is only a slight exaggeration to say that all present forms of workers' control, except those that secure the rudiments of decency in discipline, are by-products of the wages-and-hours struggle.'¹⁰¹ In 1917, factory and shop committees spread rapidly throughout Russia, first negotiating over wages and conditions before raising 'demands [that] are not limited to wages or hours but challenge many managerial prerogatives'.¹⁰² In Italy between 1919 and 1920, radical factory councils 'mov[ed] from bargaining and the management of industrial relations to attempting to achieve complete control over production.'¹⁰³ A similar process occurred in Germany and elsewhere. The nature of the activities of shop committees depends upon the social and political contexts in which they exist, and they do not inherently tend towards encroachments on managerial prerogative. They do, however, have radical potential, as organs by which workers can exercise direct control in negotiations with management, to be expanded into other areas of work and production.

2.2 Mass Politicisation and Social Radicalisation

The period from the late 1960s to the middle 1970s was one of social and political turmoil in Australia. The Vietnam War had an immediate politicising effect on Australian society and triggered a surge of popular activism. As elucidated by the visiting American scholar Henry Albinski in 1970, the Vietnam War triggered 'an awakening which has permeated both the mass public and the attentive-interested sectors of the public.' Albinski emphasised that the 'destabilizing contributions of the

¹⁰¹ Goodrich, *Frontier of Control*, 21.

¹⁰² Brinton, *Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, 1.

¹⁰³ Pietro Di Paola, 'Factory Councils in Turin, 1919-1920,' in Ness and Azzellini, eds., *Ours to Master*, 130.

Vietnam-conscription controversy should not be belittled' as it 'has injected a new, or at least newly advertised, ideological dimension into a well-aggregated society.'¹⁰⁴ Many metal workers were radicalised by their opposition to the Vietnam War and conscription. John Cleary attributes his own politicization to 'a combination of factors, but one that was very clear was that [he] was nineteen and had to register for the draft.'¹⁰⁵ Causative links between international war and labour unrest are well-established.¹⁰⁶ Shop stewards first appeared in Australia towards the end of WWI, 'fed by a worldwide surge of enthusiasm for [...] revolutionary workers' councils'.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, a wave of strikes followed WWII, culminating in the infamous coal strike of 1949 'as unions in the metal trades, the meat industry and the railways refused to be bound by arbitration.'¹⁰⁸ War tends to foment social radicalism, with the 1970s being no exception.

Ideas of workers' control were resurgent in many countries from the late 1960s. In France, factory occupations 'spread with incredible speed and spontaneity' in May 1968, despite opposition from officials of the major trade unions.¹⁰⁹ In Italy, mass unofficial ('wildcat') strikes occurred from the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 through to the mid-1970s, in 'continual struggles of a spontaneous nature which have half-paralysed industry.'¹¹⁰ In New Zealand, which had a comparable industrial relations apparatus,

¹⁰⁴ Henry S. Albinksi, *Politics and Foreign Policy in Australia: The Impact of Vietnam and Conscription* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), 208-9.

¹⁰⁵ Cleary, interview.

¹⁰⁶ For an overview see Beverly J. Silver, 'World-Scale Patterns of Labor-Capital Conflict: Labor Unrest, Long Waves, and Cycles of World Hegemony,' *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 155-192.

¹⁰⁷ Rimmer, 'Work Place Organisation,' 125.

¹⁰⁸ Bradley Bowden, 'The rise and decline of Australian unionism: a history of industrial labour from the 1820s to 2010,' *Labour History*, no. 100 (May 2011): 65.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, *French Revolution 1968* (London: William Heinemann Ltd & Penguin Books, 1968), 152.

¹¹⁰ Andrea Savonuzzi, 'Italy', *International Socialism*, no. 40, October-November 1969, 20-21, cited in Harman, *Fire Last Time*, 194.

the introduction of a Nil-Wage Order in 1968 provoked mass wildcat strikes after which '[u]nion faith in the [arbitration] court was shattered and there was a surge in industrial action and direct bargaining.'¹¹¹ Coates and Topham observe that workers' control in Britain was 'at least in part motivated by the external and internal social pressures' of the 1960s.¹¹² Australian workers demonstrated a propensity for spontaneity and direct action that could not be explained solely by industrial relations trends. The AEU Commonwealth Council remarked in 1969 that 'action of a spontaneous nature inevitably develops [...] and that such spontaneous action takes place despite shop committees, not because of them, and in most cases where shop committees do not even exist.'¹¹³ Conservative commentators drew links between social and labour unrest. Sir Walter Scott, a leading conservative commentator, described social and labour conflict as a 'communication gap' in the late 1960s, observing that '[f]ew countries have improved their industrial relations picture' and 'we find, not only strikes, but aspects of violence' in a 'communication gap [that] is not restricted to business' but exists also in 'Government, in our seats of learning, in racial and other problems of all kinds and particularly in the generation gap which is so menacing in both its proportions and implications.'¹¹⁴ Social unrest permeated the labour movement, in a symbiotic relationship that impacted beyond the industrial workplace.

¹¹¹ Chris Briggs, 'Strikes and Lockouts in the Antipodes: Neoliberal Convergence in Australia and New Zealand,' in Sjaak van der Velden, Heiner Dribbusch, Dave Lyddon and Kurt Vandaele, eds., *Strikes Around the World, 1968 - 2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*, (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2007), 185.

¹¹² Coates and Topham, *New Unionism*, 15.

¹¹³ Addresses, Reports and Decisions of the First Commonwealth Conference, AEU Melbourne District Committee, May 1969, Box 1, 1987.0116, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹¹⁴ Sir Walter Scott, 'Looking into the 1970s,' (speech presented to the Autumn Seminar of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, Canberra, 1970).

In the context of global unrest, foreign migrants contributed to Australian radicalism. Migrants represented as much as 80 percent of the increase in the workforce from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, particularly in manufacturing.¹¹⁵ The caricature of the ‘pommie’ shop steward became pervasive, while large numbers migrated from Turkey and Greece as revolutions and military coups disrupted their home countries. Ron Carli, a VBEF member in the vehicle industry, believes that migrants came from Greece and Turkey with a ‘different understanding of unionism’ and a ‘totally different idea of how to run a strike’ in that ‘you make your point’.¹¹⁶ Non-English speaking migrants were further restive due to their frustrations as unskilled workers with limited ability to communicate. Non-English speaking migrants, for example, comprised more than 80 percent of participants in the violent Ford Broadmeadows riot of 1973.¹¹⁷ O’Lincoln notes that the ‘newness to the country and the raw deal it offered them meant they often felt less commitment than Australian-born workers to a range of institutions in society, including the formal structures of the trade unions.’¹¹⁸ The introduction of non-English speaking migrants also encouraged self-organisation, as it fell to shopfloor unionists to organise them. A Strike Committee at Ford Broadmeadows in 1969 was established to facilitate cooperation between Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Yugoslav and Turkish workers, who made ‘decisions at well run meetings and in providing interpreters for the many migrant workers.’¹¹⁹ Similarly, at B&D Rolla Door in Melbourne, workers organised ‘a shop committee along ethnic lines’ in which ‘ethnic groups each elected a representative to the shop committee’ who would ‘explain proposals and decisions of

¹¹⁵ Dufty, *Industrial Relations*, 2-3.

¹¹⁶ Ron Carli, interview with author, 29 June 2014.

¹¹⁷ Santina Bertone and Gerard Griffin, Bureau of Immigration Research, *Immigrant Workers and Trade Unions* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing, 1992), 6.

¹¹⁸ Tom O’Lincoln, *Years of Rage: Social Conflicts in the Fraser Era* (Melbourne: Bookmarks, 1993), 7.

¹¹⁹ John Halfpenny, ‘V.B.F Finally Joins Dispute,’ *AEU Monthly Journal*, January 1970, 24.

mass meetings to migrants in their own language'.¹²⁰ In many cases, workers' control was contingent upon high levels of organisation between migrant and local workers.

New social movements in the late 1960s circulated with workers' control. In what he describes as the 'global circulation of struggles', American autonomist Marxist Harry Cleaver observes that a 'crisis of capitalism began to emerge in the 1960s in the form of a wide variety of seemingly unrelated disorders in which a number of basic social institutions began to fall apart,' including capital.¹²¹ The youth movement had a profound impact on industrial relations. *Tribune* observed in 1972 that '[t]he youth revolt has affected large numbers of working youth' and 'has in the main relied on spontaneity.'¹²² Again, youth dissatisfaction with menial work and managerial authority was evident internationally. In the US context, Braverman attributed an 'active dissatisfaction' with work in the 1970s to 'the characteristics of the workers— younger, more years of schooling, "infected" by the new generational restlessness'.¹²³ In Australia, young workers flooded into unions. Graeme Watson refers to mass meetings of apprentices for the purpose of agitating to join unions, attributing this to 'the mood the times [...] driven by the Vietnam War and other issues.'¹²⁴ In December 1971, 80 apprentices at GM-Holden Elizabeth occupied their administration building to force company recognition of their stewards. Similar campaigns occurred at the GM-Holden Woodville plant, the Whyalla shipyard and the Osborne power station.¹²⁵

New Left ideas of participation, self-organisation and direct action filtered into the labour movement. Judy Gillet, a teachers' unionist, observed 'very many similarities between the struggle for workers' control and other forms of social

¹²⁰ 'First Ethnic Shop Committee,' *Link: Western Suburbs*, March 1977.

¹²¹ Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 4-5.

¹²² 'Young Workers in Revolt,' *Tribune*, April 11-17, 1972, 7.

¹²³ Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, 35.

¹²⁴ Watson, interview.

¹²⁵ 'Apprentices Keep Up the Pressure: Second Sit-In at GMH,' *Tribune*, February 3, 1971, 2.

struggle, e.g., women's liberation and environmental struggles, etc., which are also struggles for self-determination, anti-authoritarianism, anti-exploitation and anti-divisiveness.¹²⁶ Likewise, Cleary recalls that social struggle

has relation to workers' control. I think what occurred in '68 in France caused an awakening on so many levels. Then of course feminism became a large discussion point on the left. The rights of gays, bisexuals, everything that we previously held was questioned, in terms of social behavior, including the notion of the master-servant.¹²⁷

In many cases, workers' control was characterised by extensions of union prerogative directly into new areas of social concern, such as protection of the environment and so forth. More broadly, workers' control was one aspect of a more general surge in popular politicisation, in which systems of domination and control were treated skeptically, including the institution of private enterprise.

2.3 Workers' Control as Ideology

From 1969, workers' control became a term to describe union incursions into the prerogatives of capital and the state. Trade unionists, almost all from left-wing metal unions, rigorously discussed workers' control in the pages of *Australian Left Review*. Frank Bollins, an organiser for the SMWU in Sydney and later NSW State President of the AMWU, defined workers' control as existing where 'organised workers of a particular job exercise a decisive influence on the conduct of the industry,' which would 'flow from the militant demands of the workers, expressed through mass meeting decisions and implemented by direct negotiations.'¹²⁸ Brian Mowbray, a fitter at GM-Holden in South Australia and chairman of the Combined

¹²⁶ 'Symposium: Workers' Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 41, August 1973, 14.

¹²⁷ Cleary, interview.

¹²⁸ 'Workers' Control: A Symposium,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 2, April-May 1969, 8.

Shop Stewards' Committee, described it as 'an effective say in the overall planning and running of the factory' which he deemed to be 'synonymous with the recognition of shop committees, and the committees' rights to be involved in planning.'¹²⁹ Many envisaged self-management or worker ownership as objectives of direct encroachment. Joe Owens, involved in work-ins at the Sydney Opera House and Johnson & Johnson, considered workers' control as 'part of the wider political movement for self-management', not 'restricted to narrow tactics aimed at achieving traditional trade union demands.'¹³⁰ Dave Lofthouse, a Brisbane AMWU member, described it as 'a growing realisation by working people that they must control the mode, purpose and quality of the production process which governs their livelihood', in 'the running of the industry by the people for the benefit of the people.'¹³¹ These definitions create broad parameters for workers' control, covering the management of the factory and 'the conduct of the industry', including its impacts beyond immediate production, but also an upheaval of production relations altogether.

In conceptualising workers' control, proponents drew largely from British and European sources. Hutson emphasises that workers' control in Australia was 'near enough to the understanding of what is meant by the demand for workers' control which is being put forward in Europe.'¹³² The British IWC, established in 1968, provided a rich literature for an Australian readership, and emulative Centres for Workers' Control were established in Sydney, Newcastle and elsewhere. Workers' Control Conferences, modelled on British conferences held throughout the 1960s, were organised in Australia from 1969 through to 1973. Much of the discussion material for the first Australian conference is borrowed from the British monthly journal *Marxism Today* and concerns the development of ideas and practices in

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ 'Symposium: Workers' Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 41, August 1973, 12.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³² *Ibid.*

Britain.¹³³ Travel facilitated the transmission of ideas. Bob Campbell, a SMWU organiser for Newcastle, was one of several metal unionists to attend a British Workers' Control Conference in 1968.¹³⁴ Michael Barratt Brown of the Institute for Workers' Control addressed a Sydney meeting of metal unionists in March 1972 to 'involve shop stewards and job activists in a discussion on workers' control and self-management',¹³⁵ while Ken Coates himself attended the Newcastle Workers' Control Conference in 1973.¹³⁶ The AEU itself was likely a conduit for ideas of workers' control from Britain. The British AEU, of which the Australian union was a section until it gained autonomy in 1968, included direct encroachment strategies in its constitution from 1963 and for 'worker participation through their trade unions in the direction and management of nationalised industries' as early as 1947.¹³⁷

Reporting on European experiments with self-management and worker ownership became common to metal worker literature in the 1970s. A typical report in *Link* suggests that the events of France in May 1968, the occupation and self-management of the British Triumph factory and the LIP watch factory in France should serve as examples for Australian workers.¹³⁸ Similar content featured in AMWU literature.¹³⁹ Yugoslavian socialism attracted fresh interest. Ron Arnold, a BBS official, returned from Yugoslavia in 1972 to laud 'the most remarkable of social experiments,' where 'each enterprise has a democratically elected workers' council on

¹³³ *Workers' Control: Discussion Material* ([np]: Australian Left Review, 1969).

¹³⁴ Bob Campbell, 'British workers' control conference,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 32, September 1971, 27.

¹³⁵ 'Workers' Control,' *Tribune*, March 1-8, 1972, 12.

¹³⁶ 'Ken Coates for Conference,' *Tribune*, January 16-22, 1973, 12.

¹³⁷ Ernie Roberts, *Workers' Control* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 44.

¹³⁸ 'End of the Long Boom,' *Link: Western Suburbs*, March 1977.

¹³⁹ See for example 'Tricofil: Where Workers Manage,' *AMWU Monthly Journal*, July 1976, 23.

the job which has the complete control of the plant.’¹⁴⁰ These experiences created a rich pool of ideas from which Australian workers were able to draw.

The CPA was the only left-wing organisation to have a meaningful impact on the development of workers’ control and, among Marxist groups, was most alert to the subtleties of the tendency. This pertains to the Trotskyist parties with whom ideas of self-management were often associated. The Socialist Workers’ Party, as the largest Australian Trotskyist group, besides otherwise ignoring workers’ control, declared at its fourth national conference in January 1976 that BLF green bans were an example of trade union struggles ‘of which the revolutionary party must be a part [...] to win the ear of the militant workers and their respect for our political judgement,’ as ‘[t]here are no organisational shortcuts by which a small party can leap over the unions’.¹⁴¹ The CPA was less patronising. An important CPA document in 1970 encouraged workers ‘to seek a growing measure of control which encroaches more and more on the sacred domain of the ruling class,’ including ‘control of processes, methods, organisation and supervision of work, including safety on the job, to control over the employer’s whole authoritarian discipline system which gives him the “right” to punish and dismiss workers, the right to hire and fire.’¹⁴² A metal industry strategy document evaluated the success of CPA industrial organising in the 1970s in similar terms: ‘Has there been an identifiable increase in the power and control of metal workers at the job level? Have “management prerogatives” been systematically challenged and wound back?’¹⁴³ The CPA played an important role in organising and

¹⁴⁰ Ron Arnold, ‘Seeing Workers’ Control in Belgrade,’ *Boilermakers - Blacksmiths Journal*, no. 19, June 1972, 5.

¹⁴¹ *Towards a Socialist Australia: How the labor movement can fight back: documents of the Socialist Workers Party* (Sydney: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 102.

¹⁴² *Modern Unionism and the Workers’ Movement: Communist Party of Australia, 22nd Congress, March 1970* (Sydney: Red Pan Publications, 1970), 10.

¹⁴³ *A Strategy for the 1980s in the Metal Industry* (np: Communist Party of Australia, ca 1980), 11.

promoting Workers' Control Conferences throughout the early 1970s.¹⁴⁴ CPA influence in the metal trades gave it the ability to coordinate its own 'metal industry workers' control movement conference' in 1972.¹⁴⁵

While the role of the CPA in advancing workers' control was far from negligible, it was responding to a tendency that was grew more organically out of the intensification of struggles over wages and conditions. The metal trades document above concedes that workers would have likely taken many of the same actions 'without this strategic objective, or any other to replace it.'¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, CPA planners observed an existing tendency towards the 'increasing demand for a widening of the powers of decision making by workers' by 1970.¹⁴⁷ The point was reiterated at the National Congress of April 1972, which perceived that a 'new trend to challenging hitherto accepted "rights" of employers to authoritarian control is shown by the big proportion of strikes against managerial policies.'¹⁴⁸ O'Lincoln notes that the Party was 'to respond, somewhat sluggishly at first, to a powerful radicalisation that began to sweep Australia from 1967' including a 'great upsurge of industrial militancy'.¹⁴⁹

What is more, the CPA occasionally became exasperated at its inability to manage and direct elements of the workers' control tendency. O'Lincoln, who attended a 1972 Workers' Control Conference in Melbourne, recalls that when the Party 'could not control the direction of the discussions' it 'allowed the Melbourne end of the project to collapse'.¹⁵⁰ CPA orientation to workers' control had provoked a major split a year earlier, with a section of the leadership leaving to form the Socialist Party of Australia, repudiating the turn towards the 'discredited path of anarcho-

¹⁴⁴ See O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, 170.

¹⁴⁵ 'Workers' Control Meet,' *Tribune*, August 15-21, 1972, 11.

¹⁴⁶ *Strategy for the 1980s for the Metal Industry*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ *Modern Unionism*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans*, 95-96.

¹⁴⁹ O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, 167.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 170.

syndicalism and Trotskyism' within the CPA.¹⁵¹ Union officials were overrepresented among Party leaders who left to form the SPA, and they likely left in part due to anxieties about threats to their power within their unions.

That workers' control was largely an expression of independent worker initiative is further illustrated by the fact that Workers' Control Conferences were also devoted to analysis of events already occurring. For example, the Newcastle Workers' Control Group justified the need for a 1973 Conference on the grounds that: 'We feel that experiences such as those at Harco, Lanray [concrete plant work-in] and South Clifton [coal mine work-in] are increasingly placing the concepts of workers' control and self-management before the Australian labor movement'.¹⁵² In the British context, the IWC developed to analyse 'the growth of an explicit trade-union demand for workers' control over the major decisions involved in modern industry', and could claim little credit for introducing the ideas.¹⁵³ These institutions were important to the process of diffusing and developing ideas of workers' control among workers, but they were honest about the fact that the tendency emerged largely independently of them, in both the Australian and British contexts.

While leading protagonists had an ideological or political conception of workers' control, they were a minority of participants in workers' control actions. As elucidated in one paper presented to the 1969 Workers' Control Conference:

Workers' control [...] is not an integral part or basis of a real political or industrial movement of Australian workers'—it is at this stage only a theoretical concept. (This does not mean that many workers' struggles cannot

¹⁵¹ Cited in Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans Red Union*, 95-96.

¹⁵² 'On Workers' Control,' *Tribune*, June 13-19, 1972, 11.

¹⁵³ Coates and Topham, *New Unionism*, 6.

be embodied within the concept of workers' control, just that no unionists have openly placed their struggles, so far, in this light.)¹⁵⁴

This situation did change with the advent of major work-ins in subsequent years, assisted by the circulation of worker's control propaganda by the CPA. However, the vast majority of metal workers involved in control-type actions were likely to have remained unaware of a 'workers' control' tendency being discussed on the political left and elsewhere. Ken Purdham, for example, as a convenor of the powerful shop committee at Pilkington Glass in Dandenong, had 'no communists anywhere near him' at his factory and had never heard of workers' control.¹⁵⁵ The point is expressed in another way by AMWU steward John Wallace, who observed that 'the revolutionary party (parties) have endeavoured to change the political consciousness of workers through propaganda,' and have 'not basically changed workers who have continually sought more material wealth.' In contrast, 'almost overnight, people [...] change dramatically when involved in attempts to encroach upon "normal" prerogatives of the employers or political authority [...] and the more these actions around workers' control continue, the more aware the people involved become.'¹⁵⁶ These facts further indicate that, while political organisation was important to workers' control, it nevertheless remained a more spontaneous tendency in worker activity. Through their own lived experiences, rank-and-file workers saw encroachments on the prerogatives of capital as a logical direction for their shop committees and job organisations.

In this sense, workers' control verged upon a type of syndicalism or anarchism. Its development was in accord with the syndicalist observation that '[m]ovements arise only from the immediate and practical necessities of social life, and are never the

¹⁵⁴ Warren Osmond, 'Workers' Control—Student Power,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 5, October-November 1969, 55.

¹⁵⁵ Ken Purdham, interview with author, 23 June 2014.

¹⁵⁶ 'Symposium: Workers' Control,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 41, August 1973, 13.

result of abstract ideas.’¹⁵⁷ This was conceded by leading CPA thinkers. Hutson observed that similar points were ‘debated at the turn of the century in the controversies as to what was the best way of achieving socialism’ and that ‘anarchists supported workers’ control as an alternative to the state, which they held to be an obstacle to the achievement of socialism, and proposed that it should be exercised through the trade unions as a form of working class self-government.’¹⁵⁸ Hutson emphasises that ‘the difference of marxism [...] was that while it agreed on the vital importance of the trade unions it held that the working class required a marxist political party to help it achieve its objectives.’¹⁵⁹ The contradiction was seized upon by anarchist groups. A ‘Railway Workers Rank and File Group’ comprised of anarchists advised at a 1973 Workers’ Control Conference that ‘[a]nytime a Leninist party proposes workers control it should be viewed with great suspicion for real workers control would make their organisation redundant.’¹⁶⁰ Workers’ control, in contrast to the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the political party, emphasised self-activity and direct action by workers, and prioritised trade unions and shop committees as organisational forms for social change.

¹⁵⁷ Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, 19.

¹⁵⁸ Jack Hutson, ‘Workers Control,’ *Australian Left Review*, no. 1, February-March 1969, 8-9.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Melbourne Railway Rank and File Group, ‘Workers’ Control of Self-Management?,’ *Melbourne Anarchist Archives: development of Melbourne anarchism: drafts, documents & articles, 1966-1973*, ([Melbourne?]: ca. 1973), 87.

Chapter 3: Control over Conditions of Employment

3.1 Control over Hiring: the Closed Shop

Workers' control over hiring was largely achieved through closed shop systems enforced by rank-and-file unionists. The closed shop, defined as 'a situation in which membership of a trade union is a necessary condition for employment', represents, at any time, 'the control of access to employment by trade unions.'¹⁶¹ Closed shops are 'a classic perennial and controversial issue in industrial relations', particularly during periods of union upsurge.¹⁶² Union hire first became prominent in Australia during the radical union struggles of the late nineteenth century and has existed since that time in industries employing metal workers, such as shipping.¹⁶³ However, the issue took on new importance in the 1970s. As noted by Mitchell and Rosewarne, 'the closed shop, and the extent of its operation, rose to significance in the mid-1960s' as 'closed-shop agreements were negotiated and registered on a large scale' in a 'trend [that] continued in the 1970s.'¹⁶⁴ Union control over hiring at the enterprise was considered a form of workers' control. A publication of the 1973 Workers' Control Conference in Queensland noted that the 'way in which workers' control ideas and tactics can encroach on the powers of the bosses are best shown by examples, most of which have been around the bosses' right to hire and fire.'¹⁶⁵ Jim Moss, a South Australian proponent of workers' control, reported in 1973 that a 'large number of industrial disputes are over matters of organisation and particularly over workers resisting

¹⁶¹ Richard Mitchell and Stuart Rosewarne, 'Individual Rights and the Law in Industrial Relations,' in Cole, ed., *Power, Conflict and Control*, 194.

¹⁶² Gianni Zappala, 'The impact of the closed shop on the union movement: A preliminary view,' *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 2, no.2 (1991): 65.

¹⁶³ Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia 1850-1910* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 108. See also Frenkel (ed.), *Industrial Action*, 67-68.

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell and Rosewarne, 'Individual Rights and the Law,' 199.

¹⁶⁵ 'What is Workers' Control?' (proceedings of the Queensland Workers' Control Conference, Brisbane, Waterside Workers' Club, November 1973).

joining a union and the unionists and the union insisting that they are members'.¹⁶⁶ Union hire was one direct encroachment strategy during the period, rooted in older traditions of union radicalism.

Closed shops took on forms that were characteristic of contemporary worker activism, driven by rank-and-file workers. Moss noted further that '[o]ne hundred per cent unionism achieved by union and worker education, persuasion and conviction—the closed shop—is qualitatively different to compulsory unionism by government decree or union/employ-agreements {sic} at top levels', in that it is the result of worker initiative and is accountable to the rank-and-file.¹⁶⁷ Numerous examples of rank-and-file workers enforcing union-hire fill the pages of *Link*. To take one, after becoming a closed shop in 1975, AMWU and ETU members at Acme-Wilco in Melbourne refused to work with 33 new employees unless they joined a union, and communicated with another Acme-Wilco factory in Abbotsford to ensure that both shops would stop work if the company hired non-union labour.¹⁶⁸ The dispute ended with all new workers unionised. Campaigns to defend union hire often merged with resistance to dismissals. When members of the Plumbers Union were dismissed for refusing to work with non-union labour at Cooperative Bulk Handling in Kwinana in early 1976, their consequent dismissal provoked an immediate strike by metal workers to win their reinstatement.¹⁶⁹ Such incidents reflect the degree to which rank-and-file workers were the agents of control over hiring.

Shop committees were the basis for control over hiring and their existence correlated with that of closed shop arrangements. Enforcement of union hire largely fell to committees acting independently of union leaderships, to the frustration of companies. In an illuminating example, after Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL)

¹⁶⁶ Moss, *Industrial Relations or Workers Control: South Australian Experiences*, 22.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

¹⁶⁸ 'Wilco-Acme Kilsyth,' *Link*, March 1978.

¹⁶⁹ 'Dispute CBH Construction, Kwinana,' *AMWU Monthly Journal*, July 1976, 8.

locked workers out during a dispute over union hire in 1972, *Tribune* accused the company of 'smashing the site and delegates committees, which have developed the workers' rights to an on the spot say in what goes on, along with elements of workers' control of site conditions and labor hire.'¹⁷⁰ QAL representatives demanded that, '[i]f there is to be a resumption of work it must be with union officials in control, and control must be taken out of the hands of the site committees', as they would 'no longer tolerate union control of labor hire' as 'selection of the workforce must be the responsibility of employers alone.' Rank-and-file control was a source of enormous consternation for the company, who claimed that 'militant workers had taken control of the situation and the unions had not been able to effectively control their membership', and requested that 'trade union officials be permanently stationed in Gladstone.'¹⁷¹ This example again demonstrates the particular qualities of union-hire in the 1970s as it intersected with the surge in rank-and-file activity generally.

Closed shops were established in the course of industrial disputation and often correlated with further incursions into managerial prerogative. During disputes in Victoria throughout January 1969, compulsory AEU membership was achieved at Balm Paints, ANCO, Monbulk Preserves, Robert Bosch, Unbreako and H. R. Grant.¹⁷² At ANCO, a manufacturer of automotive components, full union membership supported a consolidated shop committee, and ANCO workers were able to extract favourable severance terms for retrenched workers through shopfloor action in 1975.¹⁷³ Monbulk Preserves was forced to close its plant in late 1974, only for it to be reopened in 1975. Upon its reopening, members of the AMWU secured the rehiring of all workers previously employed by Monbulk, including all shop stewards.¹⁷⁴ Workers took action to reverse retrenchments at Anthony Bearings in 1975 and

¹⁷⁰ Charlie Gifford, 'Gladstone: fight for rights on job,' *Tribune*, November 21-27, 1972, 7.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² AEU *Monthly Journal*, January 1969, 25.

¹⁷³ 'Anco Sackings: Steward Reports,' *Link*, February 1975.

¹⁷⁴ 'S.P.C. Opens Brooke-Bond on workers' terms,' *Link*, February 1975.

established a closed shop in the process. In the words of *Link*, Anthony Bearings management was then 'no longer dealing with an unorganized shop, but a united shop that is intent on guaranteeing the interests of its members.'¹⁷⁵ In a related trend, metal workers at the Griffin Company in Western Australia took strike action to avoid work going to a non-union site. After discussions between stewards and management, it was agreed that 'no more vehicles will leave with the workshop unless it is an emergency and after consultation with the stewards.'¹⁷⁶ The establishment of union hire in the course of industrial disputes reflects both the importance of closed shops to shopfloor union power and the process by which self-organisation occurs as a response to immediate interests and concerns. Moreover, the importance of closed shops to exercising control over retrenchments and the protection of work reflects intersections between different expressions of growing worker prerogative.

Other forms of control over hiring emerged with the rise in shopfloor power. In one of the more significant, rank-and-file unionists forced employers to hire apprentices after completion of their apprenticeships if they belonged to the union. At Australian Newsprint Mills at Boyer, an AMWU apprentice in the pipefitting section was due to be retrenched at the end of his apprenticeship, but 'discussion with management and job activity' resulted in a guarantee that he would be retained.¹⁷⁷ This was a generalised trend. Through the Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, all unions with apprentices employed by the State Electricity Commission in the La Trobe Valley imposed 'a total ban on all contract work within the S.E.C. LaTrobe valley area', in response to the failure of the Commission to keep apprentices

¹⁷⁵ *Link: North Western Suburbs*, March 1975.

¹⁷⁶ *AMWU Monthly Journal*, August 1973, 29.

¹⁷⁷ *AMWU Monthly Journal*, March 1976, 12.

after completion of their apprenticeships.¹⁷⁸ These examples point again to self-organisation as the basis for encroachment.

Control over employment by shop committees allowed for convergence with other areas of workers' control. After a plumbing contractor was killed in an accident at the Dunlop tyre plant in Montague, the shop committee attributed the accident to the fact that: '[t]here were no Dunlop stewards on the site. If there had been, we would have asked for [the contractor's] union tickets as this work is covered by the AMWSU.'¹⁷⁹ It is doubtful that worker encroachments into OHS could have been as successful without mechanisms for the defense of union integrity at the shopfloor. Workers' control over the use of contract labour was not supported by legal frameworks and was an independent worker response to 'the fact that regulation of independent contractors is beyond the ordinary federal processes of industrial relations.'¹⁸⁰ Tony Robins, an ETU steward and convenor of the massive Commonwealth Area Committee in the Department of Housing and Construction, recalls that

We fought a lot of retrenchments there [after 1975] [...] They'd have contractors in. We had a maintenance construction workforce [...] So we would put bans on the contractors [...] The [area] committee was saying we've got to get rid of these contractors, so we started to control what contractors came in.¹⁸¹

As Robins recalls, this was a broad trend.

Though peaking in the early 1970s, closed shops endured strongly as a proportion of overall union density until the employer assault on unionism in the mid-1980s. Union hire, more than any other type of action, treads the line between

¹⁷⁸ John Halfpenny to R. Miles, Secretary of the Central Gippsland TLC, 15 April 1973, Records of the Gippsland Trades & Labour Council, Box 24, Federation University Archives.

¹⁷⁹ 'Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap at Dunlop,' *Link: North Western Suburbs*, April 1977.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell and Rosewarne, 'Individual Rights and the Law in Industrial Relations,' 203.

¹⁸¹ Tony Robins, interview with author, 8 July 2014.

conventional trade unionism and more radical expressions. What is clear is that imposition of union hire was instrumental to the integrity of shop committees, which were the living organs of workers' control, and was often a precondition for further encroachments on capitalist prerogative.

3.2 'Control over Firing': Resistance to Retrenchments

By 1971, the beginnings of the decline in the post-war manufacturing boom were felt sharply across the metal trades. As lay-offs and closures increased, a sort of collision occurred between new worker militancy and the motions of the capitalist economy, as workers in a number of enterprises resisted retrenchments through work-ins and occupations. The first major work-in occurred in November 1971, when ironworkers and boilermakers seized control of the Harco Steel factory in Sydney to resist proposed retrenchments, continuing work for a period of weeks before they were removed under the Summary Offences Act. Shopfloor organisation was crucial to the action, taken spontaneously through a rank-and-file meeting.¹⁸² Mick Tubbs, who participated in the work-in as a *Tribune* reporter, described the decision as 'spontaneous in the sense that [workers] were trying something new' in reaction to the loss of their jobs.¹⁸³ Support for the action was offered from as far away as Queensland and Western Australia, while sacked Harco workers visited other workplaces 'to explain what was done [at Harco] and to develop support in defiance of dismissals'.¹⁸⁴ A work-in occurred in the same month at Tulloch Limited, a manufacturer of rolling stock in Sydney, and a factory occupation at Johns & Waygood in Sandringham won the reinstatement of 25 retrenched workers, in an

¹⁸² Mick Tubbs and Lloyd Caldwell, *The Harco work-in: an experience of workers' control*, (Sydney South: Sydney Centre for Workers' Control, 1973), 2.

¹⁸³ Mick Tubbs, interview with author, 4 September 2014.

¹⁸⁴ 'Refusing the Sack,' *Tribune*, January 18-24, 1972, 11. See also 'Stay Put on Ships and Metal Shops,' *Tribune*, December 14, 1971.

action described by the CPA as ‘a splendid lead to the trade union movement on the way to fight mass dismissals.’¹⁸⁵ These events occurred amid a wave of popular resentment over unemployment and in the new absence of the penal powers, resulting in the employer recourse to common law to defend their right to retrench labour.

Resistance to sackings represented in many cases a contest between shop committees and management. While Harco was the first work-in to occur in resistance to retrenchments, the first such action was in response to the targeted dismissal of shop stewards. In April 1971, AMWU members John Wallace and Michael Deaves refused to accept dismissal from the medical goods plant Johnson & Johnson and were arrested under the Summary Offences Act. The initial dismissal of the men resulted in seventy four maintenance workers from the AMWU, ASE and ETU walking off, after which Wallace and Deaves continued work for a further two days, ‘escorted through the gates by their fellow unionists,’ until their arrest.¹⁸⁶ Similar conflict occurred during a wage dispute in the La Trobe Valley power industry in 1973, when metal workers outside of the La Trobe Valley refused to accept stand downs as a result of the strike. At the Williamstown Naval Dockyards, the majority of seventy men who were stood down refused to leave their jobs, informing management that ‘the shop committee would decide’ such matters and warning the Minister of Defence of ‘a revolt among Commonwealth workers if stand-downs without pay continued’.¹⁸⁷ At the North Melbourne Railway Workshop, men who refused to accept stand-downs were ‘concealing’ the products of their labour, with *Tribune* reporting that ‘if they are not paid properly, they will offer to sell the products to management.’¹⁸⁸ Actions of this sort reflect the diminished credibility of capital, described as the communication

¹⁸⁵ R. Dixon, ‘130,000 Workless by March,’ *Tribune*, December 8, 1971, 3. See also ‘Action on sackings scores a victory,’ *Tribune*, December 1, 1971, 4.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Police Arrest Work-In Men,’ *Tribune*, April 6-10, 1973, 2.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Work-ins in Melbourne,’ *Tribune*, November 6-12, 1973, 12.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

gap by Walter Scott, and the contest between managerial and union authority at the enterprise level.

This crisis of capitalist credibility at the enterprise level was felt sharply in the automotive industry, where riots and wildcat strikes occurred between 1971 and 1974. Tom Bramble describes a 'crisis of authority' at the GM-Holden Elizabeth plant in Adelaide in these years.¹⁸⁹ In August 1971, a worker was dismissed for 'refusal of duty' at the GM-Holden Pagewood plant in Sydney, resulting in an immediate stoppage of all workers in the floor section. Such was the desire of plant management to continue production that, at the threat of a walkout, they sent a car to retrieve the man to reinstate him.¹⁹⁰ A VBEF member was jailed for refusing to take the sack from the Chrysler plant in Tonsley Park in 1975. After Chrysler retrenched fifty tradesmen in March, Peter Arend continued to work for a month until his arrest. His actions were endorsed by mass meetings in the press shop and by the shop committee, though they were bitterly condemned by VBEF officials, prompting the VBEF State Secretary for South Australia to declare that: 'We are fighting a struggle within the union, the struggle is between the VBU Executive and the rank-and-file committee.'¹⁹¹ As in other areas of workers' control, the power of rank-and-file union structures was closely related to the confidence of workers to refuse managerial prerogatives.

AMWU members, most active in shop committees among metal unionists, were most likely to check retrenchments. At Clydemaster in Melbourne, AMWU members had 'a reputation [...] for resisting any attempts by management to sack them', and had established the right for the shop committee to be informed of proposed retrenchments by management.¹⁹² These arrangements were common.

¹⁸⁹ Bramble, 'Conflict, Coercion and Co-option,' 142.

¹⁹⁰ 'G.M.H. Jack-Up,' *Tribune*, August 11, 1971, 4.

¹⁹¹ Renfrey Clark, 'Car worker Jailed for Refusing the Sack,' *Direct Action*, April 24, 1975, 5.

¹⁹² 'Clydemaster Bosses Pay for Sacking 25,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, September 1976.

Derber, who surveyed twenty metal trades employers between 1969 and 1976, drew the conclusion that 'the most significant change [...] observed between 1969 and 1976 was in respect to terminations,' that '[i]ncreasingly [...] unions have challenged management freedom to discharge employees arbitrarily' and '[a]s a consequence, most of the companies in the survey had developed some special procedure to deal with discharge.'¹⁹³ The existence of 'special procedures' for retrenchment involving shop committees raises the question of class collaboration, whereby workers cooperate in their dismissal. However, in the shifting frontier of control, they are better conceived as representing an increment in the expansion of the rights of shop committees, as a nascent expression of workers' power.

Job organisation was crucial to control over sackings, though such actions sometimes occurred spontaneously, separate even from shopfloor union structures. During the work-in at Tulloch Limited, rank-and-file workers defied their own shop committee, who proposed to a mass meeting that retrenchments be accepted in exchange for settlement terms. The proposal was sharply rejected by workers, who 'walk[ed] back on to the job with the retrenched men, defying the company.'¹⁹⁴ The AEU Commonwealth Council declared as early as 1969 that it was 'where workers have been denied timely and adequate leadership on the vital and urgent issues that effect {sic} their lives that action of a spontaneous nature inevitably develops [...] and that such spontaneous action takes place despite shop committees, not because of them, and in most cases where shop committees do not even exist.'¹⁹⁵ A series of work-ins to resist dismissals involved AMWU members at the Sydney Opera House in 1972. Tensions escalated after a fitter was dismissed for a misdemeanor, only to be 'taken

¹⁹³ Derber, 'Changing Union-Management Relations,' 15.

¹⁹⁴ Mick Tubbs, 'For right to work & not some "right" to fire,' *Tribune*, November 17, 1971, 4.

¹⁹⁵ Addresses, Reports and Decisions of the First Commonwealth Conference, AEU Melbourne District Committee, May 1969, Box 1, 1987.0116, University of Melbourne Archives.

back onto the job in defiance of management' and, after three days, reinstated.¹⁹⁶ Several months later, all workers employed on the revolving stage were dismissed during a dispute over job control. By refusing dismissal and continuing work, all retained their jobs.¹⁹⁷ Restiveness and spontaneity was a defining feature of the work-in phenomenon. Rank-and-file workers were apt to defy management on issues of control and discipline, and this carried into defiance of retrenchments.

The work-in emerged in the context of a surge of occupations and blockades against retrenchments, as further indication of the strains in capital-labour relations. While production did not necessarily continue—which is the defining characteristic of the work-in—Alan Tuckman notes that the factory occupation nonetheless raises 'inherent issues of control' as 'workers [are] appropriating, however temporarily, the means of production'.¹⁹⁸ A high-profile occupation of the Brisbane Pillar Naco plant in June 1973 reflects the nature of factory occupations during the period. A proposal by Conzinc Rio Tinto to close the plant provoked swift reaction from workers: '[a] meeting was called immediately, with 600 to 700 workers present, where workers decided to stage a sit-in strike, demand the reinstatement of the 91 dismissed and a withdrawal of dismissal notices to the other 71.'¹⁹⁹ The sit-in lasted several days, supported by mass meetings and a blockade of the factory gates to avoid removal of equipment.

Resistance to retrenchments circulated with social activism. A blockade of the Draffin-Everhot stove factory in 1975, for example, was reinforced by members of a woman's liberation group after all women were targeted for retrenchment, resulting

¹⁹⁶ John Wallace and Joe Owens, *Workers Call the Tune at Opera House*, (Sydney: National Workers Control Conference, 1973), 3.

¹⁹⁷ See *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Alan Tuckman, 'Workers' Control and the Politics of Factory Occupation,' in Ness and Azzellini, eds., *Ours to Master*, 285.

¹⁹⁹ Dave Lofthouse, '600 sitting-in in Brisbane plant: Won't take the sack,' *Tribune*, June 23-July 3, 1972, 3.

in reinstatements.²⁰⁰ In June 1978, a hundred and fifty workers at Sanyo in Albury-Wodonga, largely women, voted to resist the retrenchment of thirty of their peers. Workers slept in the canteen for ten days to avoid lockout. The dispute ended with the company agreeing to reinstate nineteen of the thirty retrenched workers.²⁰¹ Unlike work-ins, major occupations to oppose retrenchments reappeared significantly in the early 1980s in response to another wave of closures and retrenchments across industry.

Refusal to accept retrenchments continued as the economy declined and entered recession in late 1974. Although, as the likelihood of reinstatement diminished, the focus of work-ins and occupations often turned to improved redundancy terms. Workers at the Evans Deakin shipyards in Unanderra worked-in for six weeks to avoid closure of the yards in 1973. Workers were eventually compelled to accept redundancy terms, though the action generated 'widespread publicity in the campaign for the right to work'.²⁰² Babcock & Wilcox, a company contracted at Unilever in Balmain, issued dismissal notices to 32 AMWU members in January 1975. At least 22 workers returned the notices and continued work with a distinct awareness of the jobs crisis. In the words of a delegate: 'If Babcock and Wilcox think we're going to join the 270,000 on the dole queue, they've got another thing coming.'²⁰³ Their resolve was insufficient to win reinstatement, nor was it enough to win redundancy pay, which became the focus of the campaign. As a signal of the changed environment, Babcock & Wilcox had retrenched 800 workers with full severance pay in 1973, but refused to consider severance in 1975. Clydemaster workers had slightly more success the following year, achieving generous severance terms

²⁰⁰ 'Everhot Workers Fight the Sack,' *Link*, February 1975. See also Deb Shnookal, 'Sacked Women Picket Everhot,' *Direct Action*, no. 79, 21 February 1975, 7.

²⁰¹ 'Sanyo: One Out All In,' *Link*, August 1978.

²⁰² 'Unanderra workers refuse sack,' *Tribune*, May 29-June 4, 1973, 4.

²⁰³ 'Metal Workers Occupy Balmain Job: Work-In to Stop Sackings,' *Tribune*, January 28, 1975, 4.

after a protracted occupation of the factory over the sacking of 25 workers.²⁰⁴ The work-in—a more serious incursion into capitalist prerogative than the traditional occupation—declined as an aspect of industrial action in the later 1970s before virtually disappearing.

3.3 Control over Health and Safety

Control over OHS conditions by rank-and-file workers emerged as a distinct tendency in the 1970s, characterised by worker self-organisation and imbued with new concerns for ‘quality of life’ issues within social activism. Evan Willis notes of the period that ‘the occupational health and safety movement might be seen as part of a general public/environmental health movement’ which had the effect of ‘raising worker and trade union consciousness and rendering ineffective the traditional managerial means of coping with occupational and health and safety hazards’.²⁰⁵ The editors of *Link* also perceived a circulation of social struggles with issues of class, arguing that ‘[c]ontrolling the hazards at our places of work must be the first step to changing a society that undermines the health of working class people daily because it puts profits before human needs.’²⁰⁶ As in other areas of workers’ control, control over OHS has older traditions, as trade unions have long engaged in campaigns to improve health and safety. However, ideas of rank-and-file workers directly controlling risks, as opposed to merely demanding improvements, emerged distinctively in the early 1970s and endured until they were submerged beneath legislative changes in the early 1980s that eroded control through external bodies and tripartite committees.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Evan Willis, ‘The Industrial Relations of Occupational Health and Safety: A Labour Process Approach,’ in Lawson Savery and Norman Dufty, eds., *Readings in Australian Industrial Relations*, (Marickville, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 406.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Control over OHS was principally achieved through worker health and safety committees, which existed as functions of shop committees or as independent organs. *Link* regularly ran articles on industrial hazards and the role of rank-and-file workers in reducing them, insisting that '[w]e can control these hazards at our places of work only through an effective shopfloor organisation.'²⁰⁷ An archetypal safety committee operated at Brick and Pipe Industries in Scoresby, established in 1976 and consisting of a shop steward from each union and a staff member from each plant. In a typical action, at the recommendation of the safety committee, workers banned any work involving asbestos and barium carbonate, forcing the company to withdraw the materials. Management cooperated with the safety committee to regulate noise, acting to 'collate information' provided by workers concerning noise levels.²⁰⁸ Safety committees had broad functions. A committee at Repco Universal consisted of shop stewards from Brighton and Burwood, 'an accident prevention officer, a sister [nurse] and personell {sic}.'²⁰⁹ This committee scrutinised conditions across several plants before logging claims with management. Danny Gardiner, a rank-and-file FIA member, describes highly organised forms of worker control over safety on the Westgate Bridge. As well as a safety committee, workers formed a 'rescue team' to assist trapped or injured workers, often using specialised skills to access awkward working spaces that paramedics would struggle to reach. In one incident, the rescue team saved a worker's life after he suffered a heart attack.²¹⁰ The CPA campaigned explicitly on the idea that 'workers' control over safety would seem to be a minimum condition' at Westgate after its catastrophic collapse in 1970.²¹¹ Gardiner recalls that control was established as a natural and predictable response to the collapse of the

²⁰⁷ 'Warning! Work is a Health Hazard,' *Link*, September 1976.

²⁰⁸ 'Shop Conditions at Brick and Pipe,' *Link*, March 1978.

²⁰⁹ 'REPCO Safety Committee Meets,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, September 1976.

²¹⁰ Danny Gardiner, interview with author, 22 July 2014.

²¹¹ 'West Gate Report: Workers' Control of Safety is Key,' *Tribune*, August 11, 1971, 3.

bridge and the failure of management systems for protecting workers. At Westgate and elsewhere, health and safety committees were independent of both management and union leaderships.

Control over OHS was often exercised as a function of existing shop committees. The shop committee at Ford Broadmeadows exacted the right to have noise level testing and toxicity tests conducted in 1976, which *Link* celebrated as 'the first time Fords {sic} have agreed to encroachments on their "sacred right" to run their plants as they see fit.'²¹² Committees clashed with managers in the push to control OHS. In many cases conflict simply arose over the defence of safety personnel. Management at Olex Melbourne dismissed a safety committee nurse in August 1977, only to be forced to reinstate her as a result of strike action.²¹³ In the same month, workers at International Harvester threatened strike action over the dismissal of a factory cleaner employed to dispose of harmful lead chips, winning his reinstatement.²¹⁴ Numerous disputes of this sort occurred throughout the mid-1970s as shop committees infringed on traditional management roles.

Conflict frequently arose between worker committees and specialised company bodies for the regulation of OHS. Prior to the fatal accident at Dunlop mentioned above, union safety officers appointed by the company had resigned due to managerial inaction on safety concerns. The safety committee was thereafter composed of company foremen, and workers widely considered this to be a factor in its failure to prevent the accident.²¹⁵ Management at the Bowater-Scott Paper factory in Box Hill introduced a series of 'safety rules' in 1978, which workers considered to be more concerned with regulating discipline than ensuring safety. When a worker

²¹² 'Workers' Reject Settlement,' *Link: Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, August 1976.

²¹³ *Link*, August 1977.

²¹⁴ 'Lead,' *Workers' Health*, no. 1, 1977, 2.

²¹⁵ 'Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap at Dunlop,' *The Link: Eastern Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, November-December 1976.

was dismissed for breaking the rules, all other workers walked out. At arbitration, the company was ordered to reinstate the worker and enter negotiations with the AMWSU to improve OHS.²¹⁶ At Australian Paper Manufacturers, also in Fairfield, management attempted to ban the AMWSU shop steward, Peter Davey, from attending a union-run health and safety course in December 1975, informing him that he could attend company-run courses instead.²¹⁷ The ban was overturned through strike action. These conflicts reflect the complex nature of struggles around control and autonomy in OHS, demonstrating that independent workers' control was considered necessary to ensuring proper protections. As expressed by an AEU delegate at Commonwealth Engineering (Comeng) in Sydney: 'the hardest part is to get the boss to move, "there's no money for him in health and safety.'" That's why the demand for workers' own safety committees [...] is on the agenda at so many places.'²¹⁸ Workers viewed health and safety as a class issue, not in an abstract sense, but as a result of their immediate experiences.

Worker self-education was a fundamental component of the tendency. At B&D Rolla Door, the 'ethnic' shop committee elected a separate safety committee, members of which attended a safety school coordinated by workers and unions.²¹⁹ The AMWU spearheaded union education in this area, driven initially, according to one delegate, by pressure from shop stewards at GM-Holden Elizabeth, who lobbied intensively for 'the union to recognise the need for union education' from 1967.²²⁰ By 1970, the AMWU coordinated 'health and safety schools [...] for shop stewards', including in the area of 'intervention at the workplace through union safety committees.'²²¹ Self-education took more autonomous forms. AMWU members imposed a longstanding

²¹⁶ 'Bowater-Rot,' *Link*, March 1978.

²¹⁷ 'Chips fly at APM,' *Link*, November-December 1976.

²¹⁸ *Tribune*, May 19, 1971.

²¹⁹ 'First Ethnic Shop Committee,' *Link: Western Suburbs*, March 1977.

²²⁰ Ted Gnatenko, in AMWU, ed. *Talking Back*, 98.

²²¹ *Ibid*, 99.

ban on lead-based paint at the Eveleigh railway workshops in Sydney, resulting in a strike after the Railway Department attempted to break the ban in 1972. Frank Bollins reported that 'shop stewards had themselves gathered information from the union's research centre, Sydney University and the Health Department on the problem of lead poisoning' to properly inform their members before they voted for bans. Bollins further explained that, subsequent to the strike, workers would 'appoint their own on-the-job research officer' and 'won't depend on the department-dominated safety apparatus but will establish their own rank and file safety organisation and set their own safety standards.'²²² Shop committees in the Victorian railways workshops ran their own training—the Central Council of the Combined Rail Unions Shop Committee, for example, conducted education programmes for workers in the use of new equipment.²²³ Workers' control over OHS, not limited to spontaneous, reactive campaigns, was usually supported by stable systems of self-organisation.

The need for self-education contributed to the inception of external organisations to provide workers with advice. The Melbourne Workers' Health Action Group (WHAG), established in 1978, observed in its first publication that 'control of workers' health lies largely with company doctors and managements and the experts they choose to consult,' but 'it is time that the long-suffering workers assumed control of their own health.'²²⁴ This organisation managed a Workers' Health Resource Centre in Carlton for the provision of information and technical assistance on regulations, 'technical and medical matters', particularly in 'analysis of materials' such as asbestos.²²⁵ WHCs were established in Sydney and Queensland, comprised of 'rank and file workers, union reps, professionals (such as doctors, lawyers, educators,

²²² 'Rail workers act on safety,' *Tribune*, August 15-21, 1972, 4.

²²³ Notice to Shop Committees from the Central Council of Combined Rail Unions Shop Committee, 18 January 1971, Records of the Ballarat North Railway Workshops Inter-Union Shop Committee, Box 2, 1979.0159, University of Melbourne Archives.

²²⁴ 'Workers' Health in Workers Hands,' *Workers' Health*, no. 1, 1977.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

etc.), students and other interested persons,' with funding from 'unions, shop committees, individuals, and state and federal governments.'²²⁶ As described by Humphrey McQueen, these organisations sprang 'from the conviction that employment need not be destructive [...] if unions engaged in politics beyond the parliamentary circus.'²²⁷ The Queensland WHC based its activities on 'the principles that 1) it is necessary to organise separately from management and 2) workers are in the best position to recognise the dangers they are faced with.'²²⁸ Moreover, despite receiving funding from unions, WHCs and the like tended to have independence in their activities; a representative of the Lidcombe WHC established in 1977 emphasised that: '[w]e're not directly affiliated with any union or political party.'²²⁹ These initiatives were expressions of control and autonomy beyond the immediate process of production.

External organisations cooperated closely with rank-and-file metal workers. In the area of asbestos, to take one issue, the WHAG investigated health problems at a brake and clutch manufacturing plant related to asbestos, and an investigation revealing asbestos at the Melbourne City Council Power Station resulted in black bans.²³⁰ At the Hazelwood Power Station, workers banned suspected asbestos after consultation with experts from the Workers Health Resource Centre, and demanded '[r]egular paid meetings to discuss health and safety on the job' and 'election of our own workers' Health and Safety Officer in each power station or workshop'' who would be 'responsible to the workers on the job, not the employers.'²³¹ In collaboration with WHAG, workers at Granowski Wheelabrators in Bayswater placed bans on work

²²⁶ *Work Hazards: Bulletin of the Queensland Workers' Health Centre*, no. 1, May 1981, 1.

²²⁷ Humphrey McQueen, *Framework of Flesh: Builders' Labourers Battle for Health & Safety* (Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2009), 130.

²²⁸ *Hazards: Bulletin of the Queensland Workers' Health Centre*, no. 6, April 1982, 11.

²²⁹ 'The Workers Health Centre,' *Link: Western Suburbs*, August 1977.

²³⁰ 'Workers' Health in Workers Hands,' *Workers' Health*, no. 1, 1978. See also 'Power Men at Risk: Doctor,' *Dynamo: Victorian Branch of the FED&FA*, April 1978, 31.

²³¹ 'Asbestos: Criminal Negligence,' *Dynamo*, March 1979, 13.

involving the removal of asbestos dust for three weeks, forcing the company to provide 'very elaborate fully disposal' protective clothing and breathing equipment, and workers handling the dust receive medical checks 'at company expense and on company time.' Workers were able to 'analyse materials' through the Workers Health Resource Centre.²³² The powerful shop committee at Sheraton Fairfield utilised the WHAG to educate its members on industrial deafness and other issues, as did other committees.²³³ The close relationship between shop committees, unions and workers' health groups was generalised. WHCs and OHS committees emerged within similar circumstances and their activities converged. An Industrial Health Workers Group in Sydney distributed literature advising workers on how to establish safety committees: 'you will need strong shopfloor support. You will also need organisation' and 'could form into a rank and file health and safety task force' as 'the start of an ongoing health and safety committee.'²³⁴ Above all, workers' control over OHS was a bottom up tendency in which rank-and-file workers were the active components.

²³² 'Asbestos!' *Link*, March 1978.

²³³ 'Noisy Sheratons,' *Link*, November 1978.

²³⁴ *How to Look at Your Plant* (Sydney: Industrial Health Workers' Group, ca. 1977).

Chapter 4: Control over Work

4.1 Job Control and the Labour Process

Concomitant with the rise of shopfloor organisation in the 1960s, shop committees clashed with managements over issues of job control and arrangement of the labour process. Demarcation and work allocation disputes, rejections of work measure, piece work and other scientific management techniques, sabotage, and resistance to domination by technology were all significant factors in this conflict, continuing into the 1970s. Conflict around job control, like the closed shop system, is not far from the domain of normal trade union activity, having been an aspect of union activity at earlier times, particular during periods of upsurge. Job control was a feature of radical unionism in the late 1910s in Australia, with the 1917 General Strike provoked by the introduction of work measure in the NSW railway workshops.²³⁵ The intensification of job control conflict from the 1960s led proponents of workers' control to attach significance to it in the 1970s as an aspect of workers' control. *ALR* published a 1972 article, originally produced by a Brisbane labour group in 1920, which observed that 'job control is finding an increasing number of advocates [...] because it points in the same direction as the ultimate objective, the ownership and control of industry by the workers', although, even where workers 'do institute job control [...], set up shop committees' and 'resist speeding-up, prevent overtime and generally secure redress', 'there will still remain a wide gulf between such achievement and the ultimate goal of complete control over industry'.²³⁶ This points again to the inextricability of workers' control from union struggle more broadly.

From the late 1960s there occurred a marked increase in disputes over work allocation and classification. In the shipbuilding industry, crisis-level rates of

²³⁵ Balnave and Patmore, 'The AMWU,' 11.

²³⁶ 'Job control in theory and practice,' *The Movement*, vol. 1, no. 8, August 1920. Reprinted in *Australian Left Review*, no. 35, 1972, 29.

stoppages over disciplinary issues in the late 1960s were exceeded only by stoppages due to work allocation.²³⁷ This was also a factor in the severe industrial strife that affected BHP operations from 1969, with construction of a 'roll on/roll off' terminal delayed for almost a year in 1973-74 due to an 'inter-union dispute.'²³⁸ Struggles over job control were expressed as shop-level conflicts between rank-and-file unionists and managers. At AI&S Port Kembla, Erik Eklund observes that the industrial records of the plant begin 'overflowing' in the late 1960s with 'subterranean tactics of job control and subtle resistance, where the key players were rank-and-file union members and plant foremen.'²³⁹ Similar disputes fill the industrial relations records of the massive John Lysaght steel plant in Port Kembla. After a series of stoppages and bans by fitters, including heated confrontations with foremen, a conference was called by the company at which 'it was made clear regarding the shift maintenance Foreman's responsibility in allocating work, that "common sense" would prevail', and unionists would refrain from interference.²⁴⁰ It is true that disputes over job allocation remain a minor imposition on the rights of management. Moreover, as wages rose rapidly, classification disputes were driven significantly by the fact that different work paid different wages. Nevertheless, the surge in job control did not exist in isolation from other control-orientated conflict and reflected a new urge among metal workers to reclaim some power over the work they performed.

Metal workers also became less inclined to tolerate unfulfilling work from the late 1960s. A study by the South Australian Policy Research Group & Political

²³⁷ Victor G. Taylor, 'Sectionalism, Solidarity and Action in Shipbuilding and Shiprepair,' in Frenkel, *Industrial Action*, 71.

²³⁸ *The Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd, Annual Report 1974* (Sydney: Broken Hill Proprietary Company Ltd, 1974).

²³⁹ Erik Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 167.

²⁴⁰ AEU - ASE - Springhill Maintenance - Fork Lift Trucks, John Lysaght Ltd, Sheet Manufacturing Division, 11/1 - 11/5, 1970, John Lysaght Collection, D52, University of Wollongong Archives.

Economy Movement noted that '[d]uring this period absenteeism, labour turnover and industrial disputation reached record levels [...] Workers were sick of alienating and inhuman production lines, filthy factories and low wages, they voted with their feet.'²⁴¹ Major employers in the metal trades were beset by these new challenges. At the Cockatoo Docks in Sydney, another study revealed that serious disputes occurring in 1975 were caused by 'the depressing, and at times, repugnant work tasks that employees are often required to perform' as well as 'the enormous bureaucracy within the dockyard'.²⁴² Stewards at Everhot, a stove manufacturing company, banned jobs at the company's Port Melbourne plant in June 1975 on grounds that 'working conditions at Port Melbourne are terrible.'²⁴³ In the railway workshops, the powerful shop committee network engaged in ongoing confrontations over work quality. A serious dispute eventuated between the Railway Commission and the Ballarat North Railway Workshops over the stripping of fixed wheel wagons on the Lift Roads section, with the shop committee requesting that the entire workshop be renovated and remodeled to improve the quality of work and reduce the 'discontentment of the employees.'²⁴⁴ The Central Industrial Secretariat, a super federation of employer associations including the MTIA and Chamber of Manufacturers, pointed out in 1974 that 'the most fundamental area [...] in which industry is facing social challenges concerning its relationship with its employees, is in respect of the nature of work itself' due to 'conflict between individual fulfilment and the goals of maximisation of productivity' and the 'alleged dehumanisation of work'.²⁴⁵ These changes in the

²⁴¹ Political Research Group & Political Economy Movement, 'Workers, Trade Unions & Industrial Democracy,' *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 3 (1978): 82.

²⁴² Malcolm Pearce, *Dockyard Militancy: A Study of the Conflict between the Navy and the Painters' and Dockers' Union* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, Department of Industrial Relations, September 1980), 9.

²⁴³ 'Everhot: Jobs Rejected,' *Link*, June 1975.

²⁴⁴ F. Knight to Workshops Manager, 31 May, Records of the Ballarat North Railway Workshops Inter-Union Shop Committee, Box 2, 1979.0159, University of Melbourne Archives.

²⁴⁵ *Industry and Society*, ([Canberra?]: Central Industrial Secretariat, ca. 1974), 4.

relationship between capital and labour reflect a growing level of concern among workers for their experiences at the point of production, a necessary precondition for the tendency towards control.

In vehicle manufacturing, discontent with alienating work provoked full-scale revolt. Riots occurred at GM-Holden Elizabeth in 1970 and Ford Broadmeadows in 1973. At GM-Holden, upon advising their members to return to work, VBEF officials, along with managers, were 'physically chased out of the plant and anything movable was thrown at them.'²⁴⁶ These events unfolded independently of union officials. According to an AEU State Secretary report: 'I attended the Elizabeth plant at approximately 9.50a.m. and advised the G.M.H management that I was very concerned that the situation had got out of control of the people handling it [...] I felt that the situation was such that the A.E.U were being pulled into a problem which the people concerned could not control.'²⁴⁷ Supported by AEU delegates, VBEF members stressed the 'need for control over the production line' and opposition to 'arrogance shown by production foremen.'²⁴⁸ Workers won concessions, with the AEU State Secretary applauding the fact that 'these body shop workers of all the 25,000 employees in G.M.H. are the first to have a say in the speed of production.'²⁴⁹ Workers rioted for similar reasons at Ford in 1973, destroying property and turning a fire hose on management offices. As at GMH, AEU officials reported that workers' grievances were centred around '[s]peed of the line, the pressure upon the workers on the line, intolerable manner of Company supervision towards workers on the line.'²⁵⁰ Workers again acted with autonomy from union officials; the AEU State Secretary even suggested that his union's recommendation to workers that they return to work with a five percent wage increase had been a cause of the riot, as it 'did not take into account

²⁴⁶ AEU *Monthly Journal*, April 1970.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵⁰ 'Vehicle Industry Report', AMWU *Monthly Journal*, July 1973, 5.

how explosive was the hatred of the Ford Company by car assembly plant workers [...] almost driven to madness by the pressure of the line [...] only too ready to grab the first opportunity to fight the company.’²⁵¹ As a result of the Ford strike, the Arbitration Commission forced a discussion on the issue of alienation. In the words of a rank-and-file AEU member involved in the strike: ‘I was happy with the ruling on alienation because we, the workers, were alienated between each other and with the product’.²⁵² Bramble observes that the actions of workers at GMH and Ford were a result of the social temper of the early 1970s, of which the spontaneous rejection of degrading work was characteristic.²⁵³

The rejection of degrading work represented a refusal by the worker to allow capitalist determination of the labour process. In his analysis of American automotive workers, American Marxist C.L.R. James concludes that ‘the increase of revolt, wildcat strikes’, if ‘taken to its logical conclusion, means the reorganization of the whole system of production itself.’²⁵⁴ Ron Carli, as a production worker, recounts that workers struck for no clear reason, in the refusal of work itself. As he recalls: ‘it’s just impossible to articulate; *why are we on strike?* [...] It’s the way you’re being treated, the attitude of some of the managers, the way things are. And you just can’t put an actual reason for it, but you’re just so dissatisfied.’²⁵⁵ Sol Marks, a former AEU shop steward, makes similar remarks about a Ford strike in Geelong in 1969, whereupon workers ‘did not know exactly what they were striking about.’²⁵⁶ Antonio Negri, an Italian autonomist Marxist, analyses similar incidents in the Italian vehicle industry and develops a theory of sabotage and its relationship to self-management (using his ideological variant, ‘self-valorisation’). He perceives the two as inextricably linked:

²⁵¹ Victoria State Report, *AMWU Monthly Journal*, August 1973, 23.

²⁵² Sol Marks, in *AMWU*, ed., *Talking Back*, 125.

²⁵³ Bramble, ‘Conflict, Coercion and Co-option,’ 138.

²⁵⁴ CLR James, with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 42.

²⁵⁵ Carli, interview.

²⁵⁶ Sol Marks, in *AMWU*, ed., *Talking Back*, 124.

'Self-valorisation is sabotage [...] Sabotage is the negative power of the positive, its inverse.'²⁵⁷ Both sabotage and self-valorisation 'lead to that moment in which the monstrous autonomy of capitalist power clashes with [...] the autonomous power of the proletariat.'²⁵⁸ Sabotage and the spontaneous rejection of work are common threads in radical labour struggle, re-emerging with renewed demands for workers' control demands.

Scientific management schemes were resisted in the metal trades from their widespread inception in the late 1940s and resistance continued into the 1970s.²⁵⁹ Disputes over time and motion study, during which the movements of workers are timed and determined by managers, appear throughout *Link*. Spontaneity was the key to resisting scientific management. To take one of many such examples, at Tullochs Engineering in Rhodes, where the 1971 work-in occurred, use of time cards by foremen was immediately banned by workers upon its introduction.²⁶⁰ A work standardisation scheme at Boxhill Engineering, in which workers were required to walk along coloured lines within the plant, was abandoned after engineers sabotaged the project. Frank Cherry, an organiser with both the AEU and AMWU, recalls that these workers were 'highly skilled toolmakers [...] from the North of Italy', experienced in taking radical industrial action.²⁶¹ The existence of shop committees was instrumental the success of workers in resisting scientific management. Even later into the 1970s, as shop committees declined in number and influence, struggles over scientific management occurred where committees existed. At Sydney Cooke, a large factory making wire spools in Brunswick, fifty maintenance workers took immediate strike action in 1977 when a foreman put up a bell to regulate the work day, resulting

²⁵⁷ Negri, Antonio. 'Capitalist Domination and Working-class Sabotage', *Working-class Autonomy and the Crisis* (1979): 92-137.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Wright, *Management of Labour*, 85

²⁶⁰ 'They Kept Sacked Delegate on Job,' *Tribune*, October 13, 1971, 4.

²⁶¹ Frank Cherry, interview with author, 18 June 2014.

in its removal.²⁶² Resistance to scientific management fed into the struggles of the 1970s, allowing workers some respite from the excesses of capitalist exploitation.

Metal worker opposition to productivity incentives and piece work also took on new proportions. Incentives schemes received fresh attention in the late 1960s, in Australia and elsewhere. The British IWC argued that productivity bargaining was used 'to destroy workers' controls at the shopfloor [...] and to establish greater managerial authority over the use of labour,' necessitating 'a coherent and co-ordinated counter-strategy' by unions.²⁶³ In Australia, skilled AEU members comprised a vanguard due to their class position, as a 'spearhead of the anti-incentives movement', particularly in 'craft conscious' Newcastle, and in the 'vast majority of cases the spontaneous and successful reaction was the traditional craftman's opposition.'²⁶⁴ Job organisation was crucial to the resistance of incentive schemes. At Gadsden's engineering in Melbourne, four hundred metal workers struck to remove an unpopular bonus scheme measuring worker output, under which 'supervisors would assess the workers' who would be 'paid according to their "value to the company"'.²⁶⁵ When AMWU members at the large Rainsfords engineering plant in Adelaide rejected a 'company merit scheme' through protracted strikes in 1975 and early 1976, the scheme had already been 'overwhelmingly rejected' by members of the conservative ASE.²⁶⁶ Skill level was a determinant factor in job control, perhaps more so than political orientation or union affiliation. Skilled engineers and technicians, represented by both the AEU and ASE, who already worked with a degree of

²⁶² 'Sydney Cooke,' *Link*, September 1977.

²⁶³ Tony Topham, *Productivity Bargaining and Workers' Control* ([Nottingham?]: Institute for Workers' Control, 1968), 1.

²⁶⁴ Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 283-284.

²⁶⁵ 'Bonus canned at Gadsdens,' *Link: North Western Suburbs Metal Workers' Bulletin*, August 1976.

²⁶⁶ AMWU *Amalgamated News*, May 1976, 7.

autonomy given their specialised abilities, were inclined to resist infringements on their autonomy and to seek its expansion.

In contrast to the explosive reactions of unskilled production workers in the vehicle industry, more disciplined disputes occurred between skilled vehicle inspectors and company management over job control. In 1972, vehicle inspectors at GM-Holden in Melbourne struck over the failure of the company to properly inspect vehicles coming off production lines. According to *Tribune*, '[i]nadequate inspection staff meant that the foremen signed the documents without inspection', prompting a stoppage by fourteen AMWU members in demand of 'more inspectors and proper quality safeguards for new car buyers.'²⁶⁷ This reflects not only a propensity for increased control over production by skilled engineers, but also control in the social interest. Such action by plant inspectors was ongoing. In late January 1973, inspectors struck for the right to control temperature levels, claiming that 'proper inspection of cars often requires instruments and gauges to be operated under standard temperatures' and that 'fluctuating temperatures makes control more difficult.' They therefore demanded 'the right to determine what are the proper conditions for them and for their work.'²⁶⁸ Vehicle inspectors, having control over their work in normal circumstances, were inclined to extend this control to encroach on the rights of capital to organise the labour process.

Similar events unfolded at Ford Broadmeadows as late as September 1978, when two shop stewards were dismissed for supporting inspectors in their refusal to accept the new company system of inspecting seatbelts. In response, two hundred and fifty AMWSU members obstructed production lines to demand reinstatement of the stewards. According to one steward, Ron Poole, workers 'immediately formed barriers to prevent production from going ahead' and even 'pushed vehicles back onto

²⁶⁷ 'GMH Stop,' *Tribune*, October 24-30, 1972, 12.

²⁶⁸ 'GMH Heat Battle,' *Tribune*, February 13-19, 1973, 12.

the production line and jostled with company representatives.²⁶⁹ The importance of class composition is even more starkly illustrated in this dispute. Unskilled VBEF members employed on the production lines offered support to AMWSU members, but also informed management that, if their pay was deducted due to the stoppage, they would 'overturn vehicles, use hammers, use forklifts to push over pallets of engines and so on.'²⁷⁰ Such was their spontaneity that Poole described it as 'an on-the-job response not seen before at Broadmeadows,' despite the conflicted history of the plant.²⁷¹ The dismissed Ford stewards were reinstated after three hours and the old method of seatbelt inspection reintroduced as per the inspectors' demands.

Class composition provides a framework for explaining different patterns of worker behaviour in the vehicle industry. Vehicle production workers operated with no control over their work and had little opportunity for direct encroachment. As noted by Garry Phelan, '[t]here is little choice about the work: what is done is done for others, the way they want it, at the quality and at the rate they set. For an assembler, there's no room for creativity.'²⁷² Assembly workers were therefore compelled to react against the means of production itself. In contrast, skilled engineers, having a natural degree of discretion and control in their work, were able to expand control. Furthermore, skilled engineers cooperated with one another, through both the AMWSU emphasis on shop floor organisation and the nature of the work itself, providing an organisational basis for encroachment on capitalist prerogative. It has been suggested that the relationship between high levels of skill and degrees of self-management are mutually supportive. Sergio Bologna, for example, in his analysis of the German factory councils of 1919, concludes that 'self-management could not have had such a wide appeal in the German workers' councils

²⁶⁹ 'Fighting Fords Dictatorship,' *Link*, November 1978.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Garry Phelan, 'Shop Floor Organisation: Some Experiences from the Vehicle Industry,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 78, 1981, 10.

movement without the presence of a labour force inextricably linked to the technology of the working process, with high professional values and naturally inclined to stress their functions as “producers”.²⁷³ In contrast, production workers were typically isolated from one another in their relationship to the means of production, encouraging spontaneity and impulsiveness, as well as alienation and discontent.

Struggles around controlling operations were not limited to mass-manufacturing. In 1976, a dispute occurred at IMCO Containers in Ferntree Gully after worker demands for improvements to the call-back system developed into a conflict over ‘management’s total refusal to consider realistic suggestions about day-to-day running of the factory.’²⁷⁴ In response to the demands, management attempted to dismiss the AMWU shop steward, who worked-in with support from other unionists. The dispute culminated in an occupation of the factory, prompting company concessions. *Link* reported that, in response to workers’ ‘constant suggestions to clear up the call-back problem [...] the bosses McCann and Bennet would cry, “You are trying to run the Factory”’.²⁷⁵ In a larger scale action the same year, a thousand workers ‘forced the giant multi-national Pilbara iron ore company, Hamersley Iron, to concede the right for the workers to have a say in running the company’s operations.’²⁷⁶ AMWU members initiated the dispute, requesting changes to job allocation under a work plan devised by the union. Rejection of the proposals by Hamersley Iron provoked a three-week strike, paralysing the industry, with ‘[t]wenty one iron ore carriers stretched for 32 kilometres outside Dampier Harbour waiting for loading operations to recommence.’²⁷⁷ In a significant concession, the company agreed to the establishment of a new railway workshop at Paraburdoo with union involvement. In both this situation and that at IMCO Containers, workplace

²⁷³ Sergio Bologna, ‘Class Composition and the Theory of the Party,’

²⁷⁴ ‘Bans and Sitdown at IMCO: Lockout Fails,’ *Link*, November-December 1976.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ AMWU *Amalgamated News*, May 1976, 8.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

organisation was instrumental to the success of the campaign; that latter campaign was coordinated by a tightly organised AMWU strike committee.²⁷⁸

At the Shell Oil refinery on the Paramatta River, FEDFA members struggled with company management in a series of dramatic 'shop floor battles' between 1974 and 1978.²⁷⁹ The introduction of new technology catalysed the dispute, with workers banning new equipment until their claims for higher pay were met. At one point, work briefly proceeded under self-management, prompting the intervention of the arbitration commission. Again, the position of these workers in the production process was crucial to their ability to grow their control. As noted by Westcott, due 'to their industrial position and their capacity to mobilise particular tacit knowledge about the job, knowledge that in some cases was exclusive to them,' Shell operators had 'unique access to control over the production process.'²⁸⁰ Moreover, though supported by FEDFA officials, the actions were spontaneous initiatives of the rank-and-file, as is clear in the remarks of an FEDFA steward: 'we had discussions about what we could do instead of striking, everybody's against striking despite what the newspapers print, and we looked at ways of controlling production'.²⁸¹ At Shell and elsewhere, conflict over job control segued into more significant interventions into capitalist prerogative, pointing again to Goodrich's frontier hypothesis. Just as the broader workers' control tendency emerged out of wages and hours struggles, self-management and control over work was in many cases a natural extension of struggles over job control, as they escalated in the climate of the 1970s. As expressed by Goodrich, 'the roots and beginnings of the control demand are in the felt irksomeness of the present system of control, not in a conscious desire for a new field of activity.'²⁸² Demands for a new field of activity were certainly felt by proponents of

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Mark Westcott, 'Worker Control in Oil Industry,' *Labour & Industry*, 405.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 406, 407.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁸² Goodrich, *Frontier of Control*, 35.

workers' control, though for other workers, resistance to managerial control precipitated further encroachment. The syndicalist principle that struggles for workers' control evolve spontaneously in the course of labour activity is given further legitimacy in the context of the 1970s.

4.3 Autonomy and Self-Management

Actions during which workers took full control over their workplaces occurred sporadically throughout the early and middle 1970s, often in the context of the work-in. This tendency towards spontaneous self-management was in part a consequence of the social climate, motivated by an intolerance for the authority of capitalist management at the enterprise-level. This has been a feature of radical unionism historically. As outlined by Goodrich, for the worker, 'what sort of authority he is under, how much freedom he is allowed, how much authority he has [...] becomes most nearly a demand for *control for control's sake* [emphasis original].'²⁸³ More than any other category of action within the workers' control tendency, struggles for self-management were the furthest from anything resembling ordinary trade unionism, though they remained inseparable from it.

In the metal trades, actions during which workers threw off managers and introduced self-management were spontaneous and fleeting, ending with the restoration of managerial authority. During the work-in of November 1971, Harco Steel workers reorganised production under self-management for a period of weeks, in defiance of management and FIA officials. The capacity of Harco workers to self-manage was due to their position as skilled workers with advanced knowledge of the production process. In the words of one employee, it was clear to him and others at the time of the work-in that 'there was work to be done, and that it was the capitalists

²⁸³ Goodrich, *Frontier of Control*, 27.

who did not want it done because they could not profit from it.’²⁸⁴ Harco workers were capable of continuing production without managerial instruction, an obvious condition for self-management, and in the mounting social and economic crisis of 1971 they were inspired to do so.

Self-management at Harco was also a result of self-organisation cultivated in the course of previous industrial struggles during which, according to a delegate, workers ‘gained real experience in their own organisational capacities and started to understand what the class struggle was all about.’²⁸⁵ During a strike over wages in June 1971, for example, Harco workers were ‘expected to do jobs given to them in [...] strike activity’ and were ‘a disciplined bunch’ in doing so.²⁸⁶ This spirit of self-activity would carry into self-management of production. In the same way, self-management was encouraged by the antipathy of FIA officials, who supported the company in its use of the Summary Offenses Act and were distant from shopfloor activity at the factory generally.

Similar circumstances led to self-management by members of the AMWU and BLF during the Sydney Opera House work-in of 1972. In this instance, the revolving stage of the Opera House was completed under self-management for a period of several weeks, with the acceptance of management, after workers ‘dismissed’ their supervisors. Tightly organised job activity occurred in the lead up to workers taking control of the site, pointing again to the relationship between self-organisation and self-management. As discussed above, a worker was kept on the job by other workers after he was dismissed for a misdemeanor, in what was ‘a big step forward in a new and virtually unknown tactic to the men’ and ‘a turning point in the nature of the battles to come.’²⁸⁷ Job control disputes were common at the site, and a black ban over

²⁸⁴ Tubbs and Caldwell, *The Harco work-in*, 2.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

²⁸⁶ Mick Tubbs, ‘Harco Men’s Story,’ *Tribune*, No. 1712, June 30, 1971, 4.

²⁸⁷ Owens and Wallace, *Workers Call the Tune*, 3.

work allocation catalysed the turn to self-management. Sabotage occurred also. When workers could no longer find constructive work to do, they began dismantling the stage, and it was this that provoked managerial concessions. At the Opera House, workers were motivated by an impulsion to assert control over their work entirely, even if that meant destructive work. Clear links can be seen between job control, self-organisation and the imposition of self-management.

In the same month as Harco, FIA and BBS members dismissed supervisors at Byrne & Thomas Installations in Sydney to complete outstanding contracts. In this case, self-management evolved out of a wage claim denied by the company on grounds that it was performing poorly. In response, workers sought to improve productivity at their own initiative. Don Currie, Chairman of the Dispute Committee elected to coordinate the action, reiterated this: 'We showed how work can be done, and done better, without standover or pushing or interference from above.'²⁸⁸ Similar sentiments would emerge from the Sydney Opera House; Owens and Wallace, writing for *Tribune*, noted that 'enthusiasm was unbelievable and work progressed at a rate unknown on the job' as 'the absence of imposed discipline [...] created a harmony [...] that surpassed everyone's expectations.'²⁸⁹ Self-management tends to inspire new enthusiasm for work and is therefore 'more than just a new way of organizing production; it is also the release of human creative energy on a vast scale.'²⁹⁰ In this way again, workers' control in the 1970s sprang from deeper impulses in worker behavior.

The actions of workers at Byrne & Thomas and the Opera House point to the complexities of self-management under capitalist ownership. While these actions served the interests of capitalist profitability in the immediate term, they also stood as embarrassments to capital, making company management redundant and raising

²⁸⁸ 'The Workers Sacked the Boss,' *Tribune*, February 1-7, 1972, 4.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁹⁰ Victor Wallis, 'Workers' Control and Revolution,' 11.

questions about the role of capitalist ownership. It is possible that concessions were made at Byrne & Thomas and the Opera House in an attempt to defuse any potential for further encroachment. As suggested by *Tribune*, 'that the work was done so well by the workers was acutely embarrassing to Byrne & Thomas and was disturbing to other employers.'²⁹¹ Worker autonomy within the labour process would later become a staple of 'worker participation' schemes, where workers were given small freedoms within management controlled systems of production. Where self-management was exercised and imposed by independent shop committees, even when it lifted productivity, employers reacted with consternation and alarm.

In a number of examples, self-management occurred during strike action as a means to minimise public disruption. The Electricity Commission Combined Union Delegates Organisation (ECCUDO), a shop committee network in NSW, maintained power provision in defiance of the Electricity Commission during a major strike over the 35-hour week in 1973. Self-organisation was again important—ECCUDO was organised in the course of the strike itself, as power workers elected delegates from the shopfloor—two at each power station—to continue operation.²⁹² After the NSW Government responded by restricting power supply and forcing stand downs throughout industry, ECCUDO took out newspaper advertisements instructing workers on how to reconnect power at their workplaces, forcing the lifting of power restrictions.²⁹³ ECCUDO maintained autonomy from officials. During a strike in January 1975, the organisation demanded the right to negotiate award claims, rejecting attempts by the NSW Labor Council and officials of all 23 unions in the power industry (excluding the AMWSU and FEDFA) to end the strike.²⁹⁴ In the words of Jack McBean, an industrial officer at the Labor Council, the January 1975 strike was

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² 'Power Workers Under Attack,' *Direct Action*, no. 77, January 24, 3.

²⁹³ Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 46-47.

²⁹⁴ 'Power Workers Under Attack,' *Direct Action*, no. 77, January 24, 3.

'not about wages and conditions' but about ECCUDO 'trying to take the right of their trade unions to negotiate for them.'²⁹⁵ The *Sydney Morning Herald* viewed self-management during strikes as a leading expression of the workers' control tendency, noting that '[w]orkers in the power industry are now controlling, and limiting, Sydney's peak-power supply' and that there was 'talk of extending workers' control to other fields' as '[r]ail workers have been urged to run train services themselves during strikes "thus giving the workers they were taking to work an example of what they could do"'.²⁹⁶ Related events unfolded out of a wage dispute at the Cockle Creek power station in Newcastle. After 'management did not provide staff labor to keep the station operative, as in past strikes, and hinted they might close it down,' the workers 'took over the station.' In the words of *Tribune*: 'The workers will decide what power is produced and where it goes.'²⁹⁷ These actions do not necessarily demonstrate a desire for permanent self-management among workers involved, but indicate the self-management impulse.

Similar incidents occurred during a strike over renewal of the Oil Industry Award between July and August 1972. To supply fuel for essential services, oil workers organised largely by the AMWU and FIA took over core aspects of distribution. As described by *Tribune*, at Newcastle, 'allocation of petrol for essential needs [...] was entirely in the hands of the workers on strike'.²⁹⁸ After pressuring oil companies to accept the agreement, a strike committee consisting of fifteen fitters and two ironworkers allocated fuel supplies to outlets at central locations, and distributed vouchers to the public authorised by the combined oil unions. In one display of union power, even Newcastle Police were forced to request supplies 'for police to get to and

²⁹⁵ Jim McIlroy, 'NSW Power Workers Vote to Drop Bans,' *Direct Action*, no. 78, February 7, 1975, 5.

²⁹⁶ Gavin Souter, 'Sacking the boss: from "working-in" to taking over,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 28, 1973.

²⁹⁷ 'Cockle Creek,' *Tribune*, March 4, 1975.

²⁹⁸ 'How unions looked after the essential services,' *Tribune*, August 8-14, 1972.

from their homes,' with the committee deciding that 'the police should have to travel on a pool system, like everyone else.'²⁹⁹ A range of controls were imposed throughout the industry. For example, upon learning that petrol stations were raising prices and 'black marketing' petrol, the union threatened to black ban any station found doing so. At Wollongong, workers banned all supplies leaving the Mobil depot, but, in response to public protest, requested that the companies release supplies from the BP Endeavour, berthed at Port Kembla, for essential services determined by the trade unions. When the companies vacillated, the unions threatened to take full control of the BP Endeavour to ensure supplies. In the words of the South Coast Labor Council secretary: 'We told them that they would have a new South Clifton on their hands,' in reference to the takeover of a South Clifton coal mine a few weeks prior.³⁰⁰ Elites were alarmed by the characteristics of the oil strike. The Minister for Primary Industries denounced it as 'a straight out blackmail attempt by the union movement to act de facto as the alternative government.'³⁰¹ These remarks demonstrate poignantly the growing prerogatives of unions.

Workers' control during the oil strike was achieved through autonomous rank-and-file cooperation. At Westernport Bay, seamen and refinery workers took over entire sections of their operations to prevent oil companies from breaking the strike. Much of the BP Crib Point refinery therefore came under workers' control, despite the fact that workers there were not under the Oil Industry Award. As outlined by *Tribune*:

'When a tanker would arrive, seamen would ascertain the intended cargo and destination. They would contact shop stewards from the refinery and decide jointly with other workers whether to bring it in or not. [...] On several occasions seamen refused to bring tankers to the jetty. If any undesirable ships

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ 'Unions to free some oil,' *The Herald*, July 26, 1972, 1.

got through, shore workers would refuse to couple the pipelines. And seamen said that if staff labor did the coupling they would not take the tankers away.’³⁰²

Concern for essential services prevailed. At the Esso refinery, seamen allowed a tanker to berth in the interests of essential services, and when the company attempted to move it to service another tanker, ‘workers said they would refuse to uncouple the tanker until it was fully loaded,’ backed by the seamen.³⁰³ The action at Westernport also ‘led the workers to put their organisation on a more permanent basis’, with 40 members of ten different unions continuing to meet regularly, even considering the formation of a Westernport Trades & Labor Council.³⁰⁴ This gives evidence to the point that new forms of worker organisation develop out of class struggle itself. As observed by Sheila Cohen, historically, ‘[a]ll accounts of workers’ councils and similar structures describe them as having been “sparked” in an unpremeditated fashion out of the concrete needs of workers’.³⁰⁵ As discussed, this principle is central to syndicalist tendencies. Rank-and-file organisation at Westernport further positions the events within a broader historical tendency.

Self-management sprang up in a rash of activity between 1971 and 1973, in part due to the social contradictions of the early 1970s and the new absence of the penal powers. However, the presence of shop committees and rank-and-file organisation was instrumental to control. As late as 1978, 1600 workers organised by the powerful shop committee at the Williamstown Naval Dockyard dismissed management and worked for eight days without supervision. These workers developed advanced forms of workplace democracy, electing their own supervisors and determining the allocation of work. When it became difficult to sustain work in the absence of administrators, the workers’ health and safety committee ‘drew up a list of work

³⁰² ‘Westernport: Workers’ Took Over,’ *Tribune*, August 15-21, 1972, 4.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Sheila Cohen, ‘The Red Mole: Workers’ Councils as a Means of Revolutionary Transformation,’ in Ness and Azzelini, eds., *Ours to Master*, 54.

needed to improve dockyard safety' and workers self-managed the maintenance.³⁰⁶ As elsewhere, Williamstown grew out of an ordinary union dispute, in this case over health and safety, after management attempted to reduce the number of lighting electricians working in dark spaces aboard ships. When contractors who refused to work in the dark were stood down, workers responded by rejecting management. As described by a worker interviewed by *Link*, 'the "work-in" was not only over the safety issue but also over the question of who has the right to determine work procedures—the workers through their trade union or the Navy Brass.'³⁰⁷ This again reflects the extension of union prerogative and its basis in ordinary unionism, as characterised the workers' control tendency generally.

In most cases, self-management was intractable from job control and other issues, such as retrenchments and conditions of work. They were invariably characterised, however, by a distinct impulse towards control over work, regardless of the likelihood of any lasting success. This aligns with syndicalist principles, which suggest that workers have a proclivity to seek control over their activities when conditions allow it. As put by one historian, control over work 'reflects no more than the capacity of all humans to think as well as to do' and 'it should not be surprising that workers on occasion take over and run productive enterprises without necessarily having an explicit consciousness or political strategy' as the 'faculties they draw upon for such initiatives are not so much new as they are long suppressed'.³⁰⁸ Self-management therefore begins with the rejection of capitalist organisation of the labour process before moving into more complete forms of workers' control.

³⁰⁶ 'WORK-IN,' *Link*, March 1978.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Wallis, 'Workers' Control and Revolution,' in Azzelini and Ness, eds., *Ours to Master*, 10.

Chapter 5: Social and Political Prerogatives

5.1 Social and Political Prerogatives at the Workplace

Union encroachment into political affairs was a core component of the workers' control tendency, representing its growth beyond the immediate sphere of production. While union political action is common at all times, the upsurge of the early 1970s was rivalled only by the radical unionism of the late 1910s. Ashley Lavelle notes that the 1970s, 'reminiscent of the major industrial upheavals at the end of World War I [...] was a period in which the union movement, by exerting its independence through the success of direct action, was able to reclaim some control over the politicians.'³⁰⁹ Analysis of incursions into political affairs suggests that rank-and-file workers were the force of these actions, but also that efficacy was often contingent on congruence between officials and members. While CPA-aligned union officials were often the impetus behind political interventions, in other instances, incursions into political affairs were made by shop committees and shop stewards acting with relative autonomy from union officials.

The most successful intervention of workers into political affairs was the near total emasculating of anti-strike laws throughout the entire 1970s, in a type of workers' control over legislation. The immobilisation of the penal powers after 1969 was reinforced through related actions in subsequent years. In a direct repeat of the O'Shea case, after seven BBS officials were arrested in 1971, the threat of mass strikes resulted in an anonymous benefactor paying all outstanding fines.³¹⁰ Lavelle notes that, 'as a direct result of union pressure, the [Labor] party leadership was forced spectacularly in 1971 to remove strike penalties from its policy program.'³¹¹ Rank-and-file workers

³⁰⁹ Ashley Lavelle, 'Under Pressure: The Whitlam Labor Opposition and Class Struggle, 1967-1972,' *Labour History*, no. 96 (May 2009): 127.

³¹⁰ 'WA Metal Bosses Move On Unions,' *Tribune*, March 31, 1971, 12.

³¹¹ Lavelle, 'Under Pressure,' *Labour History*, 117.

were the engine of resistance to strike penalties. During a major 1971 strike at Comeng, the use of penal provisions under 32A of the Arbitration Act and stand-down clauses within the Metal Trades Award had become, in the words of one striker, 'the main issue in a dispute which started over wages'.³¹² A statement from the strikers declared that: 'The time to fight the new penal clauses is now, when they first try to use them, and not wait for 20 years, as was done before.'³¹³ Striking Comeng workers believed that the law was being used 'to smash the job organisations not only in Commonwealth Engineering but also in the rest of the rolling stock industry', particularly the Rolling Stock Steering Committee that coordinated the strike, as it had become 'very effective in coordinating the battles of the workers in our industry.'³¹⁴ Officials of unions represented at Comeng actively supported their members. The AEU, BBS and SMWU refused to pay fines associated with the strike, as did the Moulders' Union for a separate strike in 1971, and with the threat of impending strike action, the majority of fines were paid by another anonymous donor.³¹⁵

Such was the level of rank-and-file self-activity around strike penalties that metal union officials were not only regularly rescued by their memberships, but were in many cases compelled to act by their rank-and-file. To coincide with a meeting between ACTU officials and employers on the Comeng strike, for example, a meeting of over seven hundred shop stewards from all metal unions resolved to refuse payment of all fines, regardless of the official decision.³¹⁶ In reaction to a push by employers to have the Whitlam Government revive no strike clauses in 1973, a mass meeting of AMWU delegates in Victoria threatened action, declaring that: 'We are firmly opposed to any agreement or consent award which precludes metal workers from exercising their inherent right to struggle on an individual shop or group basis

³¹² Mick Tubbs, 'Comeng Strikers Tell It the Way it is,' *Tribune*, March 10, 1971, 10.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Pete Thomas, 'That Funny \$6000 Has Cured Nothing,' *Tribune*, May 5, 1971, 4.

³¹⁶ "'No" to the strike fines,' *Tribune*, April 28, 1971, 15.

for improvements in wages rates or working conditions.³¹⁷ The introduction of anti-union legislation by Malcolm Fraser was met with similar opposition, to the point that Fraser was reluctant to use them until the 1980s. As late as June 1979, ten officials of the AMWSU were prosecuted under the Western Australian Police Act for holding a public meeting without permission. Amidst threats of export bans, transport blockades and 'widespread industrial dislocation', another 'anonymous donor' paid all outstanding fines.³¹⁸ The emasculation of anti-strike laws reflects the temper of the organised working class during the 1970s. Supported by robust rank-and-file networks and inspired by the social mood, workers were able to enforce and enlarge an area of worker autonomy from the official industrial relations apparatus. The state resorted to common law to break work-ins, yet the punitive faculties of its arbitration system were rendered immobile in what was a significant expansion of workers' power.

The use of industrial action to check legislation was not confined to anti-strike laws. The Fraser Government's decision to impose levies on Medibank and increase its exposure to private competition provoked widespread stoppages in the metal trades in 1976, including 40,000 workers in Wollongong alone.³¹⁹ A meeting of 1500 shop stewards in Victoria put forward a resolution to support 'weekly stoppages in every State as a move towards generalised national strike action', only for it to be diluted to a single four-hour stoppage by the VTHC.³²⁰ Rank-and-file opposition was expressed through direct action. A rash of strikes occurred in metal shops throughout Victoria to force individual employers to provide health insurance, in response to the 'failure of the campaign to defend Medibank from the Fraser government.'³²¹ At Philip Morris, a cigarette manufacturer, 1200 workers held an immediate twenty four hour

³¹⁷ Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 70.

³¹⁸ Creighton, 'Law and Control of Industrial Conflict,' 145.

³¹⁹ O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 60.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 61.

³²¹ 'Medibank: We Can't Afford to Lose,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs*, July 1976.

stoppage to demand health insurance and established 'a works council representing workers from all unions' for the purposes of organising ongoing action.³²² Within weeks, *Link* could report that 'the campaign to force employers to pay for changes to Medibank is spreading,' with the demand having been quickly won at Trayco Metal Fabricators, Alcoa and by the 'ethnic' shop committee at B&D Rolla Door.³²³

A high level of political and class consciousness drove the campaign among the rank-and-file. *Link* explained that, 'Medibank was destroyed by a government which has the full support of all employer groups', therefore health insurance should be extracted from individual employers as a response.³²⁴ In a similar vein, an AMWU shop steward at Aeron Ventilation responded to the criticism that Medibank strikes were an encroachment upon political affairs, by observing that 'It appears to me that it is impossible to separate political and economic {sic}.'³²⁵ Medibank strikes were widely viewed as an incursion on government prerogatives. Ian Spicer of the Victorian Employers' Federation worried that soon 'it would be necessary for a government to seek trade union approval before being able to implement the policies on which they were elected.'³²⁶ A more accurate jab might have been directed at shop committees within unions, who drove the strikes; only by these means could strikes have spread so quickly and been so successful at the enterprise-level.

Rank-and-file dynamism over Medibank was frustrated by official apathy. O'Lincoln, who attended an AMWU delegates' meeting in Sydney, recalls bitter rank-and-file accusations that 'the national stoppage had been called and run bureaucratically' as 'an unnecessarily top-down affair.'³²⁷ In Victoria, *Link* argued that there was a 'deliberate campaign by certain union officials in the VTHC and ACTU to

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ AMWU *Monthly Journal*, November 1975, 11.

³²⁶ *The Age*, 9 June 1976, cited in O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 64.

³²⁷ O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 65.

sabotage rank and file opposition to Fraser's attack', as shown by the decision of the ACTU not to call a national stoppage, and by the VTHC overriding decisions made by meetings of a Shop Stewards and Job Delegates organisation, which, as emphasised by the editors of *Link*, 'directly represents tens of thousands of workers from all industries [emphasis original].'³²⁸ In contrast, action at the shop floor was decisive. These contradictions highlight the distinctions between members and officials within unions. Rank-and-file workers, worst affected by the reforms, compelled their officials to take action, not always successfully.

In an intriguing response to the recession, metal workers independently secured contracts on behalf of their employers to preserve jobs. After Whitlam ended Australian military involvement in Vietnam, mass meetings were held at Maribyrnong Explosive, Gordon Street Ammunition and Government Aircraft Factory in Victoria to demand alternative work programmes, as defence contracts declined.³²⁹ A mass meeting of all Commonwealth defence workers in September resolved that 'Government establishments should be maintained at full employment capacity and should not have to base their work future on the ebb and flow of the Military requirements of this country.'³³⁰ The meeting resolved that workers would refuse to accept dismissals and that shop stewards would actively investigate alternative work.³³¹ The establishment of an Alternative Work Committee by the Federal Government in 1974 was welcomed, though a mass meeting of defence workers reiterated demands for 'rank and file representation' on the Committee and

³²⁸ 'Rank and File Unity,' *Link*, July 1976.

³²⁹ Minutes of Commonwealth Shop Stewards Meeting, 29 August 1973, Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Eric Persson's Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

³³⁰ Meeting of Commonwealth Workers Resolution, 18 September 1973, Resolutions Carried at Delegate and Mass Meetings, Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Eric Persson's Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

warned that 'Australian Government workers will not accept dismissals'.³³² Defence workers did not wait for Government invitation, resolving that 'each establishment form rank and file committees to collate and process information on alternative work to ensure that the main committee in their considerations are aware of the full potential of each establishment.'³³³ At the Williamstown Naval Dockyards, a shop stewards meeting noted that an alternative work programme for Government defence workers had been an objective of the metal unions for 'a quarter of a century', yet in the circumstances of the early 1970s, the demand took on 'positive and vigorous' proportions.³³⁴ The proposed sacking of 190 workers in 1973 was met with a walk-off, imposition of ongoing overtime ban, consideration of imposing the 35 hour week and calls for 'rallies of all Commonwealth workers in Defence'.³³⁵ A number of similar resolutions were passed imposing checks and controls on the process of sourcing alternative work.

This pattern of activity carried into the private sector. Clydemaster workers, employed on government contracts to build trains, became concerned when only three months' work remained at the workshop and the company had done little to ensure further work. In response, the shop committee organised a meeting with the shadow Minister of Transport, who assisted them in negotiating an extension of the Clydemaster contract for a further fifty four cars. *Link* reported that 'due to their own initiative workers at Clydemaster have successfully fought off the threat of heavy retrenchments and have again shown their bosses something about how their job

³³² 'Government Workers' Right to Work': Recommendation of the Committee,' 22 July 1974, Resolutions Carried at Delegate and Mass Meetings, Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Eric Persson's Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Minutes of Commonwealth Shop Stewards Meeting, 22 August 1973, Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Eric Persson's Papers, University of Melbourne Archives.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

should be done.’³³⁶ After the Harco work-in, ‘ideas of extending control of the Harco management and company were also continually discussed, for example [...] tendering for work in the name of the company, with enquiries to be referred to the boilermakers’ delegate; opening a Trading Bank account in the name of the Harco workers’.³³⁷ In a related action at the Pilkington Glass factory, the shop committee made advances to the Federal Treasurer after the removal of tariffs on glass imports resulted in the retrenchment of sixty six workers in 1975. In response, tariffs were restored and all retrenched workers reinstated, demonstrating, in Purdham’s words, ‘that if you’re strong enough and you’ve got a good argument you can influence government policy.’³³⁸ While lobbying governments is consistent with orthodox trade unionism, direct action and pressure by shop committees were more particular to the 1970s.

Major metal unions banned certain development projects at the official level to assure work for their members. The FIA leadership black banned a proposed gas pipeline running from the Moomba gas fields in South Australia to Sydney unless Australian manufacturers were contracted to provide the steel. Mass meetings of FIA members were held within hours of an announcement that three Japanese companies had been contracted by Australian Gas Light Company to provide steel, prompting FIA leadership to announce that ‘[a]pproaches are to be made to the AGL and the Commonwealth Government to see if the position can be altered’ and ‘[i]f there is no change in attitude, AGL and the Commonwealth Government are to be informed that members of the FIA will not carry out work on this job.’³³⁹ Official responses such as this point again to a degree of congruence within trade unions on certain issues. In this case, the alignment of interests between members and officials brought the

³³⁶ ‘Clydemaster: Workers Act to Secure Jobs,’ *Link: Easter Suburbs*, May 1978.

³³⁷ Mick Tubbs, Lloyd Caldwell, *The Harco Work-in*, 18.

³³⁸ Purdham, interview.

³³⁹ ‘Pipeline talks with Japanese union leaders,’ *Labor News*, vol. 27, no. 199, September 1972, 1.

organisation more fully into forms of direct encroachment. In the case above, the success of the action was perhaps contingent on this cooperation.

Securing work on behalf of employers has appeared as a feature of radical labour activity during other periods, often provoked by crisis. For the Russian factory committees of 1917, the 'most frequent incursion into managerial prerogative was not, in fact, to assert "control" but to obtain fuel and materials for their plants, sometimes orders and finances as well.'³⁴⁰ British shop stewards acted similarly in what Goodrich asserts was a significant challenge to capitalist prerogative given that '[t]he employer is sometimes spoken of as the man who finds jobs for workers.'³⁴¹ The act of securing work is simultaneously one of ensuring profit for employers and has been a point of controversy. The activities of the Russian factory committees 'raised the thorny issue of class collaboration'.³⁴² However, workers were 'prepared to cooperate with management to save jobs, but they insisted on guarantees of good faith in return,' which was 'the role of control'.³⁴³ Struggles of this type further reflect a contest over the rights of capital to determine the volume and provision of work, in contexts of heightened worker awareness of their independent power. Such awareness is necessary to self-management, if not an incipient step towards it.

At times, worker intervention into the employment relationship threatened private ownership through demands for nationalisation of large companies. In August 1973, as stewards were developing arrangements for alternative work, the AMWU reported that workers at Government Aircraft Factory and Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation held '[m]ass meetings involving several thousand workers [and] supported the demand for nationalisation of the industry.' It was reported that 'a very

³⁴⁰ David Mandel, 'The Factory Committee Movement in the Russian Revolution,' in Ness and Azzelini, eds., *Ours to Master*, 114.

³⁴¹ Goodrich, *Frontier of Control*, 63.

³⁴² Mandel, 'The Factory Committee,' in Ness and Azzelini, eds., *Ours to Master*, 115.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, 116.

active coordinating committee has been established among workers from all plants and includes representatives from both the blue and white collar areas,' for the purpose of discussing nationalisation.³⁴⁴ The issue lay beneath the surface of other disputes. During the 1972 Pillar-Naco occupation, a mass meeting of the 700 workers demanded the reinstatement of retrenched workers and, if this could not be guaranteed, that 'the government should take the factory over'.³⁴⁵ During an action at a Melbourne food processing plant, Wattie-Pict, in 1974, an AMWU shop steward, Greg Pettiona, rebuked the Whitlam Government for neglecting the issue of nationalisation, claiming that, '[w]hen Labour first came to power, everyone was talking about nationalisation,' but that they had since 'forgotten who they represent', 'that they are the political wing of the trade union movement.'³⁴⁶ Demands for nationalisation ran through the 1973 work-in at Evans Deakin. In response to the announcement that the shipyards would close, a mass meeting of 800 workers 'called on the Federal Government to take over the shipyards and run them as a Government enterprise with worker involvement in management.'³⁴⁷ Other examples reveal that nationalisation was a resurgent issue in the early 1970s, perhaps reflective of the broader crisis in capitalist credibility. It further demonstrates that workers were concerned with ownership as well as control, achieved through direct worker ownership through cooperative models, but also through nationalisation.

5.2 Workers' Control beyond the Workplace

From the late 1960s, trade unions escalated their incursions into government policy beyond industrial issues, imposing a degree of control over politicians. Strikes and

³⁴⁴ 'Aircraft Industry,' *AMWU Monthly Journal*, August 1972, 25.

³⁴⁵ Dave Lofthouse, '600 sitting in Brisbane plant: Won't take the sack,' *Tribune*, June 27-July 3, 1972, 3.

³⁴⁶ 'Greg Pettiona discusses attacks on militancy,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs*, December 1974.

³⁴⁷ 'Evans Deakin: Take it over say dockers,' *Tribune*, April 10-16, 1973, 4.

black bans were imposed by metal workers in opposition to conscription and Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. In September 1969, after Laurie Carmichael was arrested at an anti-conscription protest in Melbourne, 500 workers at the Williamstown Naval Dockyard stopped work and the Victorian rebel unions threatened ongoing strike action, securing Carmichael's release.³⁴⁸ Mutual support between members and officials was strong in the BBS, whose members threatened nationwide stoppages if their federal or assistant secretary were jailed for signing a statement encouraging men to defy the National Service Act.³⁴⁹ Workers in the metal trades engaged in 'Stop Work to Stop the War' campaigns to support the massive anti-war Moratoriums throughout 1970-1971. These campaigns were also contingent on close cooperation between union officials and members in left-wing unions such as the AEU. Frank Cherry notes that he and other officials would regularly visit Victorian metal factories to discuss the war with members before voting to stop work, and that rank-and-file education was vital to the campaign. He contrasts the activity of the AEU with that of the conservative ASE: '[the ASE] weren't politicising their members. They didn't think it was appropriate to be involved with the members politically, whereas the AEU [officials] deliberately went out and were political.'³⁵⁰ The anti-war Moratorium was dependent, in the words of the Metal Trades Federation anti-war organiser, upon 'rank and file organisation plus official union assistance.'³⁵¹

Official opposition to war and militarism was common to all left-wing metal unions. Proposals to build the American Omega satellite base provoked threats of union bans in August 1973. FEDFA officials declared that 'unionists have a responsibility to see that their labor is not devoted to anti-social ends' and 'we will recommend to our members that they refuse to supply their labor for the

³⁴⁸ Malcolm Saunders, 'The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73,' *Labour History*, no. 43 (1982): 69.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Cherry, interview.

³⁵¹ Brian Dunnett, 'On-the-job organisation vital,' *Tribune*, February 17, 1971.

prefabrication of materials, or for the actual construction, of an Omega installation in this country.’³⁵² Bans were applied spontaneously and from below. As early as 1967 rank-and-file metal unionists banned work on the plane used by the South Vietnamese dictator Air Marshall Ky.³⁵³ Tony Robins, an ETU steward at the Cerberus Naval Dockyard, recalls bitter conflicts between Navy personnel and civilian maintenance workers at the base, stirred up by the War. In opposition to Naval Police targeting young unionists with speed cameras, a black ban was placed on maintenance work at the Officers’ toilets. In Robins’ words:

we’re not going to be bullied by people who think they’re in authority [...] So we black blanned the police headquarters and their toilets blocked up, and we wouldn’t fix them. And they had sewage running out [...] They’d bring in a contractor; we’d stop the contractor at the gate.³⁵⁴

Shop committee organisation facilitated more premeditated responses. In 1968, the Central Council of Railway Shop Committees moved ‘to refuse to make union records available for pinging on young men courageous enough to refuse to be conscripted for foreign wars.’³⁵⁵ These actions were direct applications of workers’ control at the point of production to protect both Australians and Vietnamese affected by the war. They served to consolidate a culture of solidarity between union members and a sense of organisational autonomy on political questions.

Similar dynamics carried into other areas. Struggles for Aboriginal self-determination re-emerged powerfully after 1968, circulating with opposition to sporting contact with South Africa and anti-mining movements. The ACTU was called

³⁵² ‘Trade Union Submission on the Proposed Omega Installation to Foreign Affairs Committee, Australian Parliament,’ *Dynamo*, Vol. 3, No. 3, August 1973, 6.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ Robins, interview.

³⁵⁵ Correspondence 1968-1970, Central Council of Railway Shop Committees, 29 May, 1968, Records of the Ballarat North Railway Workshops Inter-Union Shop Committee, Box 2, 1979.0159, University of Melbourne Archives.

upon by member organisations to ‘impose a “dual boycott” in the fight against racism’ against the South African Rugby team and two companies (Vesteys and Nabalco) for acquiring Aboriginal land on the Gove Peninsula in 1971.³⁵⁶ The AEU, BBS and SMWU did not wait for the ACTU decision, becoming the first unions to impose bans on ‘negotiation with any companies seeking awards or agreements for construction of plants for the purpose of plunder of natural resources on land claimed by Aborigines,’ by boycotting Vesteys and Nabalco.³⁵⁷ Victorian metal workers had offered support to striking Gurindji workers years before the official bans, organising funds for their strike action throughout 1968.³⁵⁸ The anti-apartheid movement received strong support from union officials, even from the ACTU. In stark contrast to its tepid support for anti-war activities, the ACTU urged its affiliate organisations to take ‘whatever action is necessary as an act of conscience’ to disrupt the South African rugby team in its tour of Australia in 1971.³⁵⁹ As always, rank-and-file spontaneity was a factor in this campaign. In response to the Queensland Government imposing new police powers to manage the South African rugby tour of 1971, unions across the state imposed bans and strikes. These actions were driven by the rank-and-file—*Tribune* reported that ‘metal and other workers at the [Brisbane] Exhibition Ground itself, centre-point of the “state of emergency” and of police activity, have been on strike, refusing to work under Police State conditions.’³⁶⁰ These actions and others on the issue were endorsed by the Queensland TLC.

Green bans were perhaps the most advanced expressions of control beyond the workplace and were characterised by a similar congruence between rank-and-file spontaneity and official support. In the construction industry, the CPA-dominated

³⁵⁶ ‘The Scandal of Gove,’ *Tribune*, May 5, 1971.

³⁵⁷ Union Embargo Call, *Tribune*, May 5, 1971, 7.

³⁵⁸ ‘Levy to Support Striking Aborigines,’ *Dynamo: Official Organ of the Federation Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association*, Vic. Branch, Vol. 2, No. 7, October 1968, 19.

³⁵⁹ Saunders, ‘Trade Unions and Opposition to Vietnam,’ 71.

³⁶⁰ Pete Thomas, ‘Unions Lash Back at QLD. ‘Emergency’ Move,’ *Tribune*, July 21, 1971, 3.

leadership of the NSWBLF favoured direct encroachment, but this does not explain the broad rank-and-file rebelliousness that gave it impetus. Haskell partly attributes the green ban phenomenon to the political orientation of NSWBLF leadership, but admits the union was characterised by ‘adherence to principles of participatory democracy’ and was ‘anarchic’, quoting a contemporary CPA observer who described BLF members as having ‘contempt for organization and leadership’ and displaying ‘the ultrademocracy of spontaneism’.³⁶¹ Members of metal unions displayed similar characteristics. Malcolm Macdonald, who was present at the first green ban imposed in Victoria, notes that it was the result of spontaneous refusal of work by members of FEDFA.³⁶² Members of the AMWU and FEDFA were also among workers to ban commercial development of the historic Rocks area of Sydney in September 1972, resisting the eviction of residents, at independent worker initiative.³⁶³

In tandem with this rank-and-file enthusiasm, metal union leaderships imposed environmental bans during the early 1970s that have been submerged beneath the history of explicitly-named ‘green bans’. *Tribune* reported in 1971 that the ‘26 “rebel unions” in Victoria [...] have taken action on a number of issues of the environment and of social importance’, including bans on the construction of ethane pipelines under Port Phillip Bay and ‘industrial development of Victoria’s Westernport Bay’.³⁶⁴ The article points also to bans on the Clutha coal project by NSW unions and attempts ‘to protect the Barrier Reef and Cooloola Sands’ in Queensland.³⁶⁵ In NSW, the AMWU imposed environmental bans along the Hawkesbury River, namely at Botany Bay and the Chullora Container Depot. Frank Bollins acknowledged broad rank-and-file support for these actions; workers would ‘as a matter of

³⁶¹ Haskell, ‘Green Bans,’ *Industrial Relations*, 209-210.

³⁶² MacDonal, interview.

³⁶³ ‘Metal Men’s Rocks Ban,’ *Tribune*, September 5-11, 1972, 12.

³⁶⁴ ‘Challenge Unions’ Right to Act on Environment,’ *Tribune*, September 29, 1971, 3.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* See also Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 230.

conscience, drive the machines, turn on the tap, wield the axe and saw — or as a matter of conscience, refuse to do so, and so prevent the project from proceeding.’³⁶⁶

Beneath official union bans was a raft of enterprise-level challenges to environmental degradation. Delegates of the AEU, BBS, ETU and FEDFA employed in the Queensland sugar industry, ‘elected from mills and financed by job collections’, organised for ‘environmental control’ and reduction of ‘pollution and noise’ which were together ‘a disability for the communities’.³⁶⁷ At the Midlands Railway Workshop in WA, ongoing strike action by members of the BBS and ETU over ‘the nauseating smell coming from a nearby meat-processing plant’ resulted in legal action against the abattoir.³⁶⁸ Shop committees took active concern with transport pollution. Combined Unions Committees in the Victorian railways offered a detailed critique of the Victorian State Government’s transport plan in 1970, which prioritised development of new freeways at the expense of public transport, concluding that the Government plan would cause ‘greater congestion on the roads and enormous pollution’, with ‘the motor car - oil - rubber - cement - steel complexes [...] the major beneficiaries of the “plan” and not the people.’³⁶⁹ The Newcastle AMWU branch defended interventions into public transport on grounds that ‘[o]rganisations of the people, trade unions (the Builders Labourers are already doing good work on this is Sydney) [...] must today look at any of their problems [...] Because, what use are bigger wages, better education, etc., if you drop dead from environmental stress’.³⁷⁰ These examples reflect a surge in rank-and-file concern over the impact of

³⁶⁶ ‘Roads—Pipes and Wires: A Union Viewpoint,’ *AMWU Monthly Journal*, 18-19.

³⁶⁷ ‘The Industrial Front,’ *Tribune*, April 7, 1971, 10.

³⁶⁸ J. McIntyre, ‘Midlands Railway Workshop,’ *Tribune*, March 20-26, 1973, 4.

³⁶⁹ ‘The Melbourne Transportation “Plan”’, Correspondence of the Central Council, 1970, 1979.0159, Records of the Ballarat North Railway Inter-Union Shop Committee, University of Melbourne Archives.

³⁷⁰ ‘Transport and the Future: How it affects Newcastle,’ *The Newcastle Metal Worker: Official Organ of the AMWU Newcastle Branch*, vol. 1, no. 2, ca. 1972, 7.

environmental issues on working people, as well as the role of workers in resolving them.

In Victoria, the most dramatic dispute over the environmental consequences of commercial development occurred over the Newport Power Station, in a campaign that also precipitated the decline of workers' control in the context of the recession. All left-wing metal unions imposed bans on proposed construction of the station from 1974 on grounds that it would be a heavy polluter. Officials vacillated, however, and the project was eventually completed with union labour despite formal bans. Unemployment put workers under new pressure, while union officials 'made no serious effort to mobilise them'.³⁷¹ Despite this, O'Lincoln notes that 'the issue struck a chord with ordinary workers'.³⁷² *Link* reported on rank-and-file pickets of Newport during its early construction and black bans on companies supplying labour and equipment to the site.³⁷³ Danny Gardiner, as an FIA member employed laying steel with Johns & Waygood, refused to work on a contract the company had at Newport and was dismissed.³⁷⁴ Gardiner recalls that conflict among workers over Newport was vicious, particularly as unemployment ratcheted up pressure on workers—when a close friend of his took a job at Newport, Gardiner ended the friendship.³⁷⁵ A worker was chased out of the Williamstown dockyards when it was discovered he had worked on construction of the power station.³⁷⁶ While the issue was divisive, large number of metal workers were willing to act independently to oppose the construction of Newport.

Action on Newport was widely perceived as another union encroachment on capitalist and state prerogative. AMWU organiser Ed Micaleff responded to criticisms

³⁷¹ O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 93.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ 'Newport,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs*, September 1977.

³⁷⁴ Gardiner, interview.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 93.

that his union was overstepping its responsibilities in an interview with *Link*, and his remarks demonstrate the radical nature of resurgent political unionism during the period. Micaleff asserted that

the Medibank stoppage [...] penal clauses' struggle [...] workers' compensation [...] that's a political issue. The Arbitration court is set up by a political act. Your whole life is politics. [...] We have a right to say as much as a politician who is elected once every three years [...] in some cases, trade unions represent a large proportion of the community than an elected government. On some issues, a more democratic perspective is being put by organised trade unions than a minority, gerrymandered elected government.³⁷⁷

These attitudes have a syndicalist resonance and point to the self-conscious encroachment into political affairs. The failure of the Newport campaign does suggest a weakness of official unionism as a vehicle for workers' control, as rank-and-file reliance on official mobilisation proved decisive in allowing employers and the state to gain an advantage. As well, it illustrates the corrosive effects of unemployment on workers' control and trade unionism generally. The demise of the campaign was something of a symbol for the demise of workers' control.

Metal unionists vigorously challenged prices, particularly after rises associated with the 1973 oil spike. A mass demonstration took place in Melbourne during the 1973 referendum on price controls, in what FEDFA officials described as 'the most broadly based union group ever brought together in Victoria,' in support of the 'granting of full power to the Commonwealth to control prices.'³⁷⁸ Despite the failure of the referendum, there were stirrings of direct action. A meeting of over two hundred shop stewards in Victoria endorsed shopfloor action, including 'setting up an ongoing organisation to organise: Consumer Boycotts, Protest Rallies, Lunch Hour

³⁷⁷ 'Newport: Whis is Fraser so Determined?' *Link: North Western Suburbs*, December 1976.

³⁷⁸ Prices Protest, *Dynamo*, vol. 13, no. 3, August 1973, 13.

Meetings [and] taking of industrial action where necessary.'³⁷⁹ AMWU shop stewards held workplaces meetings and established a sub-committee to give direction to the union leadership on a campaign to institute price controls. In the words of a Newcastle AMWU shop steward, members were 'looking for a situation where, short of nationalisation, only a minimum price enabling just a reasonable profit margin should be permitted.'³⁸⁰ The material concerns behind these actions point further to the relationship between the concrete needs of workers and workers' control.

Worker self-education was again a necessary step towards action. In 1967, Victorian Railway shop committees participated in a study of prices and profits among major metal industry employers, particularly the 'main monopoly groups' such as BHP and ACI.³⁸¹ *Link* also adopted the tactic of exposing prices during disputes over wages. For example, during a wage dispute at Cadbury-Schweppes, *Link* scandalised the company by revealing that it had increased advertising directed at children to skirt price controls.³⁸² The CPA advocated action against price rises and in favour of price control as direct encroachment strategies, arguing that capitalism 'centres on the right of the capitalist owner to hire, fire and set the price of his product' and 'any tampering these "rights" is at the heart of the class struggle.'³⁸³

In the lead up to the dismissal of the Whitlam Government during the constitutional crisis of 1974-75, price control took a form closer to self-reduction. In response to the blocking of supply by the Federal Opposition and the withholding of Commonwealth employees' wages, Commonwealth shop stewards called for a

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Norm McKenzie, 'What are we looking for when we say price control?', *Newcastle Metal Worker*, vol. 1, no. 2, ca. 1972, 3.

³⁸¹ AEU-BBS Combined Research Centre, Bulletin 4/67, 11 September 1967, Records of the Ballarat North Railway Workshops Inter-Union Shop Committee, Box 2, 1979.0159, University of Melbourne Archives.

³⁸² 'A Pint and a Half of Full Cream Profit,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, August 1976.

³⁸³ Alec Robertson, 'Price Control needs Workers Control,' *Tribune*, February 3, 1971, 5.

moratorium on all Government charges, including rents and electricity payments, for Australian Government employees.³⁸⁴ Stewards pressured the Postal Commission to suspend telephone charges and established 'a full-time distress and assistance committee' to administer relief to workers affected by loss of wages.³⁸⁵ The campaign was handed to the ACTU, in whose hands it languished. Similar contradictions affected union responses to the final dismissal of Whitlam. In Melbourne, a mass meeting of Commonwealth workers voted for strike action to oppose the 'attack on the basic democratic principles of the Australian people' by the Opposition. Again, the meeting pledged support to 'any industrial action called for by the A.C.T.U.', none of which was forthcoming.³⁸⁶ In contrast, the dismissal provoked a wave of shop-level strikes. According to *The Australian*, 'metalworkers in factories throughout the country held spontaneous strikes and employees in railway workshops in Sydney and Newcastle also walked off.'³⁸⁷ At the Garden Island dockyards there occurred 'many protest stoppages' and workers were 'extremely indignant' and restive months later.³⁸⁸ It is notable that the immediate response of Commonwealth workers was to self-organise in defence of their own interests through direct action, before later coming to the defence of the government. While rank-and-file action was decisive, the official response was fumbled by the ACTU.

Interestingly, the dismissal of the Whitlam Government contributed to a distinctive anti-parliamentarianism among left-wing unionists, while extra-

³⁸⁴ Meeting of Officials and Stewards, Australian Government Factories, 7 November 1975, Records of the Combined Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Box 1, 1979.0113, University of Melbourne Archives.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Australian Government Workers' Resolution, Festival Hall, 27 October 1975, Records of the Combined Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria, Box 1, 1979.0113, University of Melbourne Archives.

³⁸⁷ *The Australian*, November 12, 1975, cited by O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 44.

³⁸⁸ Malcolm Pearce, *Dockyard Militancy: A Study of Conflict between the Navy and the Painters' and Dockers' Union* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Department of Industrial Relations, September 1980), 5.

parliamentary political action by unionists continued. Rawson notes in his 1977 study that 'unionism is becoming more concerned with political questions' while 'the most distinctive form of union political activity among Australian unions is showing some signs of atrophy', namely 'union political partisanship, in the sense of permanent, public support for one political party [the ALP].'³⁸⁹ There is 'now a large body of evidence [...] that most unionists do not approve of their affiliation of their unions to a party.'³⁹⁰ Rawson speculates as to the reasons for the trend, offering '[l]ack of information, or lack of interest' as explanations.³⁹¹ While various factors account for the decline, such attitudes align with older currents of radical unionism. Workers' control was a tendency in which worker organisations were perceived as means for industrial, social and political influence, in place of the ALP or any other external organisation.

Union encroachment into political prerogatives continued into the later 1970s, although, with the large-scale decline in shop committees, self-activity increasingly gave way to official responses, with limited effect. The failure of the anti-uranium movement towards the end of the decade came at a time when 'a pattern of defeat began to emerge for the labour movement generally' and 'workers had lost confidence in their ability to win large, set-piece struggles'.³⁹² Crises in 1975-76 and 1981, the employer rollback under Fraser and the impact of the ALP-ACTU Accord from 1983 gradually served to limit the scope of union activity away from broader social concerns to more immediate issues such as defense of employment and conditions.

³⁸⁹ Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 80.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 91.

³⁹¹ *Ibid*, 94.

³⁹² O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 93.

Chapter 6: Crisis and Decline

6.1 Economic Crisis and the Employer Offensive

Workers' control declined as an aspect of industrial relations from the mid-1970s. The Australian economy slipped into recession in late 1974 and economic conditions remained weak until a brief upturn in 1979, before recession struck again in 1981.³⁹³ The crisis was most severe in manufacturing, worsened by tariff reductions which forced companies to rationalise or outsource production to compete with foreign imports.³⁹⁴ By December 1974, metal unionists estimated that jobs were being lost in manufacturing at a rate of a thousand per day.³⁹⁵ The trend was ongoing, with 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost between 1974 and 1984.³⁹⁶ Unemployment had an immediate impact. In particular, it upset the confidence of workers' to take action in pursuit of control-type demands as employers became less likely or able to grant concessions. Employers responded to declining profits by reasserting prerogative, particularly in the area of retrenchments. John Halfpenny remarked in December 1974 that 'there have been some struggles [against retrenchments]' but

none of them have been very successful [...] In 1971, for example, we were able to mount quite an offensive [...] we also had the dual problem of inflation and unemployment. What is different today is the magnitude of these problems'.³⁹⁷

By 1976, companies enjoyed 'considerable flexibility' in retrenching labour despite challenges presented by unions.³⁹⁸ As profits declined, pressure to reduce labour costs exceeded that of organised workers to control retrenchments.

³⁹³ Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 76.

³⁹⁴ Rimmer, 'Work Place Organisation,' 133.

³⁹⁵ *RPM: Militant Workers' Bulletin*, no. 5, December, 1974, 14.

³⁹⁶ Bowden, 'Rise and decline of Australian unionism,' 69.

³⁹⁷ Interview with John Halfpenny, *RPM: Militant Workers' Bulletin*, no. 5, December, 1974, 6.

³⁹⁸ Derber, 'Changing Union-Management Relations,' 15.

The weakened position of workers in the context of unemployment opened the way for an employer attack on shopfloor unionism, as mass retrenchments became a cover for the targeting of militants. In one of a number of cases reported by *Link*, Jim Cowling, an AMWSU shop steward at Dunlop Bayswater, was dismissed in late 1976 and claimed to have been blacklisted by local employers.³⁹⁹ Cowling, unable to find work despite twenty years of experience in the aircraft industry, perceived this as part of a broad employer offensive. He claimed that 'bosses are saying that if workers become militant, they'll be fired and won't get another job in the area,' pointing to dismissals of shop stewards at Everhot, Vulcan and Insulwool in 1974 as evidence of the trend.⁴⁰⁰ Management at a Melbourne-based maintenance shop owned by IPEC repeatedly targeted shopfloor activists, culminating in the dismissal of the AMWSU shop steward for 'theft and receiving stolen property' in 1978, despite a Police investigation clearing him of suspicion. Workers were 'unanimous that the whole incident was a "set up job" and "stank to high hell".'⁴⁰¹ Subsequent strike action was averted by the intervention of the Senior Manager of the company, who travelled from Sydney to warn workers that the shop would be closed if unrest continued.⁴⁰² Where full employment diminished the power of dismissal as a disciplinary measure, mass unemployment intensified it.

Union leaders in some cases assisted the removal of rank-and-file activists. Large car industry employers pursued a similar offensive from the mid-1970s. Bramble observes that at GM-Holden Elizabeth 'several steps were taken to undermine and then destroy oppositional shopfloor organisation in the mid to late-1970s, involving both management and the VBEF leadership.'⁴⁰³ Likewise, Ron Carli recalls that he was 'locked out of the union' at GM-Holden Fisherman's Bend by

³⁹⁹ 'Steward Blacklisted,' *The Link: Eastern Suburbs*, September 1976.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ 'Company says . . . bugger the union,' *Link*, June 1978.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Bramble, 'Conflict, Coercion, Co-option,' 142.

1980.⁴⁰⁴ As rank-and-file militancy fell away, hastened by the decline in their shopfloor organisations, changes occurred within the AMWSU by which decisions were increasingly made by the leadership. Bramble notes that the AMWSU and other unions took corporatist forms from the late 1970s, characterised by 'highly centralised political deals involving usually only a limited number of senior national officials and advisors.'⁴⁰⁵ This model of unionism allowed for the introduction of the Accord between the ALP and ACTU in the early 1980s, which further accelerated job losses in manufacturing and sped the decline in union membership across all sectors.

Employers were able to dismantle entire shop committees in the context of large-scale retrenchments. Reports detailing this activity appear frequently in *Link*. At Kenworth trucks in Melbourne, where workers saw their shop committee as as 'a real alternative to the bosses management' (discussed above), the company dismissed 280 of its workers and the entire shop committee in October 1976. The dismissed workers comprised 'the most active unionists in the plant' and 'almost all the AMWU members in the shop.'⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, Kenworth locked-out all remaining workers and notified the Commonwealth Employment Service that the workers were on strike and should not receive the unemployment benefit. In October 1978, the APM Botany Mill in NSW succeeded in retrenching large numbers of its workers and closing down a section of its operations, despite immediate strike action by its workers and the first nationwide stoppages of all paper manufacturers in their history.⁴⁰⁷ The editors of *Link* again expressed concern that management had 'sacked most of the leaders of the Combined Unions Committee' to 'destroy union organisation at the Botany mill'.⁴⁰⁸ The targeting of shopfloor activists was generalised. Derber observed in his 1976 surveys of metal manufacturers that: 'Some companies reported that they were able to eliminate extra-

⁴⁰⁴ Carli, interview.

⁴⁰⁵ Bramble, 'Trade Union Strategies,' 11-12.

⁴⁰⁶ 'Kenworth Militants Sacked,' *The Link: Eastern Suburbs*, November-December 1976.

⁴⁰⁷ "'Jobs Before Profits' say striking A.P.M workers,' *Link*, November 1978.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

militant or troublesome employees in the course of retrenchment' and that '[w]hile the retrenchment process was often difficult [...] it was ordinarily followed by a period of quieter relations in the plant.'⁴⁰⁹ Structural retrenchments provided a cover for punitive dismissals and distinctions were blurred. As a result, few shop committees existed by the end of the 1970s and the disappearance of these organs was the death-blow to the workers' control tendency.

Events elsewhere reflect the changing responses of employers to unionists. At West Footscray Engineering, dismissal of the AMWSU shop steward in 1976 provoked an immediate walkout of all workers at the shop, who after a three week strike won his reinstatement. During a bitter strike at the same plant in 1978, the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers intervened directly, at which point the AMWSU shop steward and the convenor of the shop committee were dismissed and the dispute ended with no wage rise and no reversal of dismissals. The editors of *Link* speculated that West Footscray had been close to capitulating, and that the Chamber of Manufacturers had 'guaranteed that it would take care of lost company orders if it decided to hold out'. The editors estimated that the company lost \$3m in the dispute, and this 'makes one wonder at the type and amount of pressure being put on it' by the employer association.⁴¹⁰ Employers cooperated closely to undermine industrial militancy and massive employer associations, including the MTIA, took aggressive and united positions.

The employer offensive augmented worker insecurity created by the economic downturn. In some actions, shopfloor organisation deteriorated due to a lack of unity and a mood of defeat. The powerful shop committee at Ajax-Nettlefold, where retrenchments were resisted throughout 1977, eventually fell into discord. In 1978, when it was announced that over 200 workers at Sunshine and Ballarat would be

⁴⁰⁹ Derber, 'Changing Union-Management Relations,' 15.

⁴¹⁰ 'Chamber of Manipulators,' *Link*, March 1978.

retrenched, overtime bans but were only partially supported by workers at other Ajax-Nettlefold factories. *Link* reported that the 'morale of the workers at Sunshine is very low – the worst in the history of the plant itself. Management knows this, and is using it to really push hard.'⁴¹¹ The fight against retrenchments was abandoned in late July, and the focus shifted to terms of severance. The convenor of AMWSU stewards at Sunshine opined that 'if they had stuck together, if Richmond and Nunawading had supported Sunshine and Ballarat, they possibly could have continued to avoid the mass of retrenchments.'⁴¹² Ajax-Nettlefold workers, exhausted by the bitter struggles of 1977, came to accept the inevitability of retrenchments in the economic downturn. Frank Cherry, the AMWSU organiser in the dispute, recalls it as an important signal of structural changes in the economy and its impact on metal unions. 'Ajax Nettlefold, I think we had a thousand members in there [...] I use them as an example because they folded down into one shop [...] Bit by bit, by an evolutionary process, [unionism] was being reduced. Imports coming in. That sort of thing.'⁴¹³

Similar incidents occurred elsewhere. In June 1978, 150 workers at Sanyo in Albury-Wodonga, largely women, voted to resist the retrenchment of 30 of their number. Workers slept in the canteen for ten days to avoid lockout, holding daily meetings, even working-in. By the time the company agreed to reverse retrenchments, the retrenched workers had separated from the occupation and voluntarily resigned. The editors of *Link* attributed this to Sanyo placing 'constant pressure on the workers' throughout the dispute.⁴¹⁴ Demoralisation and hopelessness instilled by the prospect of likely unemployment became an obstacle to militancy, though the reversal of the company position suggests that workers' control still had potential.

⁴¹¹ 'Ajax Nettlefold,' *Link*, August 1978.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ Cherry, interview.

⁴¹⁴ 'Sanyo: One Out All In,' *Link*, August 1978.

The impact of the economic crisis and the manufacturing decline, galvanised by a savage employer offensive, served to intimidate and disorientate metal workers. The industrial campaigns of the late 1960s, in the form of self-organised over-award campaigns, gave way to campaigns to defend wages and conditions after 1974, often unsuccessfully. Instead of advancing towards employer prerogative, workers were pushed into defensiveness. AMWU officials reported in 1976 that 'wage fixation against the background of severe economic crisis, [...] and very high levels of unemployment, has confronted the trade union movement with a whole new set of problems and tasks.'⁴¹⁵ Unemployment has such an effect in labour relations, creating 'an arena for political agitation which engages the working population [...] and offers a substitute for the revolutionary movements which would soon gain ground if the rulers followed a more traditional laissez-faire course.'⁴¹⁶ The workers' control tendency gradually eroded as workers refocused demands away from expanding control over work to simply retaining work.

6.2 The Role of the State

Federal and state governments intervened in Australian social and industrial relations in complex ways throughout the 1970s. As discussed, workers' control emerged partly out of social politicisation provoked by the Vietnam War. With the end of Australian involvement in 1972, the surge in social and industrial activism gradually eased. The Whitlam Government actively sought to restore harmony to social relations. Clyde Cameron, Minister for Employment under Whitlam, acknowledged frankly before an audience of employers in 1973 that 'political strikes [...] will be fewer than they were under the previous government because of the radically different stance of this

⁴¹⁵ 'AMWU Policy in the mid-Seventies,' *AMWU Monthly Journal*, March 1976, 19.

⁴¹⁶ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 286-287.

Government towards social questions and foreign policies.⁴¹⁷ Cameron sought to 'resolve the crisis in Australian society through collaboration between capital and labour.'⁴¹⁸ This was achieved in part through expansion of the welfare state, or 'social wage' policies, described by a contemporary left-wing commentator as 'an alternative to unions striking for wages.'⁴¹⁹ The introduction of equal pay, the establishment of Medibank, increases to pensions, annual leave and other measures, while they did not reduce the need for workers to take industrial action, helped to instill a degree of calm.

The introduction of Federal wage indexation as part of the social wage agenda in 1975, by which wages would theoretically increase with prices, was highly effective in constraining shopfloor activity. Wage indexation 'virtually prohibited' workplace wage bargaining and undermined the over-award campaigns that were crucial to the development of workers' control in the 1960s.⁴²⁰ What is more, Chris Briggs notes that workers demonstrated 'substantial compliance' to indexation due to the recession, leading to 'a period of industrial quiet amidst rising unemployment.'⁴²¹ The AMWU State Secretary for Western Australia reported that: 'It is obvious that the so-called wage movement "Guidelines" introduced by the Federal Arbitration and accepted by the WA Commission are making it harder and harder to break through on over-awards.'⁴²² In Victoria, the editors of *Link* insisted that wage indexation had made it 'virtually impossible to organise successful shop floor action' and that it was

⁴¹⁷ Clyde Cameron, 'Industrial Disputes in Australia: The Correct Perspective,' (address by Mr. Clyde R. Cameron, American Chamber of Commerce in Australia luncheon, Melbourne, November 30, 1973).

⁴¹⁸ O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 19.

⁴¹⁹ 'The Whitlam Government: Labor's Golden Age?,' *Solidarity*, July 11, 2012, <http://www.solidarity.net.au/labor-party/the-whitlam-government-labors-golden-age/>.

⁴²⁰ Rimmer, 'Work Place Organisation,' 133.

⁴²¹ Chris Briggs, 'Strikes and Lockouts in the Antipodes: Neoliberal Convergence in Australia and New Zealand,' in Sjaak van der Velden, Heiner Dribbusch, Dave Lyddon, Kurt Vandaele, eds., *Strikes Around the World, 1968 - 2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries*, (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2007), 185.

⁴²² AMWU *Monthly Journal*, July 1976, 8.

'introduced as a means to *control*' [emphasis original].⁴²³ Metal workers were pressured to cooperate with employers and the arbitration system, while recalcitrant workers were punished.

Resistance was nonetheless forthcoming. As the impacts of indexation came to be felt, *Link* reported that 'participation within indexation is the subject of meetings to be held in many shops.'⁴²⁴ A 'Group of Shop Stewards' in the metal trades called on the ACTU to organise 24 hour weekly strikes to 'abandon indexation', while workers at the Westgate Bridge staged walk-offs.⁴²⁵ Despite pressure, the ACTU dithered. As a result, Russell Lansbury observed in 1978 that the trend toward direct negotiations in the 1960s was reversed in the mid-1970s, in what he referred to as 'the return to arbitration'. While unemployment undermined the power of workers to pursue direct negotiations, 'the introduction of wage indexation [...] has strengthened the authority of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.'⁴²⁶ Lansbury was able to conclude that 'the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission has once again become the centrepiece of the Australian industrial relations system.'⁴²⁷ Shopfloor wage struggles were crucial to the development of direct encroachment, and their obstruction through indexation stifled the tendency.

In OHS, a similar process occurred by which legislation was expanded to intervene more acutely at the enterprise level. From the mid-1970s, all Australian states revised their OHS laws to articulate 'the responsibility of employers; employees; self-employed contractors; and suppliers, designers and manufacturers of plant and

⁴²³ 'Indexation: Moore Rip Offs,' *Link: Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, March 1977.

⁴²⁴ 'Indexation: The Tip of the Iceberg,' *Link: North Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, April 1977.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ Russell D. Lansbury, 'The Return to Arbitration in Australia: Recent trends in dispute settlement and wages policy in Australia,' *International Labour Review* 117, no. 5 (1978): 615.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 623.

substances', and to increase inspectoral powers.⁴²⁸ Most significantly, 'mechanisms for worker involvement' were introduced, notably 'workplace OHS committees' consisting of equal numbers of employee and employer representatives.⁴²⁹ Much of the inspiration for this model came from the 1972 report of the Robens Committee on OHS in the UK, which emphasised 'a natural identity of interest' between employers and employees.⁴³⁰ Brett Heino notes that, by the 1980s, the 'tripartite OHS council became the model arrangement for both Federal and State level politics.'⁴³¹ Union controls over OHS have endured since the late 1970s. With the institutionalisation of tripartite OHS committees, the autonomy of independent worker committees gave way to systems for collaboration between capital and labour, protected and enshrined by the state.

Federal and state governments also increased legal support for employers. The trend began under Whitlam, who in 1974 mobilised the Air Force to break two strikes, blocked a wage campaign by airline pilots, established a Royal Commission to investigate the Seamen's Union and passed legislation to make strikers ineligible for the unemployment benefit.⁴³² This last policy was used by Kenworth to break the strike over retrenchments in October 1976 (discussed above). A hardening toward unions occurred under the Government of Dick Hamer in Victoria. The Vital Projects Act was passed in 1976 after the Newport Power Station dispute, described by Bob Hawke as 'the most repressive in Australia's history'.⁴³³ Ed Micallef, President of the AMWU Preston branch, argued that Newport was being used as a 'catalyst', which

⁴²⁸ Michael Quinlan and Richard Johnstone, 'The implications of de-collectivist industrial relations laws and associated developments for worker health and safety in Australia, 1996-2007,' *Industrial Relations Journal* 40, no. 5 (September 2009): 430.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁰ Brett Heino, 'The state, class and occupational health and safety: Locating the capitalist state's role in the regulation of OHS in NSW,' *Labour & Industry* 23, no. 2 (2013): 156.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴³² Bramble, *Trade Unionism*, 80.

⁴³³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 1976, in O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage*, 91.

concealed its 'far reaching implications.'⁴³⁴ Police violence broke picket lines at Newport, where Danny Gardiner recalls being 'absolutely flogged by the coppers'.⁴³⁵ Metal workers in the La Trobe Valley power industry, a bastion of rank-and-file power in Victoria, were drawn into a strike over wages in 1977 and defeated by the combined pressure of the SEC and the Hamer Government. From the beginning, attempts were made by the SEC to undermine direct negotiation and force the workers into arbitration. The SEC 'refused even to discuss the claims. "Send them to the Victorian Trades Hall Council" it commanded'.⁴³⁶ In NSW, ECCUDO ceased to be active after a 1975 campaign to introduce the 35-hour week, when the NSW Government threatened to enact emergency legislation that would allow for massive fines to be imposed on ECCUDO members. This legislation was drafted after the 1973 strikes during which ECCUDO members self-managed power stations.⁴³⁷ ECCUDO faded after 1975; their struggles for 35-hours was abandoned.

Adopting the rhetoric of 'individual rights', the Fraser Government oversaw a diversified response to union militancy whereby social wage policies and class collaboration were interspersed with outright repression.⁴³⁸ Anna Stewart, a VBEF official, observed the 'strengthening [of] the legislative powers in a multiplicity of ways which means a return to the position which was effectively the same as that before the repeal [of the penal provisions]'.⁴³⁹ As noted by Breen Creighton, Fraser's legal reforms represented not so much a return to the penal provisions of the 1960s as

⁴³⁴ 'Newport: Why is Fraser so determined?' *Link: North Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, December 1976.

⁴³⁵ Gardiner, interview.

⁴³⁶ *The 1977 La Trobe Valley Power Strike: AMWSU Information Bulletin* ([Melbourne]: AMWSU, 1978).

⁴³⁷ Jim McIlroy, 'NSW Government Closes Down Industry: Power Workers Under Attack', *Direct Action*, no. 77, January 24, 1975, 3.

⁴³⁸ Cole, Introduction to *Power, Conflict and Control*, 4.

⁴³⁹ Anne Stewart, 'The Business Offensive in the United States -- Will It Spread?,' *Journal of Industrial Relations* 22, no. 4 (December 1980): 488.

they did a considerable extension of the provisions, leaving unions 'extremely vulnerable' to legal sanction in the 1980s.⁴⁴⁰ At the Federal level, the establishment of an Industrial Relations Bureau (IRB) and the outlawing of secondary boycotts in the Trade Practices Act in 1977 were among more serious reforms. Amendments to the Commonwealth Employees (Employment Provisions) Act allowed the Federal Government to arbitrarily dismiss any government worker taking industrial action. Ron Carrington, a delegate to the Australian Government Establishments Shop Committee, described the legislation as 'another union bashing bill and one with no right of appeal', noting that members were 'extremely concerned'.⁴⁴¹

Workers galvanised their defence of union hire in the face of legal challenges to the practice. Metal workers at the Williamstown Naval Dockyards resolved through a mass meeting in 1977 that 'irrespective of what bills or acts are passed by the Fraser Liberal Government, this dockyard along with thousands of other closed workshops will remain the same.'⁴⁴² 1500 Dockyard workers struck over the creation of the IRB, though rank-and-file enthusiasm was dampened by cumbersome officials. In the words of a delegate: 'A large number of workers are pestering the delegates now — "What's the continuation of the dispute?" — because they see it as an important issue, especially when they see an attack on the right to strike.'⁴⁴³ This and other examples point to the corporatisation of the AMWSU, in a cooling of official responsiveness towards rank-and-file initiative.

The strength of trade unions into the later 1970s meant that large-scale repression was not feasible until the further weakening of unions in the 1980s. As observed by Creighton, such provisions are 'subject to the same fundamental

⁴⁴⁰ Creighton, 'Law and Control of Industrial Conflict,' 130-131.

⁴⁴¹ 'Right to Strike: New Threat,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs*, September 1977.

⁴⁴² 'Williamstown Naval Dockyard: Mass Meeting Resolution,' *Dynamo: Victorian Branch of the FED&FA*, June 1977, 16.

⁴⁴³ 'Right to Strike: New Threat,' *Link: Eastern Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, September 1977.

limitation as all sanctioning devices in the industrial-relations context—they can work only so long as those to whom the sanctions are directed are prepared to allow them to work.’⁴⁴⁴ Alex Carey asserts in similar terms that ‘Fraser obtained all the anti-union legislation he needed’ but ‘could not use it because his specially conducted opinion polls continued to tell him that such action would not have enough public support to be viable.’⁴⁴⁵ This fact is further evidenced by the successful defence of Western Australian AMWSU officials by the threat of mass industrial action in 1979. George Campbell, Victorian State Secretary for the Shipwrights Union, believes that mass shopfloor resistance to the IRB, including the mobilisation of ‘8000 shop stewards’ in Victoria, meant that ‘the whole process was defeated, making the IRB a paper tiger.’⁴⁴⁶

It was not until the 1980s that large-scale invocations of the law were used to attack trade unions, by which time unions were hamstrung by the Prices and Incomes Accord, negotiated between the ALP and ACTU from 1983. In an expansion of the wage indexation principles of Whitlam, the Accord secured commitment to no extra claims in exchange for centralised wage maintenance and increases to the social wage. Briggs notes that it is ‘almost universally concluded that the Accord was a significant factor in the major decline in disputation throughout the 1980s.’⁴⁴⁷ The ACTU ‘isolated recalcitrant unions determined to break out of the centralized wage guidelines of coercive state power’ by facilitating the penalisation of unions whose members breached the guidelines.⁴⁴⁸ The leadership of the AMWSU, and even leading former CPA members, such as Laurie Carmichael, gave active support to the Accord. John Cleary expresses incredulity as to ‘why people who’d been militant communists for many years could have a total about face and believe that we were going to be able to

⁴⁴⁴ Creighton, ‘Law and Control of Industrial Conflict,’ 132. See also

⁴⁴⁵ Alex Carey, *Taking the risk out of democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995), 99.

⁴⁴⁶ George Campbell, in AMWU, ed., *Talking Back*, 48.

⁴⁴⁷ Briggs, ‘Strikes and Lockouts in the Antipodes,’ 186.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 186-187.

get into bed with the employers and the government get a fair shake.’⁴⁴⁹ By the mid-1980s, industrial relations scholars observed that ‘extensive use of legal action by employers has begun and will continue to promote a significant change in the relationships between union, employers, and the industrial arbitration and conciliation process.’⁴⁵⁰ The scale of repression was ‘analogous to the years immediately preceding the noted Clarrie O’Shea case,’ in that ‘unions have suffered serious monetary and industrial defeats’ through employer recourse to legal action.⁴⁵¹ By the mid-1980s, the autonomy that trade unionists had established through resistance to anti-strike laws was completely reversed. Unions and shop committees were actively repressed, and the basis for workers’ control was eliminated.

6.3 Worker Co-Option: Participation versus Control

An immediate employer response to workers’ control was the adoption of ‘worker participation’ schemes in enterprise, including consultative management techniques, autonomous work systems separate from unions, job enrichment and employee communications. Interest in these ideas spiked in the early 1970s, led by large employers and professional management associations. The Central Industrial Secretariat warned in 1973 that ‘[s]ociety seems to have reached a point where the individual is no longer prepared to wait to express pleasure or displeasure at social events and decisions at the ballot box’ and ‘strikes, black bans and other types of industrial action are being used as a mechanism for the resolution of social differences.’⁴⁵² There was a need for ‘containing these expressions of concern within a

⁴⁴⁹ Cleary, interview.

⁴⁵⁰ Howard Smith, Herb Thompson, ‘Industrial Relations and the Law: A Case Study of Robe River,’ *The Australian Quarterly* 59, no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 1987): 297.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² *Industry and Society* ([np]: Central Industrial Secretariat, ca. 1973).

socially and politically acceptable framework' —namely, workers' participation.⁴⁵³ In similar terms, a Liberal Party pamphlet published in September 1973 warned that '[w]orkers control has ceased to be an empty phrase or an implied threat' —'the muzzling and control of management by worker committees' has 'challenged the ability of employers to make men redundant' and asserted 'the right of workers to elect their own foremen, decide what kind of goods a factory should produce and have access to the employers' books to decide what the level of profit should be.' Workers' participation 'seeks to eliminate these situations by taking a responsible attitude to the man on the shop floor and giving him the opportunity to add his voice to the success and productivity of the company', therefore 'negating the insidious doctrine of workers' control.'⁴⁵⁴ These attitudes went to the top of the Liberal Party. Malcom Fraser had previously announced that 'Australians ought to have the wisdom to break down the bitterness that so often surrounds industrial disputes', and to do this, there is 'the need for those who work in an industry to have a sense of participation, involvement and responsibility.'⁴⁵⁵ This stands in contrast to the repressive nature of Fraser's industrial legislation and points to his true intentions for participation schemes.

Enthusiasm for participation circulated within professional management circles. Sir Walter Scott concluded his 'communication gap' speech by advising that 'the one already well formulated possibility which gives some ray of hope and which may grow and expand rapidly during the 1970's {sic} is participation.'⁴⁵⁶ Managerial reluctance to make meaningful concessions of their prerogatives was preponderant. A survey of 140 managers belonging to the AIM in 1978 revealed that 'worker participation techniques that threaten neither managerial prerogative nor profits are

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Worker Participation or Workers' Control?* (Sydney: Liberal Party of Australia, 1973), 2.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Scott, *Looking Into The 1970s*, 10.

widely favored by the managers.⁴⁵⁷ The success of participation was in its ability to give workers an illusion of meaningful co-determination, when such schemes were, in reality, designed to serve managerial goals. By allowing workers a degree of autonomy in their work, separate from union structures and carefully controlled by management, the tendency towards independent workers' control by shop committees could be negated.

Large employers eagerly adopted new management techniques, including 'human resources' systems. GM- Holden introduced autonomous work groups to its Australian plants in the mid-1970s, in which workers were given a degree of autonomy in completing tasks. Ron Carli notes that large numbers of workers were 'cynical' about work groups and Carli himself refused to participate in them.⁴⁵⁸ Carli also recalls that plant management began to regularly consult workers to discuss work and settle disputes separately from unions. He and other unionists were 'not too happy [...] to accept the idea that we've got to work collaboratively with management' because they 'were brought up in Communist ideology'.⁴⁵⁹ These management styles endured beyond the period. Frenkel noted in 1981 that management in the metal industry 'recognise more and more the need for greater employee co-operation' and that, in an MTIA survey of 846 plants, 51.7 percent of managers made use of management-employee meetings.⁴⁶⁰ The 'formalisation of [dispute] procedures [...] is a means of standardising and hence controlling the behaviour of managers and employees.'⁴⁶¹ The use of employee communications and company systems for dispute resolution offered an alternative to shopfloor union channels, having a

⁴⁵⁷ Norman Dufty, 'Industrial Democracy in Australia,' *International Studies of Management and Organisation* 17, no. 2 (1987): 11.

⁴⁵⁸ Carli, interview.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ Frenkel, *Union Strategy and Industrial Change*, 108-109.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

gradual corrosive effect on shop committees in the context of the broader assault on their integrity.

Governments facilitated the spread of workers' participation. In 1973, Clyde Cameron announced to the AIM that 'a better educated workforce and greater industrial democracy are becoming facts of life' and that 'action by management in defence of obsolete and inappropriate "prerogatives" can only perpetuate confusion and unrest.'⁴⁶² A paper promoting the Queensland Workers' Control Conference in November 1973 responded to Cameron, rebuking his attempt to 'counter the idea of workers' control with the more moderate idea of "workers' participation"', described as 'putting a worker on a board of representatives where he or she is outnumbered by bosses' representatives.'⁴⁶³ The Don Dunstan Labour Government of South Australia was most active among governments in its promotion of worker participation. Dunstan established a Unit for Industrial Democracy to promote the introduction of worker participation in local industry. As described by a 1976 paper produced by the department: 'the concept [of worker participation] has gained considerable momentum through the cost to society of disruptive disputes between Labour and Management' and 'prosperity through partnership of labour and capital is beginning to gain a great deal of acceptance in some management circles.'⁴⁶⁴

Trade unionists, particularly within the AMWU, opposed participation schemes on the whole, largely due to the belief that they were intended to separate workers from trade unions and co-opt them into management aims. The Australian Institute of Managers (AIM) was forced to concede that 'there is perhaps greater hostility and suspicion towards the concept of WORKER PARTICIPATION in the

⁴⁶² Clyde Cameron, 'Managerial Control and Industrial Democracy: Myths and Realities,' (address to the AIM, NSW Division President's Dinner, Sydney, 20 August 1973).

⁴⁶³ 'What is Workers' Control?' (paper presented to Queensland Workers' Control Conference, Brisbane, November 1973).

⁴⁶⁴ K. Wang, Unit for Industrial Democracy, 'Current Debate' (paper presented the Health Service Personnel Officers' First National Seminar, Adelaide, 26 March 1976).

Trade Union movement than in industrial and commercial management circles,' and that 'where unions do show interest, they invariably equate increased worker participation with increased union participation.'⁴⁶⁵ The AMWU issued a statement in 1973 to the effect that: 'Whilst recognising the growing pressures for involvement in these [worker participation] schemes supported by employers and government circles, this union rejects such involvement.' The document states that 'despite its official policy the A.M.W.U. has been involved in a number of participation schemes such as joint consultation committees and semi-autonomous work groups.'⁴⁶⁶ John Halfpenny described workers' participation as 'little short of management-labour co-operation for the achievement of management objectives' and 'channelling the ever-increasing demand of workers for greater involvement in the work and decision-making processes into more respectable channels which pose less of a threat to management power.'⁴⁶⁷ Instead, he expressed support for 'worker involvement which produces greater interference and intervention through independent trade union organisation rather than through participation' and 'greater involvement in the work place and in society.'⁴⁶⁸ Halfpenny's emphasis on independent union organisation is instructive.

By manipulation, shop committees could be separated from trade unions and placated. At B&D Rolla Door, the shop committee expressed concern that it was becoming a management tool to placate the workforce. They claimed that 'the company doesn't recognise the shop committee as a union meeting, they believe the committee's only for the purpose of identifying small problems on the shop-floor, it

⁴⁶⁵ D. H. Giles, *Worker Participation in Australia: the Motives, Philosophy and Practice* (Sydney: Australian Institute of Management, 1977), 12.

⁴⁶⁶ 'Worker Participation: Profits or Problems: A Report on Worker Participation Evaluating its Worth to Organisations in N.S.W. and Guidelines for Implementation' (presented by third year management students, Liverpool College of TAFE, Liverpool, 1985), 13.

⁴⁶⁷ 'Can Management and Workers be Reconciled?' *AMWU Monthly Journal*, May 1976, 16-17.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

makes it easier for them.’ Management was ‘always put[ting] responsibility onto the workers to do things like setting up a new canteen, investigate cooling systems for the place, chose {sic} the colour paint for the toilets,’ and so on.⁴⁶⁹ The relative autonomy of shop committees from trade unions, which on the one hand allowed for the self-activity that spurred direct encroachment, could also be used to co-opt and undermine them. Carey observes that the rise of human relations management was based around ‘active “participation” in low-level decisions [...] that would be insignificant in affecting management’s power and authority but would nevertheless weaken the loyalty of workers to unions.’⁴⁷⁰ These techniques were effective, and while they did not have the impact of unemployment and repression, they point to the sensitivity of managers and employers to the subtleties of shopfloor labour relations.

In a sense, workers’ control was vulnerable to co-option from its inception. In the earliest discussions of workers’ control during the period, proponents warned that it was vulnerable to manipulation into innocuous forms by employers. Frank Bollins forewarned in 1969 that ‘[d]angers of class collaboration and integration would be ever present in worker control’ in the form of ‘merging interests of employer and worker.’⁴⁷¹ To some extent, distinctions between participation and control were blurred from the outset. Gary Phelan, an AEU-Boilermakers’ research officer writing in *ALR*, described workers’ control as ‘some measure of workers’ participation’ in the management of industry and received critical responses from other contributors.⁴⁷² Management discourse carried equally ambiguous distinctions. The AIM, while it advocated participation under the auspices of managers, excoriated the ‘intention [of militant unionists] to use WORKER PARTICIPATION as a tactic in causing the collapse of the present political and economic system and the destruction of the

⁴⁶⁹ ‘First Ethnic Shop Committee,’ *Link: Western Suburbs Metal Workers Bulletin*, March 1977.

⁴⁷⁰ Carey, *Taking the risk out of democracy*, 152.

⁴⁷¹ ‘Workers’ Control: A Symposium,’ *Australian Left Review*, no. 2, April-May 1969, 11.

⁴⁷² *Ibid*, 9.

institution of private ownership.⁴⁷³ While the success of workers' control was in its efficacy as a practical tendency without ideological hang-ups, inconsistencies in how it was conceived and understood may have contributed to its sabotage by employers.

At the enterprise-level, conflict arose between unions and managers over the nature of participation. Unions were invited to participate in the formulation of a joint-consultation programme at Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) Botany, only to abandon the negotiations in protest. Upon hearing the union proposals for the scheme, ICI management 'launched into an attack on the "workers' control" concepts in the proposals, and the presence of the Union Secretary.'⁴⁷⁴ AMWU members believed that the final version of the scheme 'severely limited the amount of control the rank and file would have over the projects' (ie. the 'steering committee would have "guidance" instead of "control"') and 'gave up in disgust'.⁴⁷⁵ Workers' control was a living issue at ICI, where shop committees were open to direct encroachment. The Combined Shop committee at ICI Osborne in South Australia, for example, sought to gain access to records of the company's productivity 'to be in a better position to expose the high degree of exploitation from these multinationals.'⁴⁷⁶ This may have been a factor in the adoption of participation by the company.

Correlations between militancy and the introduction of participation existed elsewhere. Graeme Watson believes that a participation scheme was introduced at the Oakleigh Area Centre, a power depot, because of workplace militancy. He recalls that

in about 1972 [...] my depot—the Oakleigh Area Centre—I was the shop steward there, [was] very heavily unionised. Very militant depot. It was decided that this would be the place that they would trial industrial democracy

⁴⁷³ Giles, *Worker Participation in Australia*, 14

⁴⁷⁴ Darryl Hull, 'Job Redesign at ICI Australia,' in Lansbury, ed., *Democracy in the Work Place*, 79.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

⁴⁷⁶ AMWU *Monthly Journal*, August 1976, 8.

[...] I always wondered, why Oakleigh? And maybe it was to try to shut me down or whatever, I'm not sure.⁴⁷⁷

Watson recalls further that the state Electricity Commission 'wouldn't dare try it inside the [La Trobe] Valley', which was a union stronghold, and where he believes it would never had succeeded.⁴⁷⁸

Similar contradictions existed internationally as workers' participation became a global phenomenon. The Conservative Governments of Edward Heath in the UK introduced incomes policies and forms of tripartite negotiation. These were 'corporatist strategies [...] to contain the consequences of the demands of subordinates, [...] reduce the workers' scope for countervailing power and hence assert a monist model of relations.'⁴⁷⁹ A clear consequence of this strategy was 'the erosion of union autonomy.'⁴⁸⁰ The IWC was 'critical of any scheme for workers' participation without built-in safeguards for the unions.'⁴⁸¹ Harvie Ramsay, a British historian, observes that participation schemes appear cyclically in industrial relations and 'seem on each occasion to have arisen out of a managerial response to threats to management authority [...] and the consequence is, if significant at all, to nullify pressures to change the status quo.'⁴⁸² Braverman made similar criticisms in the American context, describing participation as 'a gracious liberality in allowing the worker to adjust a machine, replace a light bulb, move from one fractional job to another, and they have the illusion of making decisions [...] which deliberately leaves

⁴⁷⁷ Watson, interview.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ Colin Crouch, *Class conflict and the industrial relations crisis: compromise and corporatism in the policies of the British State* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977), 255-256.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴⁸¹ Michael Barratt-Brown, 'The Institute for Workers' Control,' in Tony Simpson, ed., *Resist Much, Obey Little: A Collection in Honour of Ken Coates* (np: Spokesman Books, 2012), 49.

⁴⁸² Harvie Ramsay, 'Worker Participation in Historical and Sociological Perspective,' *Sociology* 11, no. 3 (September 1977): 496.

insignificant matters open to choice.’⁴⁸³ He reiterates that ‘control is indeed the central concept of all management systems, as has been recognized implicitly or explicitly by all theoreticians of management.’⁴⁸⁴ Participation schemes, while giving an illusion of worker independence and control, were insidious in their erosion of both.

⁴⁸³ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 39.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 68.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Workers' Control in Summary

Workers' control was a broad and at times ambiguous tendency. In many ways it was merely a more aggressive unionism—the peak of Australian union militancy in the post-war era and perhaps at any other time in Australian history. In this sense, Rawson is correct to describe workers' control as a debate around the proper scope for union objectives. However, more serious strategies of direct encroachment, as well as experiments with self-management and worker takeovers, characterise workers' control as a distinct extension of any traditional trade unionism. Its proponents perceived the tendency as a means to achieve systemic change, and this notion is reinforced when workers' control is compared to similar movements historically. Fundamental characteristics of the tendency are in line with historical syndicalist movements, which tend to develop in the course of ordinary industrial struggles before challenging capitalist prerogatives and moving towards more complete control, often in the context of war or economic crisis. These movements were always organised around shop or factory committees, workers' councils and other forms for direct rank-and-file control over production.

Workers in the metal trades made diverse encroachments into areas of capitalist and government prerogative during the 1970s. Shop committees were engines of these encroachments, established and consolidated throughout the 1950s and 1960s in struggles for improved wages and conditions, while mass meetings, strikes and bans, occupations, work-ins and other forms of direct action were the tactics by which direct encroachment and self-management were achieved. Why workers' control emerged in the early 1970s is due in part to the social turmoil of the period, combined with the onset of economic crisis before the recession of 1975. The Vietnam War destabilised Australian society and widened existing schisms between capital and labour. New social movements assisted in circulating ideas of spontaneous

direct action and self-management at the workplace. Proponents of workers' control perceived similarities with radical unionism historically, particularly that of the late nineteenth century and the syndicalism of the late 1910s. Thus, while the CPA did much to propagate workers' control, even leading members of this organisation conceded that it was closer to the spontaneism of more left libertarian traditions than any type of Leninism or Bolshevism.

Shop committees were the basis for closed shops and union hire arrangements which, while not unique to the 1970s, reached a peak of their influence and were rightly considered a form of worker control over hiring. Shopfloor organisation enabled a trend towards resistance to retrenchments as organised workers clashed with the capitalist system in crisis. In most cases, worker resistance to retrenchments took the form of work-ins and occupations, though in some cases there existed more established checks on the power of employers to retrench labour. While this raises the question of worker collaboration in their own dismissal, it is better considered as an extraordinary extension of union power in the absence of complete workers' control over the economic system, in which retrenchment due to fluctuations in the profitability of capitalist enterprise would no longer occur. Shop committees also enabled workers' control over health and safety, whereby workers took this responsibility away from employers in a direct incursion on their historical prerogatives. Sometimes, separate forms, such as independent worker health committees and worker health centres, were established, but were in every case intractable from organisation at the shopfloor. These interventions, among others, were made possible through a process of worker self-education driven from the shopfloor.

Metal workers also took steps to assert control over work and the labour process, in an aspect of their activity that converged with expressions of self-management. The surge in job control struggles from the late 1960s was reflective of an impulse among workers to assert autonomy in the labour process. These

campaigns were both defensive—involving the rejection of scientific management, authoritarian supervisors, automation and so forth—but also offensive, during which workers sometimes won rights to independently manage aspects of work. Control was established through shop committees, as opposed to joint consultation or co-determination schemes that proliferated under the banner of ‘worker participation’, where ultimate control resided with management.

Job control was tied intrinsically to the phenomenon of self-management, which comprised the most serious incursions into capital’s historic right to control labour. In most cases, self-management was short-lived; in others, it endured through employer capitulation and acquiescence. Self-management was beset by contradictions. Under capitalist ownership, worker self-management continues to serve the interests of capitalist profitability, and control ultimately resides with shareholders and directors. On the other hand, freedom in work often improved the quality of working life exponentially, if briefly. Under self-management at the Opera House, for example, enthusiasm for work increased exponentially. Self-management is an affront to the authority of capital, calling into doubt the necessity for capitalist management altogether. While in most cases self-management was confronted by disadvantages such that any lasting control was unlikely, at the very least it represented an impulse that went beyond any notion of conventional trade unionism.

In the social unrest of the 1970s, trade unions made serious encroachments into social and political affairs typically the responsibility of governments and employers. At no point did Australian workers institute forms that might have portended towards political control, like the soviets and workers’ councils of Europe in the late 1910s. But they were able, through industrial action, to check the power of governments to implement policy. Anti-strike laws were immobilised throughout the 1970s, rendering the capitalist state incapable of intervening in industrial unrest until more serious boundaries around private property were crossed, as in the case of work-ins at Harco, Johnson & Johnson, Chrysler and elsewhere. Metal workers used strike

action to resist the Vietnam War, while it was shipping and waterfront unions that were positioned to have the most success. Unionists resisted state repression in other ways. In November 1969, the President of the AEU, after being arrested for his involvement in anti-conscription activism, was released without charge at the threat of mass strike action by the Victorian rebel unions. After the Fraser Government attacked Medibank with the support of major employers, autonomous strikes occurred across the metal trades to force employers to pick up the cost of health insurance individually. As unemployment loomed, metal workers in a number of cases secured work for themselves independently of their employers. This peculiar category of activity raises the issue of class collaboration, yet it has been common during the most revolutionary upsurges of workers' control historically, such as in Russia throughout 1917. Workers' control represented a wide-ranging expansion of the frontier trade union power, exercised at the point of production and diffused throughout society more generally. In this sense again, self-management was the tip of a much larger iceberg.

Indeed, all forms of workers' control circulated with one another. The growth of union hire was important to the advancement of shop committees and was a condition for further encroachment. A sort of blurred distinction existed in some cases between more ordinary struggles over job control and the tendency towards self-management. At the Parramatta Shell Oil refinery, FEDFA members engaged in protracted disputes over their position in the labour process, interspersed with periods of self-management. In many cases, self-management occurred during campaigns to resist retrenchments, as workers moved from resisting one aspect of managerial control to rejecting managerial authority altogether, as at Harco and elsewhere. In the case of the Williamstown Naval Dockyards, workers undertook self-management after a health and safety dispute, recognising their shop and OH&S committees in place of managers. There again, worker health and safety committees were in many cases preserved through campaigns to protect dismissed workers.

Union political action broadens the concept of workers' control further. By taking action at the enterprise level, workers could wield an influence well beyond it. It is perhaps in recognition of this final intersection that workers' control had its most profound potential. The labour movement demonstrated significant power on issues such as the penal powers, where workers took unified, mass action that crossed industrial and professional demarcations. If this power could be transferred to areas where workers' control was weakest—where workers worked-in or attempted to appropriate enterprise—the tendency takes on more serious implications. Worker takeovers were never defended through widespread solidarity actions. If they had been, the record suggests that the ability of employers and the state to intervene might have been significantly impaired.

Workers' control lost momentum after the ending of the Vietnam War and the subsidence of radical social struggles towards the end of the decade. The recession aided this process, weakening unions and having a demoralising effect across the working-class. Workers' control did not decline as a result of forces that were inexorable. In fact, in movements for workers' control historically, Victor Wallis notes that 'in no case did the radical initiative die a natural death', and the same is true of Australia in the 1970s.⁴⁸⁵ Employers self-consciously assaulted the shop committee movement, using the recession to dismiss union militants and dismantle shopfloor structures. In some cases, worker participation schemes and techniques for human resources management achieved similar outcomes, eroding the integrity of shopfloor organisation and re-aligning workers to the interests of management. The state remained powerless to actively repress union activity through to the end of the 1970s. Despite the introduction of new anti-union laws in 1977, Fraser was reluctant to utilise them; the threat of widespread industrial dislocation after the arrest of AMWSU officials in 1979 suggests good reason for this. As shopfloor structures were weakened,

⁴⁸⁵ Wallis, 'Workers' Control and Revolution,' 13.

however, and with the introduction of the ALP-ACTU Accord in 1981, workers were less able to resist the offensive of employers and the state that was mounted in the 1980s. Few shop committees existed by the end of the decade, and the loss of these organs of rank-and-file decision-making were the death knell for workers' control.

7.2 Evaluating Workers' Control: Considerations for a Usable Past

As mentioned, the 1970s represented perhaps the highest point of union militancy in Australian history, what Bramble describes as the 'flood tide', during which significant gains were made across most industries and professions. Union density was close to peak level, buoyed by mass rank-and-file participation in the metal trades and beyond. In this sense, the lessons that the 1970s may offer to the present are limited by the fact that union membership is at historic lows in Australia, and in a state of ongoing decline, particularly in manufacturing and other areas in which unionism was once strong.⁴⁸⁶ As a result, nothing like the movement for workers' control in the 1970s could exist under present industrial relations conditions. It is hopeful that, where enterprises and industries retain high levels of union organisation, vague remnants of the tendency can be observed. Occupations occur sporadically, for example. In early 2015, a protracted occupation occurred over wages and conditions at International Flavors and Fragrances in Dandenong.⁴⁸⁷ In July 2014, members of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union obstructed train lines to reinstate a

⁴⁸⁶ Ewin Hannan, 'Union membership at record low as workers flee,' *The Australian*, June 5, 2014, accessed September 9, 2015, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/industrial-relations/union-membership-at-record-low-as-workers-flee/story-fn59noo3-1226943547468>.

⁴⁸⁷ Nick Toscano, 'Dandenong factory workers claim 'significant win' after four-day lunchroom protest,' *The Age*, January 28, 2015, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/dandenong-factory-workers-claim-significant-win-after-fourday-lunchroom-protest-20150130-132jrm.html#ixzz3o1KkhcZr>.

dismissed worker.⁴⁸⁸ Workers' control over health and safety endures in small measure, though it is submerged beneath the collaborative frameworks introduced in the 1980s. While their independent power has been eroded by the intervention of government bodies, unions continue to retain an element of control over health and safety conditions through WorkSafe.⁴⁸⁹ Unions at times make small interventions into social and political affairs. It is notable that the same obstacles that diminished the efficacy of workers' control in the 1970s persist into the present. For example, Ken Purdham claims that there was discussion of a green ban on the proposed East West Link motorway prior to the project's demise in November 2014, but unemployment undermined any serious consideration of the campaign among unionists.⁴⁹⁰ While a number of historians have viewed workers' control sceptically, this thesis suggests a revised evaluation of its potential. It can be seen that, if the scope for understanding workers' control is expanded to include political interventions, rank-and-file workers *did* successfully confront the state, and do have the capacity to resist the repression of both employers and the state when there is will and organisational means to do so. Where the labour movement took mass, combined action, at the level of both officials and the rank-and-file, the ability of the state to intervene was seriously impeded.

It is notable that some aspects of workers' control are being revived in ways that represent a compromise with existing industrial relations conditions. Worker self-directed enterprises are proliferating internationally, largely in response to unemployment as a result of both outsourcing and the global financial crisis of 2008-09. Trade unions have built innovative connections with worker cooperatives, and it is where unions have established broader foundations for the development of worker-owned enterprises that they have been most successful. Immanuel Ness, in a

⁴⁸⁸ Luba Grigorovitch, 'This Win is Yours,' *RTBU Express: Official Newsletter of the Rail Divisions of the RTBU Victorian Branch*, vol. 1, no. 8, July 10, 2014, 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Australian Government, *Safe Work Australia, Worker Representation and Participation Guide* (Canberra, 2012).

⁴⁹⁰ Purdham, interview.

presentation to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, notes that, increasingly, 'we can see labour unions and worker cooperatives existing side-by-side,' in a relationship to which 'the future bodes'.⁴⁹¹ Parallels to the 1970s can be observed. New Era Windows, a workers' cooperative in Chicago, was established in 2012 through a work-in by members of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union. The largest union in the United States, the United Steelworkers, has formally partnered with the Mondragon cooperative network as of 2012, aiming to develop worker-controlled firms across the country.⁴⁹² In Australia, the Earthworker Cooperative is establishing worker self-directed enterprises in the Victorian energy industry, using a broad network of trade unions to ensure 'collective markets' for their goods and services. The project is described by its spokesperson, Dave Kerin, who belonged to both the BLF and CPA in the 1970s, as 'developing a new economic space. [...] At the heart of it is democratic ownership. Trade unions are a form of workers' power that exists currently, and they will be important to growing the power of people and workers in the future'.⁴⁹³ Again, the necessity for cooperation between workers of multiple unions and workplaces, beyond narrow professional and industrial demarcations, must be acknowledged by contemporary movements if they are to maximise their successes. Workers attempting to establish worker ownership and control in their workplaces must look to broader organisations of the working-class if they are to avoid the disadvantages of isolation.

⁴⁹¹ Immanuel Ness, 'Intersections between labour unions and worker cooperatives,' (presentation to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin, November 4-5, 2011).

⁴⁹² Rob Witherell (United Steelworkers), Jim Anderson (Ohio Employee Ownership Centre), Michael Peck (Mondragon International USA), *Worker Ownership for the 99%: The United Steelworkers, Mondragon, and the Ohio Employee Ownership Center Announce a New Union Cooperative Model to Reinsert Worker Equity Back into the U.S. Economy*, media release, Pittsburgh, Ohio, March 26, 2012, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://www.usw.org/news/media-center/releases/2012/worker-ownership-for-the-99>.

⁴⁹³ Dave Kerin, interview with Sam Oldham, 'Dave Kerin on Worker Cooperatives and the Climate Emergency,' *The Platform*, no. 3, November 12, 2014, accessed October 10, 2015, <http://www.anarchistaffinity.org/2014/11/dave-kerin-on-workers-cooperatives-and-the-climate-emergency/>.

Historians who are critical of workers' control tend to focus disproportionately on failed attempts at worker appropriation of enterprise during the 1970s, such as the Harco campaign, to suggest that workers' control was flawed on the whole. This approach, while also taking an unfairly narrow view of the tendency, denies examples of worker and union ownership that were successful, at Nymboida Collieries, James North and elsewhere, where capitalist enterprises were successfully converted to worker ownership and self-management. The support of trade unions for these actions was instrumental to their success; just as, conversely, the opposition of FIA officials to the action at Harco was no doubt a reason for its failure. These and contemporary examples problematize the conclusion of Cottle and Keyes that workers' control remains an 'impossibility' within capitalist economies. The role of capitalist and state repression is always a factor for consideration in the success of radical workers' movements. Despite the eventual repression of workers' control in the 1970s, the most advanced expressions of the tendency have been successful, particularly where workers involved are supported comprehensively by unions.

While trade unions internationally are weak relative to the 1970s, important resurgences of union militancy are occurring, often characterised by the presence of informal or autonomous forms of organisation within unions or separate from them entirely. In Australia during the 1970s, workers' control was always achieved by organisations of workers at the point of production. Contemporary historians have posited that established trade unions are inherently foreign to these organs and cannot serve as viable forms for social change. The Australian experience suggests that, while major metal unions actively sabotaged shop committees, and the uppermost echelons of the union movement accepted the Accord, the presence of sympathetic officials in other unions such as the AMWSU and its forerunners was an important factor in the success of workers' control. As a notable qualifier, it seems that a determinant concern in official support for workers' control is the consequences of the tendency for officials, as it was only in the absence of the penal powers that the tendency was given

full support by left-wing elements in the union bureaucracies. This elucidates the problem of established trade unions as organs for subversion of the status quo, though it also suggests that moments of congruence between members and officials do occur, further enabling the success of rank-and-file encroachments on capitalist and state prerogatives. What is clear is that democratic organs at the point of production, whether they are supported by official trade unions or otherwise, are the basis for workers' control. If the history of workers' control is to be at all usable, this fact must be at the forefront of any understanding.

As a final note, ideas and practices of worker autonomy within the capitalist labour process continue to exist within the framework of class collaboration that appeared as a response to workers' control in the 1970s. While worker participation schemes were never widespread, their appearance reinforces the idea that 'participation' is an effective means for employers to co-opt and align the interests of workers with those of private enterprise. This raises questions as to the function and intentions for workers' participation programmes today, particularly in parts of Europe where they prevail, with support from elements within the European labour movement. Management strategies based around ideas of collaboration endure in the Australian context also. Human resources management, in which worker grievances are directed through managerial channels, continues to be popular, largely at the expense of enterprise-level trade unionism. Far from representing any type of humanised capitalism, these are explicit strategies for controlling labour. This observation pertains also to the principles of collaboration that underpinned the Accord and its precursors under Whitlam. Where decision-making power was removed from workers at the enterprise-level and entrusted to officials in the state and union bureaucracies, workers' control was undermined. This fact must be acknowledged if such ideas are to be overcome and conditions for workers' control encouraged.

Bibliography

Articles

Bologna, Sergio. 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party in the German Workers' Councils.' *telos: Critical Theory of the Contemporary*. No. 13 (Fall 1972), 4-27.

Bowden, Bradley. 'The Rise and Decline of Australian Unionism: A History of Industrial Labour from the 1820s to 2010.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. Issue 100, (May 2011), 51-82.

Bramble, Thomas. 'Conflict, Coercion and Co-option: The Role of Full-Time Officials in the South Australian Branch of the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation, 1967-80.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. Issue 63, (1992), 135-154.

— — —. 'Trade Union Organization and Workplace Industrial Relations in the Vehicle Industry 1963 to 1991.' *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol. 35, No. 1, (March 1993), 39-61.

— — —. 'Australian Union Strategies Since 1945.' *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work*. Vol. 11, Issue 03, (April 2001), 1-25.

Burgmann, Verity. 'The Green Bans Movement: Workers Power and Ecological Radicalism in Australia in the 1970s.' *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Spring 2008), 63-89.

Burgmann, Verity, Ray Jureidini and Meredith Burgmann. 'Doing Without the Boss: Workers' Control Experiments in Australia in the 1970s,' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, No. 103, (November 2012), 103-122.

Cottle, Drew and Angela Keyes. 'The Harco Stay-Put: Workers' Control in One Factory?' *The Hummer: Journal of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (Summer 2003-2004), <http://asslh.org.au/hummer/vol-4-no-1/harco/> (accessed 3 June 2014).

Cronin, James E. 'The "Rank and File" and the Social History of the Working Class.' *The International Review of Social History*. Vol. 34, Issue 01, (April 1989), 78-88.

Croucher, Richard and Martin Upchurch. 'Political congruence: A Conceptual Framework and Historical Case Study.' *Labor History*. May, 2012, Vol. 53, No. 2, (May 2012), 205-233.

Derber, Milton. 'Changing Union-Management Relations at the Plant Level in Australian Metalworking.' *The Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol. 19, No. 1, (March 1977), 1-23.

— — —. 'Collective Bargaining: The American Approach to Industrial Democracy.' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 431, (May 1977), 83-94.

— — —. 'Crosscurrents in Workers Participation.' *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, Vol.9, Issue 2, (1970) 123-136.

Norman Dufty, 'Industrial Democracy in Australia,' *International Studies of Management and Organisation* 17, no. 2 (1987): 10-16.

Dolack, Pete. 'Prague Spring: Workers' Control in a State-Owned Economy.' *WorkingUSA*. Vol. 16, Issue. 3, (September 2013), 371-387.

Frenkel, Stephen J. 'Explaining the Incidence of Worker Participation in Management: Evidence from the Australian Metal Industry.' *Australian Journal of Management*. Vol. 14, No. 2, (December 1989), 127-150.

Fry, Eric C. 'Symposium: What is Labour History?' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. No. 12, (May 1967), 60-81.

Haskell, Mark. 'Green Bans: Worker Control and the Urban Environment.' *Industrial Relations*. Vol. 16, No. 2, (May 1977), 205-214.

Heino, Brett. 'The state, class and occupational health and safety: Locating the capitalist state's role in the regulation of OHS in NSW.' *Labour & Industry*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (2013), 150-167.

Hyman, Richard. 'The Sound of One Hand Clapping: A Comment on the "Rank and Filism" Debate.' *The International Review of Social History*. Vol. 34, Number 2, (August 1989), 309-326.

Lansbury, Russell D. 'The Return to Arbitration in Australia: Recent trends in dispute settlement and wages policy in Australia.' *International Labour Review*. Vol. 117, no. 5 (1978), 611-24.

Norrell, Robert J. 'After Thirty Years of 'New' Labour History, There Is Still no Socialism in Reagan Country.' *The Historical Journal*. Vol. 33, No. 1, (March 1990), 227-238.

Oldham, Sam. 'Taking Control: The Work-In Phenomenon in the Australian Metal Trades, 1968-1978.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. Issue 109, (forthcoming).

Political Research Group & Political Economy Movement. 'Workers, Trade Unions & Industrial Democracy.' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*. Vol. 3, (1978), 82-88.

Price, Richard. "'What's In a Name?'" Workplace History and "Rank and Filism".' *The International Review of Social History*. Vol. 34, Issue 01, (April 1989), 62-77.

Quinlan, Michael and Johnstone, Richard. 'The implications of de-collectivist industrial relations laws and associated developments for worker health and safety in Australia, 1996-2007,' *Industrial Relations Journal*. Vol. 40, No. 5 (September 2009), 426-443.

Ramsay, Harvie. 'Cycles of Control: Worker Participation in Sociological and Historical Perspective,' *Sociology*. Vol. 11, No. 3, (September 1977), 481-506.

Ranis, Peter. 'Argentine Worker Cooperatives in Civil Society: A Challenge to Capital-Labor Relations,' *WorkingUSA*. Vol. 13, Issue. 1, (March 2010), 77-105.

Saunders, Malcolm. 'The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73.' *Labour History*. No. 43 (1982), 64-82.

Saunders, Malcolm and Neil Lloyd. 'Arbitration or collaboration? The Australasian Society of Engineers in South Australia, 1904-68.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. No. 101. (November 2011), 123

Sheldon, Peter and Louise Thornthwaite. 'The State, Labour and the Writing of Australian Labour History.' *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*. No. 100, (May 2011), 83 - 104.

Smith, Howard and Thompson, Herb. 'Industrial Relations and the Law: A Case Study of Robe River.' *The Australian Quarterly*. Vol. 59, No. 3/4, (Spring-Summer 1987), 297-304.

Westcott, Mark, 'Worker Control in the Australian Oil Industry, *Labour & Industry*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (August-December 2012), 399-414.

Winn, Peter. 'Oral History and the Factory Study: New Approaches to Labor History.' *Latin American Research Review*. Vol. 14, No. 2, (1979), 130-140.

Zappala, Gianni. 'The impact of the closed shop on the union movement: A preliminary view.' *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*. Vol. 2, No.2, (1991), 65-89.

Zeitlin, Jonathan. 'From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations,' *The Economic History Review*. New Series, Vol. 40, No. 2, (May 1987), 159 - 184.

— — —. "'Rank and Filism" in British Labour History: A Critique.' *The International Review of Social History*. Vol. 34, Issue 01, (April 1989), 42-61.

— — —. "'Rank and Filism" and Labour History: A Rejoinder to Price and Cronin.' *The International Review of Social History*. Vol. 34, Issue 01, (April 1989), 89-102.

Books

Alperovitz, Gar. *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty and Our Democracy*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, ed. *Talking Back: Reflections of Retired AMWU Activists*. Granville, NSW: AMWU, 2006.

Berlanstein, Lenard R., ed. *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Bramble, Tom. *Trade Unionism in Australia: A History from Flood to Ebb Tide*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Braverman, Harry. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

Brinton, Maurice. *The Bolsheviks & Workers' Control 1917 to 1921*. London: Solidarity, 1970.

Burgmann, Verity and Meredith Burgmann. *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1998.

Carey, Alex. *Taking the Risk out of Democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995.

- Chomsky, Noam. *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 10th edition. Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009.
- Cleaver, Harry. *Reading Capital Politically*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.
- Coates, Ken. *Essays on Industrial Democracy*. Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1971.
- Coates, Ken. *The New Unionism: The Case for Workers' Control*. London: Peter Owen, 1972.
- Cohn-Bendit, Daniel, translated by Arnold Pomerans. *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*. London: Penguin Books, 1969.
- Cole, Kathryn (ed.). *Power, Conflict and Control in Australian Trade Unions*. Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Crouch, Colin. *Class Conflict and the Industrial Relations Crisis: Compromise and Corporatism in the Policies of the British State*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1977.
- Dawson, Archie. *Points and Politics. A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Queensland*. Brisbane: Colonial Press, 1977.
- Dufty, Norman F. *Industrial Relations in the Australian Metal Industries*. Sydney: West Publishing Corporation, 1972.
- Eklund, Erik. *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*. Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Publishing, 2002.
- Evans, Raymond. *A History of Queensland*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Foenander, Orwell de R., *Shop Stewards and Shop Committees: A Study in Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations in Australia*, North Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965.
- Ford, Bill and David Plowman. *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*. Melbourne: MacMillan, 1983.
- Frenkel, Stephen J. (ed). *Industrial Action: Patterns of Labour Conflict*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1980.

Frenkel, Stephen J. and Alice Coolican. *Unions against Capitalism? A Sociological Comparison of the Australian Building and Metal Workers' Unions*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984.

Goodrich, Carter L. *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics*. London: Pluto Press, 1975 (Second Edition).

Harman, Chris. *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*. London: Bookmarks, 1998 (Second Edition).

Healey, Bede. *Federal Arbitration in Australia: An Historical Outline*. Melbourne: Georgian House, 1972.

Huntley, Pat. *Inside Australia's Largest Trade Union*. Northbridge: Ian Huntley, 1978.

Hutson, J. *Penal Colony to Penal Powers*. Surry Hills: Amalgamated Engineering Union, 1966.

Jordan, Douglas. *Conflict in the Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics and the Trade Union Movement, 1945-1960*. Ultimo, NSW: Resistance Books, 2013.

Lansbury, Russell D., ed. *Democracy in the Work Place*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1980.

Markey, Raymond. *In Case of Oppression: The Life and Times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1994.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. III*.

McQueen, Humphrey. *Framework of Flesh: Builders' Labourers Battle for Health & Safety*. Adelaide: Ginninderra Press, 2009.

Melbourne Anarchist Archives: development of Melbourne anarchism: drafts, documents & articles, 1966-1973. [Melbourne?]: ca. 1973.

Moss, Jim. *Industrial Relations or Workers' Control: South Australian Experiences*. Adelaide: People's Bookshop, 1973.

Murray, Robert and Kate White. *The Ironworkers: A History of the Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982.

O'Lincoln, Tom. *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism*. Carlton North: Red Rag Publications, 2009.

— — —. *Years of Rage: Social Conflicts in the Fraser Era*. Melbourne: Bookmarks, 1993.

Pearce, Malcolm. *Dockyard Militancy: A Study of the Conflict between the Navy and the Painters' and Dockers' Union*. Sydney: University of New South Wales, Department of Industrial Relations, September 1980.

Ness, Immanuel and Azzelini, Dario, eds. *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011.

Ness, Immanuel, ed. *New Forms of Workers Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class Struggle Unionism*. Oakland: PM Press, 2014.

Purdham, Ken. *A Century of Struggle: A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*. Flemington, VIC: Hyland House Publishing, 2002.

Rawson, D. W. *Unions and Unionists in Australia*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1978.

Roberts, Ernie. *Workers' Control*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1973.

Rocker, Rudolf. *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*. 6th ed. Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2004.

Reeves, Andrew and Andrew Dittmer (eds). *Organise, Educate, Control: The AMWU in Australia, 1852-2012*. Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013.

Scalmer, Sean. *The Little History of Australian Unionism*. Carlton North: Vulgar Press, 2006.

Seale, Patrick and Maureen McConville. *French Revolution 1968*. London: William Heinemann Ltd & Penguin Books, 1968.

Sheridan, Tom. *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Short, Susanna. *Laurie Short: A Political Life*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992.

Tony Simpson, ed., *Resist Much, Obey Little: A Collection in Honour of Ken Coates*. [np]: Spokesman Books, 2012.

Towards a Socialist Australia: How the labor movement can fight back: documents of the Socialist Workers Party. Sydney: Pathfinder Press, 1977.

Turner, Ian. *In Union Is Strength: A History of Trade Union in Australia 1788-1978.* Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1978 (Second Edition).

Thomas, Pete. *Miners in the 1970s: A Narrative History of the Miners Federation.* Sydney: Miners Federation, 1983.

— — —. *Taming the Concrete Jungle: The Builders Laborers' Story.* Sydney: Australian Building Construction Employees & Builders Laborers' Federation, 1973.

— — —. *The Nymboida Story: The work-ins that saved a coal mine.* Sydney: Australian Coal & Shale Employees Federation, 1975.

van der Velden, Sjaak, Heiner Dribbusch, Dave Lyddon, and Kurt Vandaele, eds. *Strikes Around the World, 1968 - 2005: Case Studies of 15 Countries.* Aksant Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, 2007.

Walker, Kenneth F. *Australian Industrial Relations Systems.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Wright, Christopher. *The Management of Labour: A History of Australian Employers.* Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Wright, Steven. *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism.* London: Pluto Press, 2002.

Lectures, papers presented at meetings, and the like

Cameron, Clyde. 'Industrial Disputes in Australia: The Correct Perspective.' Address to the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia luncheon, Melbourne, November 30, 1973.

Cameron, Clyde. 'Managerial Control and Industrial Democracy: Myths and Realities.' Address to the AIM, NSW Division President's Dinner, Sydney, 20 August 1973).

Scott, Sir Walter. 'Looking into the 1970s.' Speech presented to the Autumn Seminar of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, Canberra, 1970.

Collections

AEU Melbourne District Committee, University of Melbourne Archives.

Records of the Gippsland Trades & Labour Council, Federation University Archives.

Records of the Ballarat North Railway Workshops Inter-Union Shop Committee,
University of Melbourne Archives.

John Lysaght Collection, University of Wollongong Archives.

Stan Willis Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Records of the Combined Commonwealth Shop Stewards Committee Victoria,
University of Melbourne Archives.