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**A SURPRISING STRUGGLE? THE
AMIEU(QLD) AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL
WAGES IN THE MEAT PROCESSING AND
EXPORT INDUSTRY IN THE 1950s AND 1960s**

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ABSTRACT

In the 1950s, the Queensland branch of the AMIEU initiated and led a campaign for equal wages for women in the meat export and processing industry. In doing so, the AMIEU(Qld) was alone as the other state branches were not inclined to pursue the struggle and the Victorian branch actually opposed it. Over two decades the Federal union's attitude changed to coincide with the Queensland view. The influence of the CPA on the Queensland branch and the personal dedication to the fight by the State Secretaries are the differentiating features and must be of consideration when analysing the decisions of the AMIEU(Qld) during the 1950s and 1960s. Feminist ideology, the structure of the Queensland meat export and processing industry, and the practical significance of the outcome itself are also important in explaining why the AMIEU(Qld) led what, to those outside the union, was a surprising struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

Equal wages for women has been an ongoing debate for a number of years in a number of countries and continues today. In the Queensland meat processing industry, the issue first arose in the 1940s with increasing numbers of women being employed during and after the Second World War but it was in the following decade that the role played by the AMIEU(Qld) became central to the struggle. In an industry which during this period was dominated by men, it was surprising to see a 'traditional' blue-collar male-dominated union take up the fight for something that was generally perceived as a women's issue and even as a threat to their own jobs and wages (Armstrong & Armstrong 1990; Naiman 1996:21; Fink 1997:218). The commitment of the state executive of the AMIEU(Qld) to the rights of workers, whether male or female, to earn a fair wage for their work to enable them to live above a subsistence level was largely attributable to membership of the CPA and associated ideological beliefs. These beliefs also had a practical purpose, to increase the take home pay for the family of their members, both men and women (Naiman 1996:21). Given that the AMIEU(Qld) extended an issue which the majority of unions at that time regarded as a gender issue into an industrial one through its actions - particularly the links with seniority - the role of feminism could be expected to be limited. To counter this assumption, was the role played by Stella Nord, Mary Anear, and other women unionists and Members of Parliament such as Marie Sibson, firstly in the struggle for the right of married women to work and secondly in the equal pay campaign itself. These women, in seeking the practical outcome of economic independence for women workers, were also driven by ideological beliefs (Naiman 1996:25) which, while coinciding with those of Communism, allowed for feminism in that they regarded the opportunity to seek employment and to work for an equal wage as a right of women to be won from the industry's male employers who viewed women as a cheaper source of labour than men. These women saw that they could use the male dominated structures of trade unionism and the Australian Labor Party to achieve their goals, rather than regarding these organisations as part of the problem they were fighting to solve.

A study of the fight for equal wages in the Queensland meat processing industry during the 1950s and 1960s raises a number of questions which must be addressed before the actual campaign for equality can be considered. There is the nature of the meat industry, the issue of the sex-based division of labour, the role of central wage fixing in determining women's wages, and the right of married women to work. Underpinning the campaign itself are the ideological considerations of the relationship between feminism and Communism.

The Industry

The meat export and processing industry has been described as noisy, dirty, dangerous, and even brutal. It is divided into jobs that range from unskilled (pre-packing) to relatively skilled (boning and butchering) and from repetitive (packing, trimming, and slicing) to heavy (slaughtering and boning), to those that are dangerous (boning), and carried out in temperature extremes (cold room). The industry is seasonal - which has contributed to the adversarial nature of its industrial relations - with tally quotas still in existence in a number of plants and long hours during the slaughtering season. During the 1950s and 1960s, the industry was distributed more proportionately across all three regions of Queensland: northern (around Townsville and west), central (around Rockhampton) and southern (around Brisbane-Toowoomba and west to Roma) than is to be found now. The financial and numerical power base of the AMIEU(Qld) during the period under discussion began to follow the geographical drift of the industry's slaughter sheds south from the northern region where it had been located almost since the reformation of the union some years prior to World War I to the southern region where it remains today. The AMIEU has consistently maintained union

coverage at over 90% of workers with closed shops a common feature. Workers in the red meat section of the industry come almost totally from English speaking backgrounds¹ and include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders while workers in the poultry section represent more diverse cultural backgrounds, including European and Asian.

During the 1950s, the focus of the industry was on red meat processing but in the 1960s, the poultry section experienced rapid growth and became the domain of the female meatworker with over 90% of employees in the white meat industry being women (Jones 1989:18). The AMIEU(Qld) has not covered bacon workers since 1946, the same year that poultry workers were first covered by the union, however, the other state branches of the union cover bacon workers and the pork industry. The inclusion of poultry workers, of whom the majority were women, and the loss of pork coverage where most of the members were men meant that the AMIEU(Qld) was forced to actively recruit women members in order to maintain industry coverage and membership density and therefore had proportionately more women members at an earlier time than did the southern branches. Over the years, shifts in the division of labour, social attitudes, legal framework, industry technology, and industry structure have integrated women into the meat export and processing industry (Fink 1997:219) but these shifts have not served to guarantee gender equality. Equality was [and is] an issue to be fought for by the union, which in turn raises questions about the AMIEU's representation of women and participation in gender construction and stereotypes.

The Gendered Division of Labour

The division of labour in the meat processing industry aligns with the traditional pattern of allocation of work on the basis of sex. Women are [and were] employed in jobs requiring speed, dexterity, and repetition - slicing, pre-packing, and packing - in the red meat industry and make up the majority of workers in the poultry industry where the work is 'lighter'. This is not to say that women are located in all sheds across the state and make up one hundred percent of the workforce in such jobs; even in 1997, there is still one shed that employs an all male workforce, including in those jobs traditionally regarded as 'women's' (Mickeljohn 1997). The consequence of regarding certain jobs as 'women's work' and others as 'men's work' has been an undervaluing of women's skills and work and an ongoing reinforcement of job allocation on the basis of sex, a practice common across all paid employment (Connell 1987:99). As Connell states, this segregation rule becomes the basis of new forms of constraint and rationalises discriminatory practices on the part of the employer (1987:99-100) because it promotes skill differentiation and therefore different training and development for women and men which can in turn be used to justify different wage levels. It can be argued that this holds true in the meat processing industry and the dearth of female butchers and women on the kill floor is illustrative as are the cluster of women found in slicing, trimming, and packing. Employers were able to successfully push women into a limited number of job categories in the meat industry and therefore to pay women in those jobs less than they paid for comparable jobs dominated by male workers, a practice that is today reinforced by HRM techniques such as job evaluation (Burton 1987). For example, women working in the poultry section of the industry are paid less than male workers doing the same or similar job in the red meat industry. The difference is justified by the employers on the basis that red meat jobs require different skills and abilities, namely strength for areas such as boning and lifting mutton and beef carcasses, whereas in the white meat industry, this same job requires dexterity and has been "essentially adapted for women with their superior deftness and suppleness of fingers" (6 CAR 1912:71) because poultry is smaller in size. This means that the determinant of skill is, as McDermott (1990:61) argues, pay because skill can be defined to legitimise pay levels given to specific groups by employers as in the meat processing industry and in the fruitpicking industry (6 CAR 1912:71).

¹ This was not apparently due to any conscious hiring practice of the companies covering the industry but to a combination of social and industry factors which deterred workers from non-English speaking backgrounds (primarily Italian in the central and northern regions) during the period under discussion) from seeking employment in the meat processing industry. Research on these factors is virtually non-existent and this hypothesis is based on the opinions of current AMIEU organisers and staff formed from union records and their own experience.

McDermott argues that pay as a determinant of skill is the result of skill being "defined to legitimise pay levels won by specific groups of workers in strategically powerful positions through industrial action" (1990:61). By inference, McDermott includes trade unions in her term "specific groups of workers" but by including trade unions, she is denying that unions such as the AMIEU(Qld) have used their strategic position within the meat industry to redefine skill for women workers and to win pay rises for women workers on the basis of this redefined skill (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1950:15; see also later discussion of the Huttons' Case). In support of McDermott's argument is that of Jackson (1991:17) which highlights the role of the group in shaping individual understanding and experience. Jackson (1991:21, relying on Acker 1989:217) also identifies the role of trade unions in protecting "structures" and "principles" which serve to provide and protect the higher wages paid to men and the low wages for women. Jackson's argument has problems in application to the AMIEU(Qld) in that by protecting the right of married women to work without discrimination from employers - a so-called 'women's issue' - the union was also protecting the system of seniority which was a cornerstone of its industrial policy because these women were experienced and therefore senior workers and who would otherwise have been dismissed. The replacement workers were inexperienced, new to the industry, and would have to learn the job. During learning periods, new workers were slower than their fellow experienced workers and slowed down the disassembly line of production, thus costing the employer money and also the team of workers to which they were attached if it did not meet its tally for the day, although it was more likely that the team cost would be time rather than money as the tally would simply take longer to achieve. To state that the AMIEU(Qld) turned a women's issue, or to use contemporary terminology, a gender issue, into an industrial issue by linking the right of married women to work and be remunerated equally may be seen as an historical ascription² because union records do not use such terminology and it can be argued that this is typical of the period under discussion. However, the actions of the Queensland branch of the union indicated that its approach was a consciously developed strategy that distinguished its policy on this issue from that of the other state branches and also from most other unions.³ Given that the executive of both the AMIEU(Qld) and the TLC(Qld) which organised and led the struggle were men, it is difficult to not see the issue as an industrial one, especially in the light of articles and contributions to the unions journal during the two decades under discussion.

The historical notion of complementary skills for men and women, reinforced through the Fruitpickers' Case (DEET 1987:5), has been firmly entrenched in the Australian award system (McDermott 1990:61, 71) which has limited the ability of trade unions, including the AMIEU(Qld), to adequately argue the case for comparable worth, with an example being the wage differences between the red meat and white meat industries. Wages in the meat processing industry during the 1950s and 1960s were fixed centrally through state and federal awards negotiated by the AMIEU and the employers. The national wage fixing principles determined the minimum levels of wages which consisted of the basic wage and a margin for skill. A 1950 Conciliation and Arbitration Court ruling establishing the female basic wage at seventy-five percent of the male basic wage meant that the principle of comparative wage justice was not applicable across sex boundaries (O'Donnell & Hall 1988:49) so women were not paid the same basic rate as men, even if doing the same or similar work. Further, as women did not qualify for margins because their work was considered to be unskilled, the AMIEU(Qld), in the eyes of the court and employers, had no legitimate bargaining position for seeking such increases for female members. In order to achieve these increases, the system of wage fixing would itself have to be changed or at least broadened. The 1951 ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (No.100) set out the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and the Equal Remuneration Recommendation (No. 90, article 5) on equal pay prescribed equality of remuneration for male and female workers for equal work done and it is clear that the distinction being specified was one of sex. This was

2 Thanks to the participants at the session of the Labour History Conference, Perth 02-04 October 1997 at which the initial version of this paper was presented, particularly to Jim Hagan, Beverley Symons, and Bradon Ellem.

3 The other unions which supported the AMIEU(Qld) included the Liquor Industries Union and the Hospital Employees' Union.

reaffirmed at the 1956 International Labour Conference but loopholes were left for member nations to escape applying the principle:

... member nations consider, *when appropriate*, implementing the principle of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value, either by legislation, or by collective bargaining, or by a combination of these two systems, or by other measures, if such measures have not yet been adopted (my italics).

The resolution, however, did provide the Australian trade union movement with a stronger bargaining position than the one held in 1950. The ACTU Congress endorsed a national petition in support of equal pay and called on the Federal Government to honour its obligation as an ILO signatory. At the state level, the AMIEU(Qld) became actively involved in the campaign, participating in TLC-organised workshops, petitioning the Queensland State Government, urging employers to voluntarily adopt the practice of equal wages without waiting for proscriptive legislation, funding female delegate attendance at national women's conferences, and raising member awareness through the regular coverage of the women's wages struggle in the union journal. It was probably the latter that drew both negative and positive response from members on a related issue - that of the right of married women to work.

Married Women Meatworkers

The AMIEU(Qld) made its position on the right of married women to work extremely clear during the 1950s but did not deny the right of union members to contribute to the debate carried on in the union's journal. By 1958, though, the executive were attempting to end the debate and published an article to that effect stating bluntly "this could mark the end of the controversy which developed, in certain sections only, regarding the right of married women to work" (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* August 1958:12). The union's official position reflected that of the ACTU: "we stand by the democratic right of the individual to choose, and that if women work, then they must be paid equally with men, i.e. the rate for the job" (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* February 1957:6). In mid 1958, the AMIEU distributed a leaflet "All AMIEU Members Have Equal Rights" which inspired the Queensland Central Executive of the ALP to produce their own article on what had become a controversial subject. This article, like the leaflet, was aimed at ending the controversy that had developed in certain sections of Australian society and also reflected the 1958 ILO Convention and Recommendation (Nos.111) which prohibited discrimination on the grounds of sex, although not specifically marital status. The phenomenon of questioning and denying the right of married women to work was identified by both the ALP and the AMIEU(Qld) as "found in certain powerful elements of the working class attacking one small section of the same class for putting into practice what they themselves support[ed] in principle" (*Labor News* July 1958; reprinted in *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* August 1958:12). The attack was further criticised as being "particularly sectionalised, in that it deal[t] with only certain kinds of employment" because "no one object[ed] to married women ... doing unpleasant, under-paid work; the only objections are to women taking their places ... in an office or a shop, or at a work-bench". In addition, it was a concept that was of very recent growth as prior to the industrial revolution, married women worked in the fields beside their husbands or else selling the goods which he produced in his trade. Neither did the concept hold any economic basis as the economy could not afford to ignore the skills of married women workers, nor their purchasing power to increase demand and therefore production and employment. The ALP and the AMIEU(Qld) recommended that, as married women often work because they need to financially, any attacks against such women ought to be launched against the system and not upon the victims of the system (*Labor News* July 1958; reprinted in *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* August 1958:13).

The struggle for the right of married women to work was both practically and ideologically driven. Mrs Marie Sibson, ALP member and delegate at the first Conference for Labor Women (the Labor Women's Central Organising Committee (LCCOC)), believed fundamentally that "it is a right of all humans to work if they so desire" (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* July 1959:10) and worked because she and her

husband of twenty-five years needed the money (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* July 1959:10). For Mrs Sibson, the cause had an ideological underpinning grounded in the democratic right of both men and women to choose to work but she also had a practical need to work. It is impossible to divide the two driving factors in her crusade as an ALP member representing the Queensland AMIEU's views at the LWOC just as it is impossible to divide the practical outcome of equal wages from the ideological crusade that drove the AMIEU(Qld) to achieve at least a partially successful outcome.

While both the ALP and AMIEU(Qld) supported the right of individuals to work, the ALP had a wider agenda in that it wanted to protect women workers against piece rates and sweat shops by locating them in recognised workplaces where wages and conditions could be properly supervised and regulated by the award system. The AMIEU(Qld) supported this wider principle in general, particularly with regard to women employed in the poultry industry which was located in small abattoirs attached to farms (Jones 1989:18) but its major focus was the red meat industry and giving the family of the meatworker as much take home pay as possible in order to rise above the subsistence level of the labourer. It is this focus that creates doubts about the union's dedication to a women's issue in that women workers were a clear minority of members in this section of the industry in comparison to the poultry section. However, it was an easier task for the union to negotiate with employers in the poultry section because the employers were not well organised and the award agreements covered primarily women workers as they were the majority of workers employed in this section of the industry. As a result, poultry workers were the first of the union's members to benefit from the equal wages campaign (Lucas 1997). Women were clearly disadvantaged and exploited in the red meat section where their labour was used to replace that of men in some sheds in order to save money. In its struggle in the red meat sector, the union was actually hampered by the award system which entrenched wage divisions based on seniority and skill margins that favoured male workers and which also encouraged employers to undercut the male wage by hiring new single female employees when married women were forced to resign or were not rehired at the start of a new season. This practice undermined the union's seniority system and control over hiring practices at a number of sheds.

Given that wives often worked in the same shed as their husbands, it was logical that they would join the same union and that their union would then recognise their right to work and be remunerated at a fair rate. In fact, the AMIEU(Qld) engaged in active recruiting campaigns for women members during the 1950s and 1960s and produced leaflets and journal articles aimed at women in the meat processing industry and strengthened the women's committees and overall representation and responsibility within union ranks (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* February 1959:8). Women became involved in organising at the shed level but still held a secondary role in the union in that they did not hold elected executive positions until 1989, a factor which, despite the Queensland branch's struggle for equal wages, locates the union within the male dominated power structures which feminist writers have criticised tools of suppression and exclusion (Smith 1980:40). As the shed was usually the largest employer in a district or suburb, the work options open to wives of meatworkers were reduced, adding necessity to the reasons these women entered the industry. Another consideration that often drew meatworkers' wives to the sheds was one of social ties in that the workers and their families frequently socialised together and the union promoted and organised such activities. The AMIEU(Qld) had been pressuring individual employers throughout the state to hire women employees without reference to their marital status in order that the union system of seniority could continue to operate without penalising married women for their marital status. This action by the union contradicts the arguments of a number of feminist writers including McDermott (1990) and Jackson (1991) who regard unions groups of (male) workers in strategically powerful positions as using collective industrial action (McDermott 1990:61) to protect the structures and principles that in turn protect the high wages for men while reinforcing low wages for women (Jackson 1991:21, relying on Acker 1989:217). However, this feminist critique holds true of the Victorian branch of the AMIEU until 1961 when it finally entered the struggle for equal wages instead of fighting against women working in sections of the industry.

In March 1958, the union's Committee of Management (COM) which was the governing body of the state branch of the union held that "there shall be no discrimination against married or single female members, whose rights as members should be the same as males" (AMIEU(Qld) COM Minutes March 1958; *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* July 1958:11). Prior to this decision, single female union members

were given priority over married female members in engagement at those sheds where the union's seniority system applied. During pay-offs, married women were first off and single women were retained until all married women were dismissed, thus over-riding the principle of seniority. As debate on the right of married women to work had not been gagged in the union's journal, it continued with a vocal minority of members being against married women working (Jones 1989:18; *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* 1956-1958). In July 1958, a petition of just over one hundred member signatures was collected and forwarded to the Branch Secretary requesting the holding of a special meeting of the state branch to review the COM's decision on seniority, as provided by union Rule 49 which ensured that the COM was accountable to the rank and file. The meeting was set down for 8:00pm July 27 at the Brisbane Trades Hall but lapsed for want of a quorum. As the Federal Executive had already unanimously voted in favour of the state COM's decision, a quorum would not have had the power to overturn the decision anyway. Further, the COM argued that the decentralisation of the Queensland AMIEU administration across three regional sub-branches with direct election by the rank and file of each sub-branch council, as well as direct election of the Branch Executive and COM, provided an adequate safeguard against dictatorial COM decisions which may otherwise be reached on behalf of the 11 000 members spread across the state. Thus the all-male union executive and policy making body of the union firmly supported the right of married women to work in the meat processing industry by establishing one seniority list for females regardless of their marital status and was able to focus its attention on the campaign for equal wages which had been continuing throughout the 1950s. Their decision was influenced by their belief in the right of all people to work and also by the desire to achieve the highest standard of living possible for their members, whether male or female, despite the stance taken by employers to suppress wages to the lowest levels possible and to keep workers at a subsistence level. The role played by the union's Communist secretary, Bert 'Digger' Field, was significant in that he had rallied the members of the Executive and COM to support this policy through repeated campaigning based on the right of all individuals to work and secondly, as a means of increasing the take home pay for the family of married male workers. 'Digger' Field also played a leading role in swinging the Federal Executive to support this policy as well as that of equal pay for women (Jones 1993), despite vigorous opposition from southern state branches, particularly Victoria (Davies 1974:232).

The AMIEU(Qld) and a Surprising Struggle

Given that the union executive and COM were dominated by male union members, it is seen by those outside the AMIEU as somewhat surprising that these men took up the fight for women's issues with such a force, particularly as other unions were relegating the fight for fair wages to a "gender issue" for women to take up (Jackson 1991:21, citing Acker 1989:217). The economic and social arguments applying to reasons why the union supported the right of married women to work partially explain this but their ongoing willingness to work with the ACTU, an organisation to which the AMIEU(Qld) has had a rather inconsistent affiliation, needs some explanation, despite the Queensland branches' consistent links with the Queensland TLC. It is at this point that the role of ideology and political affiliations comes under the spotlight. During the 1950s and 1960s, the AMIEU(Qld) was under the leadership of men strongly committed to socialist ideals and equality, men who were or who had been members of the Communist Party of Australia and included the State Secretary Bert 'Digger Field' (Jones 1993). Their support networks within the union, consisting of both male and female members, shared similar beliefs and were prepared to fight for them. It was apparently this commitment to a set of beliefs derived from the CPA but shaped by the individuals concerned to fit their own belief patterns that drove the union to support equal wages for women and also underpinned the debate on the right of married women to work. In this respect, the AMIEU(Qld) leadership differed from the more 'conservative' members of the CPA who were in favour of married women withdrawing from the workforce and expressed a "resistance to wives' participation in activity outside the home" (*Communist Review* March 1950:465). This view was also common amongst the rank and file members of the AMIEU(Qld) during the early stages of the equal pay campaign when women far outnumbered men at the initial public meetings, particularly those in Townsville in the Northern District (Irving 1997) where employers and some union members at the Ross River shed (Lucas 1997) "were particularly vicious against women" (Irving 1997).

These CPA links of the AMIEU executive and COM ought to have effectively served to push women out of the meat processing industry, as the Victorian branch of the union attempted to do. The solution to this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that the State executive, under the secretaryship of Bert 'Digger' Field, while operating within the Party confines, adopted an ideological framework which had largely been abandoned by Communists around the world; they revisited the idea of women taking a full and organised role in production in order to achieve liberation for the working class. This was the theory advocated by Marx and Engels (1888). Women members of the AMIEU(Qld) were encouraged to become actively involved in union campaigns and to fight for issues which affected themselves and other members of the union, in other words, the gender issue of equal pay was treated by the AMIEU(Qld) as an industrial issue in that job protection and furthering wages and conditions for all members were the reasons for the formation and existence of the union.

The communist TLC secretaries, Mick Healy (until 1952) and Alex MacDonald, ensured that the AMIEU, under the leadership of state secretaries Jim Neumann (until 1955) and Bert 'Digger' Field (1955-1963) would work closely during the 1950s with the state Council in the pursuit of common objectives, including equal wages for women (Jones 1993). In the late 1950s into the 1960s, despite a change in the TLC power stakes with the rise of the Boilermakers Society secretary Jack Egerton who was politically acceptable to both the AWU and the left wing ARU (former IWW and Communist ally of the AMIEU) (Fitzgerald & Thornton 1989:149) and political manoeuvring by the AWU (Fitzgerald & Thornton 1989:150, 179-180, the AMIEU(Qld), under the secretaryship of Bill Hodson, was still able to maintain a reasonably stable relationship with the TLC. Invariably it was this CPA link between the leaders of the TLC and the AMIEU(Qld) that enabled them to find common ground in a way which was to be no longer possible after the rise in the TLC and ACTU of the AWU and the white collar 'professional' unions.

For the communist members of the AMIEU(Qld) the struggle was to raise wages above the minimum level that was used by capitalists to keep the worker in bare subsistence as a worker. Initially, the meat industry employed all men and the struggle was to obtain wages at the highest level possible for members and by doing so, improve the lot of the worker and his family rather than seeing companies plough their profits into increasing their capital and therefore accumulating more subsistence labour (Jones 1993). Around the time of the First World War, small numbers of women began to enter the meat industry where they worked as cashiers and in canning departments as the demand for canned meat grew (Jones 1989:18). They worked a forty-seven hour week to earn the wage that was paid to a man after only two and a half days doing the same job. Women provided a source of cheap labour undercutting male wages and were seen initially as a threat to male workers, particularly as they showed a reluctance to unionise, most probably because they did not at this stage understand the need for unity (Jones 1993; Fox 1997). There was a physical separation of the female workers from the majority of male workers in workplaces, particularly in the canneries, and the scheduling of AMIEU(Qld) meetings during the evening when it was difficult for women to attend because of practical transport difficulties and (perceived or real) societal expectations of women which further discouraged them from joining the union. If these women joined a union at all it was usually the Clerks' Union as was the practice in other states (Davies 1974:230). During the Depression, employers favoured women for low skilled work because of the savings in wages and during this period, women became the major source of employment in those sections of the red meat industry where they are still primarily located. This exploitation of women workers and the women's own apparent willingness to undercut men's wages must explain some of the opposition from within sections of the AMIEU, both in Queensland and other states, towards women working in the industry.

The Second World War saw women move in large numbers into other sections of the red meat industry and to seek AMIEU membership on a growing scale in order to improve their wages and working conditions. This move towards unionisation and AMIEU membership was probably influenced by the 1940 insertion into the Federal Meat Industry Award of the proscriptive clause limiting female labour in retail butchers' shops to cashiers and clerks, despite there being a demand for their labour (Lambert & Petridis 1994:3) in meat processing. The war years had also seen the Women's Employment Board establish women's wages at 90% of the male wage but the post-war years saw a reduction to 75%. In the meat processing industry, employers were campaigning for further reductions in women's wages, with the American-owned Swifts

making an application in 1951 to the Court for a reduction of 9% in women's wages to 66% of the male wage, an action consistent with American meat companies' policy on women's wages (Andreas 1994; Fink 1997). Women workers took industrial action and the strike was supported by the AMIEU and other male meatworkers which proves that the issue of women's wages was regarded as an issue concerning all workers and proved that initial reluctance on the part of men to support the campaign was being rapidly overcome, particularly in the Southern District. The AMIEU fought the case on the grounds that women were meeting tally and production targets so that the employer had no justifiable reason beyond the grounds of sex for seeking a wage cut under the award. The Court found in favour of the union, thus setting a precedent for the union to follow during later hearings on women's wages (*Queensland Guardian* 1951 July 21; also quoted by O'Lincoln 1980:55).

During this same period, there was a campaign by southern state branches of the AMIEU to prevent women being widely employed throughout the industry. Their argument was based upon the fact that companies were paying women below award wages (Davies 1974:231) and even after the 1957 federal decision by Commissioner Austin that women be employed in boning rooms for the purpose of cleaning, pricing, and packing meat, the Victorian branch continued to oppose the employment of women in such jobs (Davies 1974:231). However, the AMIEU(Vic) did recognise that women ought to be paid the male rate if they were to do this work and in 1960, the increasing number of women workers in the industry drove the Victorian branch to follow in the footsteps of the Queensland branch and to take up the struggle in an active organised manner. From 1961, the Victorian branch began to be a participant in ACTU Equal Pay Conferences and in 1966, supported the Federal Council of the union at a meeting in Melbourne on October 18 to adopt the policy of equal rates of pay for all workers irrespective of sex or race. From this point on, the AMIEU across all states was to show a united front on the issue of equal wages and to fight as strongly as the Queensland branch had been for the previous two decades.

The AMIEU(Qld) executive recognised that by engaging employers in the fight for equal wages they would also be promoting their own ideological position because the Communist Manifesto explicitly recognised the rights of women and the abolition of the bourgeois notion of "the status of women as mere instruments of production" (Marx & Engels 1888:56), instead seeing them as individuals with rights. A victory would raise the standard of living of all their members, no matter which sex, to above subsistence level and explicitly prevent the exploitation of women workers which was often at the cost of male workers' jobs. An increase in women's wages would also benefit male workers since the majority of the women workers were from families which already had (male) family members employed in the meat industry. This meant an overall increase in the household purse (Naiman 1996:21), enabling living costs to be met more easily and allowing meatworkers the opportunity of extending their children's education and perhaps buying a home (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* July 1959:10). The personal appropriation of property as the result of one's labour was compatible with communist ideological beliefs because it was for the maintenance and reproduction of life (Marx & Engels 1888:51) and the promotion of education also falls within these ideological beliefs (Marx & Engels 1888:55). From a feminist ideological perspective, a challenge was being given to male employers to cease exploiting women workers and to recognise the value of women's skills to the industry and remunerate women workers accordingly, as was their right. This challenge was coming from the left of the union movement and the political spectrum in that the AMIEU(Qld) was a left-wing union and it had members who belonged to the CPA. The union had also turned their struggle into one based on cross-gender solidarity as they recognised, like one of their American counterparts, the United Packinghouse Workers of America in 1955 (Deslippe 1997:193) that if it did not put up a battle for women's wages, then men's wages and jobs would suffer next.

The Equal Pay Campaign

In March 1958, the ACTU held the first National Conference on Equal Pay which, together with the New South Wales Labor Government's legislation concerning equal wages, inspired the AMIEU to continue to lead the struggle in Queensland. When Federal Commissioner Kelly, on 20 October 1958, granted a new federal award which allowed women to be employed on the pre-packing of meat, previously done by men, at the cheap female rates of pay, there was a rush of meat industry employers seeking to take advantage of

this decision. The AMIEU in both Queensland and Victoria saw this as an attempt by employers to undermine the whole wages structure in the industry. The Queensland branch of the union sought to have the women paid at the male rate of pay (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:15) whereas the Victorian branch sought to prevent women from undertaking such work (Davies 1974:232). Stella Nord, writing in the Queensland industry journal, reported the employers' argument as based on pre-packing being 'women's work', therefore implying that work done by women was inferior (1959:15). A case in point was that at the Hutton plant at Oxley where the industrial advocate for J.C. Hutton Pty Ltd requested that the cheap female rate of pay be placed on work previously done by men but now allocated to women. The basis for his argument was that "women were more suited to trimming meat tongues than men ... so they should only be paid the female rate" (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:15). This argument clearly fitted into the pattern identified in the award system (Johnson & Wajcman 1986; Burton, 1987; Connell 1987) due largely to the 1912 Fruitpickers' Case (6 CAR 1912) and that identified by other researchers in the field of women's work and wages where women's work and skills are undervalued and therefore poorly remunerated. Nord herself stated that "the phrase 'women's work' has so deeply penetrated the thinking of many workers, that often in the canning factories, when a male worker is put on a job usually done by women (this [being] often done when, for the moment, the foreman cannot find him other work), other workers tease him in a joking manner, using such remarks as 'women's work, eh' - 'getting it easy, eh' and so on" (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:15). Nord pre-empted the thrust of the later feminist argument by stating that "these remarks help to perpetuate the idea that the work done by women is of lower value to the boss, and is an inferior type of work" (15). However, the executive and COM of the Queensland AMIEU did not fall in line with the view held by employers and some of its own members. Using the union's democratic structure of representation enabled the executive and COM to continue to fight for equal wages as a justifiable right of women members since the majority of rank and file members supported the policy on the basis of Nord's argument that women's work was not inferior because it required different skills to that of men and also on the basis of the communist belief in the right of women to work.

A factor ignored in the Hutton's argument was that not all employers across the meat processing industry sought to hire female workers for pre-packing so there was no industry uniformity. The AMIEU(Qld) pointed out to the Court that the employer's own argument on the women's suitability for the task was flawed because it was based on the fact that their output was greater, therefore their skill in the area must be higher and deserving of the higher remuneration level. Huttons were interpreting higher productivity as the result of better management of employees, not as the result of higher skill levels, in order to ensure the employer's wages outlay was less. The Court found in favour of the union with its decision that women employed on tongue trimming be paid the minimum male rate of £3/3/0.7d. per day, thus vindicating the union's position that women's skills were not inferior and ought to be remunerated at the same rate as a male worker undertaking the same work. The decision was used by the AMIEU executive as part of its strategy to win over the critics of equal pay for women because equal pay was actually a protection for men's jobs while ensuring that women were paid the higher rate of pay for their work. This demonstrated that while ideological commitment may have driven the executive, they were pragmatists who recognised the value of a practical outcome for those without such commitment. The union did recognise that in the short term at least, the employment opportunities for women would be reduced as it was unlikely that companies would choose to employ women who needed to be trained in pre-packing, thus costing production time and output, if there were experienced male workers currently looking for work (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:16).

At the end of 1958, the AMIEU's male and female members at the Intercontinental Meat Packing Company successfully took job action to gain better working conditions for women, including gloves to protect their hands from sharp edges of tins and seating at work. At the beginning of 1959, these same workers again took action to protect women from having to lift heavy weights but the Industrial Court did not hand down a favourable decision in this instance. The workers, through their shed delegates and local organiser continued to negotiate with employers on such matters with some 'unofficial' success at individual sheds. Longstanding united job action and direct union negotiations with the employer on the issue of uniform wage increases of 10/ for all hands - adult males, females, and juniors - achieved a positive outcome. This

gain was regarded by the union executive as assisting in establishing the principle that equal pay also meant equal job rises and was regarded as a precedent which it sought to apply across all sections of the industry (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:16). During this same period, according to union research and ABS figures, six out of ten women workers were supporting a dependant on seventy-five per cent of a man's wage (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* February 1959:8; Fox; Lucas 1997; Irving, 1997), a clear case of inequity given that single men without dependants were paid the same wage as a married man with dependants.

While the AMIEU(Qld) had some success at the state level in establishing the principle of equal pay company by company, there were still problems at the federal level as evidenced by the Borthwicks (Moreton Freezing Works) March 1959 application to introduce cheap female labour in their smallgoods section (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* April 1959:16). The Victorian branch was as yet loathe to support the Queensland branch and actively take up the struggle at the Federal level. Since the applicant meatworks companies were parties to federal awards covering female labour to prepack meat and make smallgoods, and federal awards overrode state awards on identical matters, Borthwicks could legally pay female workers at the lower rate under the federal award until an application was made for a new federal award. The Queensland branch of the union, claiming male rates should be paid, continued to oppose this application, and others made at the federal level by employers. By 1968, the Queensland branch had the full support of the Victorian and other state branches and together with representatives of the ACTU and the unions covering the clothing trades, manufacturing grocers, and the electrical trades, formed a committee to decide the federal award on which the test case on equal pay would be run. The success rate of the AMIEU(Qld) in its federal struggle for equal wages was so high that by 1965, the wages and conditions set under the federal award after applications by employers of Queensland members had surpassed those won at the state level after numerous ongoing battles with the industry's employers. This dedication and determination of the Queensland branch most certainly contributed to the ACTU committee's selection of the Federal Meat Industry Award 1965 as the key award on which to base its 1968-1969 national wage case application for the removal of the difference (\$8.40) that existed between the female basic wage and the male basic wage before the Commission introduced the total wage concept in 1967. Ironically, it was Borthwicks' Townsville shed that was the first to introduce the concept of equal pay (Lucas 1997) after the Commission's decision was handed down.

Complicating the union's fight for equal wages during the 1950s was the role played by the Queensland ALP sanctioned anti-Communist Industrial Groups established within unions during the war years by the lay Catholic body called The Movement (Fitzgerald & Thornton 1989:51). These 'Industrial Groupers' attacked the AMIEU(Qld) for its stance on equal pay and actually launched attacks against individuals carrying out the union's policy; for example Stella Nord was harassed by Industrial Groupers during her 1958 case for equal pay tour of meatworks in Brisbane, Gladstone, and Rockhampton. In attacking the AMIEU because of its Communist leadership and membership, the Groupers had chosen the case for equal pay for women as one of their major tactics but in doing so, served the dual role of entrenching discriminatory remuneration practices against women with the associated undervaluation of women's skills and job allocation on the basis of sex plus serving the employers' cause (Hagan 1986:164-166 reproduction of *ALP Industrial Groups Menace to Labour Movement*). This attempt by the Groupers to destabilise the AMIEU's leadership and to undermine union solidarity contributed in part to the slowing up of the union's state-based campaigns. Another consideration at the state level was also the number of companies with which the union was negotiating as this meant that there was rarely a break between one struggle and the next so that both members and the union executive were being drained of energy and finances although not of determination. The union ensured that its members were always represented by elected delegates from each of the three regional sub-branches at any equal pay seminars or conferences with Mary Anear, the delegate from the Southern Sub-Branch taking on the responsibility for reporting the outcomes to members in the union's journal (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* August-September 1968:12) so that all members would be informed of the current situation. In this way, the AMIEU(Qld) worked with other unions, notably the Liquor Industries Union and the Hospital Employees' Union, to ensure that a unified front was portrayed to employers across industries, to the Conciliation & Arbitration Commission, and to the Government.

The change in the state secretary from 'Digger' Field to Bill Hodson in 1963 in no way saw the lessening of the struggle for equal wages, despite the weakening of the direct ties with the CPA that had been the result of Field's party membership (Jones 1993). The AMIEU's action on this front continued with a combination of direct negotiation with employers, united industrial action, and ongoing Court appearances with state victories being overshadowed by those in the federal arena. Hodson's major victory was his deal on classifications which saw the introduction of four classifications which he hoped would be seen by employers as the basis of equal employment opportunity in the red meat industry (Lucas 1997). The downside of Hodson's strategy was that women workers had little job choice as they were effectively left with the jobs which the men did want. The secretaries from all three Queensland sub-branches advocated campaigns be undertaken at both the state and federal level to make all AMIEU members aware of the wages disparity that existed for female workers covered by the state awards when compared with their federal counterparts. While a considerable amount of this campaigning was undertaken by the paid officials of the union, the job representatives from each of the sheds - shed president, secretary, and delegates from the boning room, slaughter floor, cold rooms, yard, and maintenance - were also actively involved (Fox 1997; Lucas 1997). The objective was to acquaint all members, whether employed under the federal award or one of the many state awards and whether male or female, of the rates of wages, various tallies, and conditions of the federal award in order that the state-covered members would be prepared and organised for the ongoing struggle to achieve equal rates of wages and conditions with their federal counterparts under the same classifications and tallies (*The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* December 1968-January 1969:12). Despite the strongly supported and argued case, the 1969 decision of the Full Bench of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission on 19 June was not satisfactory from the unions' point of view since only about 18% of women workers benefited, but neither was it a total defeat. The nine qualifying points laid down by the Commission restricted the applicability of the principle of equal pay, particularly the last of the points:

... equal pay should not be provided by application of the above principles where the work in question is essentially or usually performed by females but is work upon which male employees may also be employed.

Consequently, the fight continued into the 1970s and beyond.

Conclusions

The AMIEU(Qld) led the fight for the right of married women to work and for all women to receive equal pay primarily because of a series of factors that coincided in that particular state. The most significant of these must be found in the CPA membership of the executive and the unwavering Communist beliefs held by a number of members of the Committee of Management in Queensland (Jones 1993). These CPA links were apparently much stronger than those in other states (Jones 1993) and set the Queensland branch apart by allowing it to develop a particularly close working relationship with the Queensland TLC during the 1950s and 1960s. The Communist ideology also aligns closely with the rhetoric of the articles in *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland* during the 1950s and 1960s. The co-operation between women and men employed in the meat industry epitomises Communist ideology which promotes the right of both men and women to live above a subsistence level while contradicting the Marxist feminist theory of the family wage (Walby 1990:37), as well as contradicting the common (and proven in many instances) view that unions sought to protect high wages for men at the sacrifice of low wages for women (Jackson 1991:21; Naiman 1996:17). In both theory and practice, the AMIEU(Qld) was committed to the CPA ideology of "bringing women into production, and organising them there as a prerequisite for liberation" (O'Lincoln 1980:53) and it was the dedication to the practical aspect that set it apart from other unions with CPA links. In the Queensland meat industry, it is apparent that there was a balance between ideology and practical outcomes, probably reinforced by the structure of the industry which 'exchanged' female poultry workers for male bacon workers in 1946 and gave the Queensland branch the opportunity to recruit women members in larger numbers and at an earlier date than the branches in other states. The poor conditions in the industry generally served to make good unionists (Fox 1997) and both men and women union members fought

struggles for all workers in the meat industry, irrespective of gender.

In conclusion, there is much opportunity for further research and analysis of the role of Communism and feminism in the struggle of the AMIEU(Qld) for equal pay for women during the 1950s and 1960s. While outright success was not achieved with the 1969 test case, steps forward were made in the area of equal wages for women in a number of industries and the AMIEU(Qld) was able to claim its place as one of the instigators of a campaign which had come a long way but still had a way to go in achieving the desired outcome.

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